

Workplace Pressures Experienced by Enrollment Management Staff
in Higher Education Institutions

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Masters of Arts

by
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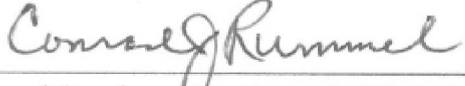
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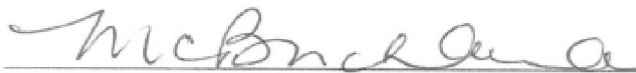
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Abstract

Higher education personnel face a myriad of tasks in the course of their professional duties. The timing and priority of these tasks are sometimes controlled by the staff themselves, but are often determined by campus or external constituents. Five enrollment management staff members were interviewed to identify specific occupational pressures, situations, and challenges in their places of employment. The goal of this study was to determine the common workplace experiences of enrollment management staff and how those circumstances and conditions may affect productivity, professionalism, and purpose.

Chapter One - Statement of the Problem

With the ever increasing cost of higher education, it is often necessary for students to begin their college career at a community college. This leads to students carrying course credit from one or more institutions to another and increases the probability of confusion or miscommunications regarding how prior coursework is credited to their new educational institution. Misunderstandings on behalf of students, and the staff that assist them, can result from varying levels of knowledge regarding transfer credit policies and procedures and their applicability. The purpose of my study was to identify specific workplace pressures experienced by enrollment management staff that work directly with transfer credit evaluation. Enrollment management generally houses the areas of Admissions and Recruitment, Financial Aid, and Records and Registration. The research question for this study was, what are the workplace pressures experienced by enrollment management personnel? It is the opinion of this researcher that understanding the levels and types of stress associated with working with students will enable staff to be more effective in collaborating and explaining awarded credit. Feelings of strain in the workplace are not uncommon, however, if professional staff are overly worried about the quality of work they are able to produce, the timeline in which they are to complete this work, and the amount of support provided from supervisors, they may become too stressed to be effective.

The principal investigator for this research study has worked in the Records and Registration office at California State University Channel Islands since June 2007, and, most recently, in June 2015 was assigned the role of Academic Evaluations Coordinator. This position requires supervision of Records and Registration staff members as they evaluate transfer credit and apply what is deemed acceptable toward degree goals at California State University

Channel Islands. Roksa and Keith (2008) state, “With approximately 50% of students in public higher education attending community colleges, facilitating transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions has become a critical issue in higher education” (p. 236). At California State University Channel Islands, a concerted effort has been put forth to improve the timing and quality of transfer credit evaluations, which in turn portends to increase student confidence in the University. In addition to this, the more university staff understand how coursework applies to their institution, the better assistance and guidance they can provide to students.

The main function of the principal investigator’s current position as Academic Evaluations Coordinator at California State University Channel Islands is the review and application of transfer credit for newly admitted students, which are referred to as Front-End Evaluations (FETCs). The focus is to have all new students evaluated prior to the start of their first semester at Channel Islands. In addition to this, a major part of this job is clearing students for graduation. Both of these tasks are rooted in the evaluation and application of course credit, and managing expectations of accuracy and timeliness.

It is not unusual for misunderstandings to occur in the application of transfer credit which can result in repeated course credit. This can delay, or in some cases prevent, graduation. If students are better equipped to understand how the coursework they have already completed will apply to their transfer institution, it follows that they would be able to make informed decisions regarding the remaining requirements for their degree without extensive assistance from evaluation staff. As such, what often occurs is a staff member makes a decision regarding the applicability of transfer credit and students do not understand why that decision was made, so they request a one-on-one meeting with the evaluator to receive an explanation.

Proper evaluation of transfer credit requires the ability to appropriately award course-to-course credit from another institution. An online tool for transfer students and enrollment management staff is available on the ASSIST.org website which houses information regarding how course credit earned at one California institution can apply to other California institutions. Course-to-course equivalencies provided on ASSIST.org are referred to as articulation agreements. “Articulation agreements are the principal instruments to facilitate the transfer process. Specifically, articulation agreements serve to negotiate the requirements for students’ movement from institution to institution and support the transfer intent” (Sun, 2006, pp. 262-263). Students are at a disadvantage if they do not automatically earn credit for completed work and thus enroll in a course with curricula similar to one they had already taken and passed. Situations such as this cause loss of time, loss of earned credit and degree progress, and loss of money. Although this is an effective way for students to assess the credit they have earned, the downside is that articulation agreements are created and entered via a manual process of individual course review and not all institutions or catalog years are available.

Student and staff interaction plays a significant role in understanding transfer credit. Transfer students who effectively make the transition to a four-year institution greatly enhance their ability to complete their degree if the receiving institution is able to apply previously earned credit effectively. As educational costs rise more students are feeling the pressure to complete their degrees as efficiently as possible and those feelings of stress and anxiety can be passed along to the staff they interact with. A preliminary review of past research suggests little has been done regarding the adverse mental effects felt by enrollment management staff when meeting with two-year transfer students regarding their earned credit. There is, in general, a

great deal of research regarding occupational stress and the effects this has on employees, but little to none specifically regarding staff that work with transfer students and their credit.

It is critical that California State University Channel Islands understands the effects of occupational stress on staff in relation to transfer credit evaluations, as 64% of those enrolled at California State University Channel Islands in Fall 2013 were returning students, and 18% were new transfers. 70% of the transfer students that attended California State University Channel Islands that year were already Ventura County residents, which means they stayed close to home to attend. The student demographic provides additional context through which to view staff-student interactions (California State University Channel Islands, Fact Sheet). Studying workplace pressures felt by enrollment management staff will assist in developing personal and professional coping strategies to mitigate any resulting negative emotional and physical reactions. The intended audiences for this study are those college and university staff members that work within enrollment management areas. Additional research on this topic will assist staff in understanding the degree to which workplace pressures are considered normal and how to develop best practices. As participants in students' educational journeys, it is the obligation of enrollment management evaluation staff to provide them with as much clarity and support during the transfer process. Part of this support comes from understanding our own reactions to real and perceived stressors and taking an active role in addressing these issues.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

The effects of workplace pressures on enrollment management staff can manifest itself into mental disturbances, which can lead to loss of productivity, decreased staff motivation, increased doctor visits, and missed time at work. Both employers and employees must be aware of the specific stressors of their work environment so that they may develop strategies to mitigate any psychological and physiological effects experienced. Certainly, stress in the workplace is a normal factor of everyday life, but it is the opinion of this researcher that the staff that work with transfer students experience feelings of mental distress that are unique to the work that they do and the students that they serve. This literature review examines articles and research studies that have addressed the concepts of workplace stress, technology and the effects on the traditional workday, and how transfer credit is evaluated and applied. This background lends context and purpose to the need to study the effects of the workplace on enrollment management staff. An overview of the context of the literature is provided, followed by specific areas where the literature has been found to relate to the research question. Finally, overall connections to the literature are provided as well as key concepts to consider when researching this area of study.

Overview of the Context of Literature

Significant topics related to occupational stress experienced by enrollment management staff include: (a) reasons for different types of stress; (b) how mental and physical distress can manifest and evolve; (c) ways employers and employees can mitigate the effects of workplace stress; (d) the roles technology plays in the extended work day; (e) course articulation and transfer credit evaluation. Two theoretical frameworks were applied to this research topic - Lazarus' Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) and Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (1989). Stressful experiences can occur as a result of transactions between a

person and their environment. The impact of external stressors are firstly mediated by the person's appraisal of the stressor, and secondly by the social and cultural resources at his or her disposal. In addition, individuals may collect resources they can use to address, withstand, or overcome work-related stress. They might have previously accumulated, or developed resources such as self-esteem, optimism, money, status, and social support. One must also consider the compatibility of someone's personal traits and the tasks they are expected to perform. Stressful or traumatic events will consume these resources, thereby enhancing the person's sensitivity to successive stressors.

Occupational stress is not only how a person perceives their surroundings and duties - factors such as the extent to which technology is used in the workplace and related expectations, as well as the degree to which an employee must participate in inter-personal exchanges contributes to a person's sense of anxiety. "Previous research has identified that an effort-reward imbalance or decreased job control and increased job demands may lead to increasing psychological problems in employees" (Hilton & Whiteford, 2010, p. 6). Transfer credit evaluators are tasked with providing precise, accurate, and timely reviews of student credit, and these evaluations are often expected within a certain amount of time which is determined by university policy. Spector (2002) reminds the reader that "Occupational stress has been recognized as a major health issue for modern work organizations. Conditions of the workplace have been shown to lead to negative emotional reactions (e.g., anxiety), physical health problems in both the short term (e.g., headache or stomach distress) and the long term (cardiovascular disease), and counterproductive behavior at work" (p. 133). It is the opinion of this researcher that the demands felt by university staff in relation to work-related tasks and timelines often lead to feelings of anxiety and frustration. "In organizations today, there are interpersonal demands

that cause stress among individuals. More individuals may want to perform at a higher level of production, which might put pressure on colleagues to follow the same level of work performance” (White, Blevins, Ablanedo-Rosas, Teng, & Gao, 2011, p. 554). Unreasonable expectations can add to the lack of control often felt by staff in high pressure situations. Monitoring all invested parties and ensuring that each is being accounted for in planning and execution of duties is a complicated task.

Additionally, the increased use of technology in everyday life has expanded into the workplace, and in turn has had a permanent effect on student expectation of staff accessibility. Bittman, Brown, and Wajcman (2009) state “In most of the developed world, mobile phone services are at (or approaching) saturation (i.e. there are as many mobile phone services as there are people)” (p. 685). To encounter someone without a cell phone is now the exception, not the rule. Nearly every aspect of daily life has been digitized and put on the internet, accessible any time of day or night. “Certain industries or occupations are more reliant on technology and thus impose more physical and emotional stressors on employees” (Soylu & Campbell, 2012, p. 1). In order to keep up with the normalized and increasing daily use of technology, colleges and universities are fighting a constant uphill battle to remain relevant to students’ needs while at the same time managing their expectations of what is possible or appropriate to expect from university staff. Student expectations regarding staff availability and access to information or results can transfer over into their expectations during one-on-one meetings. The same level of immediacy students are accustomed to online may not be possible when working with an individual.

There is scant evidence that particular attention to the specific effects of workplace pressures felt by enrollment management staff has been thoroughly investigated in current

literature. Currently, more focus is placed on the stressors experienced by general university and academic staff. Previous studies have also focused on university staff outside of the United States, most often in Australia or other areas of the United Kingdom. Gillespie et al. (2001) present the reader with a “report on the first phase of a longitudinal investigation of occupational stress. A total of 22 focus groups were conducted with a representative sample of 178 academic and general staff from 15 Australian universities. The groups focused on understanding staff’s experience of occupational stress, and perceptions of the sources, consequences and moderators of stress” (p. 1). While this study is important and provides significant data, it is focused on university settings in Australia. Additional studies on the stress felt by American staff in higher education are needed to determine if any cultural factors play a role. Stress felt by enrollment management staff when working with two-year transfer students, in the United States, must be analyzed and pertinent issues addressed in order for this group of employees to continue to be effective in their professional roles. The population of transfer students will only continue to grow, so it is imperative that sources of mental and physical distress be identified early so they can be mitigated and not become uncontrollable in the future.

A review of relevant literature included a focus of workplace stress on university staff, the significance of the psychological and physiological effects due to occupational stress, and the effects of technology use by staff on student expectations. Additionally, the review of literature included sources which further investigated the significance of accurate and timely transfer credit evaluations which precipitated the students’ sense of urgency and desire to discuss their credit with evaluation staff. Research excluded from this study included those conducted in any country outside of the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

Workplace Stress

Mental and physical stressors can cause adverse reactions to job duties, including the interpersonal interactions required to complete those duties. Gillespie et al. (2003) state that:

A comprehensive understanding of stress from this perspective involves assessing each important facet of the stress process... This includes the key environmental and personal *antecedents* (e.g. demands, resources, beliefs), the *intervening* processes (e.g. coping, personality), indicators of the immediate *stress response* (i.e. subjective, behavioral and physiological evidence of emotion), and the longer term *consequences* of stress for individuals and the workplace (e.g. psychological well-being, health and social functioning). (p. 3)

Groundwork must be laid to establish a general understanding of workplace stress so that one can extrapolate that knowledge to the occupational distress experienced by enrollment management staff when working with students.

Gillespie et al. (2001) concentrated on a longitudinal study that focused on understanding staff experiences with stress in the workplace, perceptions of where that stress comes from, potential consequences of occupational stress, and what may be done about it. This research was conducted at Australian universities, but similarities may be transposed to the American Higher Education system as both systems are structurally similar. There are currently 38 public and 3 private universities in Australia, with degrees awarded from an Associate's degree up to the Doctoral level (The Australian Higher Education System). As a group, academic staff reported higher levels of stress than general staff. Five major sources of stress were identified, including: insufficient funding and resources, work overload, poor management practice, job insecurity, and insufficient recognition rewards. Aspects of the work environment (support from co-workers

and management, recognition and achievement, high morale, flexible working conditions), and personal coping strategies (stress management techniques, work/non-work balance, tight role boundaries and lowering standards), were reported to help staff cope with stress. While the authors focused on “academic staff” (e.g. faculty), it is possible that the same findings would apply to “support” (e.g. administrative) staff. There is a disconnect between the understanding of how staff members conceptualize stress, the impacts and sources of stress, and reducers of occupational stress that may be utilized. It is important to determine factors of stress from a wide range of institutions so as to eliminate any institution-specific peculiarity. Identifying sources of stress and how stress is managed in the workplace on a broad scale will assist in more colleges and universities being able to apply moderating tactics to assist staff. Participants in Gillespie et al.’s study placed much of the responsibility for occupational stress on university management. While this study did not address enrollment management staff in American higher education, it lays a good foundation for the importance of studying stress in the academic workplace. If staff members are so worried about their job (quality of work, support from administrators, etc.) they may become overly distracted and less effective in their work tasks.

A study by Michael Hilton and Harvey Whiteford (2010) focused on the connection between interaction with the public and mental distress. Like the Gillespie article, this study was performed in Australia, but the findings may be generalized to similar employment situations in the United States. The authors also utilize studies based in the United States, so this further strengthens the parallels of the findings. This study asserts that mental health issues are prevalent, and that employees with these types of issues often decrease in productivity and miss work. Considering the costs associated with loss of employee productivity, missed days of work, and even treatment for mental health problems, it is in an employer’s best interest to mitigate the

stress caused by staff interaction with the public. In this specific study, nurses, call center staff, and sales staff are the most at risk for psychological distress. However, any job that requires interaction with the public puts the staff member at more risk for mental distress than jobs that do not require this type of interaction. “It may be that interaction with the public per se does not predict psychological distress it may in fact be that the number of difficult contacts is the predictor. The total number of contacts may be a surrogate for difficult contacts as the more contacts an employee has the greater the risk of a difficult contact” (Hilton & Whiteford, 2010, p. 5). This study did not look at the ways staff are equipped, whether naturally or from training, to deal with difficult interactions. Those who have more trouble handling difficult contacts with the public are expected to develop and portray more psychological distress. “Due to the relative large numbers of employees surveyed the results that interaction with the public increases psychological distress may be extrapolated to other industries not surveyed in this study” (Hilton & Whiteford, 2010, p. 5). The authors cite previous research that suggests an imbalance between staff effort and feelings of reward or satisfaction, a decrease in control over job duties, and an increase in demand for completion of tasks that can also cause psychological distress in employees. This study supports the idea that interaction with the public in relation to employment increases a person’s chance of developing mental disorders due to stress. There are specific types of stress that enrollment management staff experience in relation to one-on-one interactions with students. This study legitimizes the concept that mental stress can and is felt when working with the public.

Maureen Dollard, Helen Winefield, Anthony Winefield, and Jan Jonge (2000) looked at the interaction between high demands, low control, and low support on employees. Staff with each of these three characteristics present in their workplace are the most likely to experience

and physiological distress. Jobs combining high demands and high control, however, can lead employees to feel a high degree of satisfaction. Job demands were found to be positively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of employees. If workers are consistently exposed to a workplace of high demands, low support and low control, effects on mental and physical health will manifest. The researchers assert that workplace stress and physical and mental distress can be mitigated, not by reducing demand or amount of tasks, but by increasing support and staff control over their own job functions. This research study substantively addresses how demand, control, and support effect staff psychologically and physiologically.

A source of stress felt by enrollment management staff is related to an expectation outside of their control to complete student record evaluations in a limited timeframe with a certain level of accuracy, which may cause feelings of pressure and stress on these employees. Transfer credit, and it's appropriate and accurate application, is currently at the forefront of many university employees' thoughts due to the ever increasing number of transfer students in American higher education. Thus, it is the opinion of this researcher that a significant amount of work-related stress felt by enrollment management staff is due to the minimal amount of control they feel they have in regard to the management of transfer credit evaluations.

Paul Spector (2002) addresses the concept of workplace stress and the resulting psychological and physiological effects this can have on staff. "Evidence is growing that enhanced control at work can be an important element in employees' health and well-being" (Spector, 2002, p. 2). The author presents this concept in terms of a control-stress model. Again, an important factor in the experience of job related stress is the sense of control an employee has over their duties. "Certain events, however, are perceived and interpreted as somehow threatening to physical or psychological well-being - these are the perceived job

stressors” (Spector, 2002, p. 3). The most common emotional reactions to these job stressors are anger and anxiety, and these can lead to more significant physical and emotional manifestations. Once again, the perceptions of control in the workplace play a significant role in the mental and physical health of employees. The author presents the reader with Karasek’s demand-control model (1979), which is widely considered a working job-stress model in connecting perceived control and job stressors. “In this model, control buffers the effects of demands, such that high-demand jobs lead to adverse reactions only among employees who have low control. Employees with high control see such demands as challenges to overcome rather than threats” (Spector, 2002, p. 4). Even though some people perceive a sense of control as a buffer to work-related stress, the author states that sufficient research does not exist to support this. The author points out that if the employee is feeling distress because of his/her duties, control over the tasks themselves can reduce stress; however, if the stress is because of negative interaction with co-workers, then control over the tasks won’t make a difference. Having the ability to control the conflict itself will allow for reduction of stressful feelings. “If a person perceives control over the work situation, he or she will believe the magnitude of the stressor can be contained within tolerable limits. The situation will therefore be seen as less stressful, and the emotional response to it will be less extreme” (Spector, 2002, p. 4). Finally, the author asserts that sense of control and confidence has a direct effect on one’s choice of coping mechanism. Perceived control leads to positive coping; perceived lack of control can lead to negative coping. Primary and secondary control are presented as 1) Primary – direct action to control one’s environment and 2) Secondary – action that affects one’s own reactions to a situation. Primary control is preferred, but is not always possible depending on the circumstances, so people resort to secondary control. The majority of studies on this topic use cross-sectional questionnaires.

In her article, Joann White et al. (2011) addressed the levels of stress felt by faculty, staff, and students. Stress factors, such as work overload, feeling overwhelmed, and interrelated relationships were examined. On one hand, stress can be fuel to help individuals achieve satisfaction associated with professional challenges. However, stress can also be a hindrance to succeeding in workday interactions. For employers, workplace stress can manifest itself in high employee turnover rates, decreased commitment to job duties, increased absenteeism, and job dissatisfaction. The authors indicate that many years ago, staff jobs in the academic setting were considered to be some of the lower stress jobs available. However, according to this research, this is no longer the case as more and more university employees are reporting high levels of work related stress. The authors define stress as “a mentally or emotionally disruptive or upsetting condition occurring in response to adverse external influences” (White et al., 2011, p. 2). In any work environment, an individual has certain demands and expectations they must meet to complete their duties. Interpersonal demands and interactions also cause stress in university staff. Some people experience physical or mental problems, while others develop ways to handle stress, using it to motivate them to higher performance levels. When dealing with negative stress, many individuals experience deterioration in their emotional state, which causes low job performance and diminished judgment. Feelings of stress can cause people to interpret information incorrectly, which can be detrimental in a field where information is currency. There is a certain level of stress that can be beneficial and help motivate staff to achieve at a higher level, but there comes a point when the stress levels become too high and the negative impacts of stress outweigh the benefits. The researchers remind their readers that the impacts of stress on an individual also depend on their particular emotional characteristics, personal values and skills, and interactions. This study determined that there is no stress level

difference when looking at gender and age, but there are differences in relation to job duties. White et al. further support the importance of researching the psychological effects felt by university staff in relation to their job duties.

Judy Hogan, John Carlson, and Jagdish Dua (2002) address the gap in research pertaining to the study of job-related stress on administrators and support staff in the university setting. The authors report that academic stress has increased over the past several years, and that stress in certain roles in the academic field are higher than in other areas of employment at the university level. This study compared the stress levels of faculty, high-level administrators, managerial-level administrators, and support staff at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. University job type was predicted to be a significant indicator of stress. It was also predicted that younger staff, as well as female staff, would report higher levels of work-related stress. Data was solicited from the University employees via quantitative surveys. Participants in the surveys reported on three types of effects on their physical health: absence from work, visits to a doctor, and ranking of their health. These are referred to as the three dimensions of stress reactions. The data collected supported the hypotheses that reported stress correlated positively with conveyed indicators of stress, and that reported stress correlates with negative emotionality. Both job and non-work stress (and stress reactions) correlated meaningfully and positively with measures of the emotions, anger, anxiety, and depression. Younger staff members reported higher stress levels than their older counterparts. The results of this study, however, did not support the hypothesis that strong social support would mitigate work-related stress. The authors feel this result may be indicative of the instrument used in that they considered it to be weak in assessing this factor in relation to stress. There was also no data to support any stress level difference between male and female respondents. The overall results of this study replicated the results of a previous study

conducted in Australia. This result is all the more notable in that the university population in this study was geographically distinct and culturally very diverse.

Caroline Biron, Jean-Pierre Brun, and Hans Ivers (2008) present continued decreases in government funding, pressure on university finances, and work overload persisting in higher education. Institutions of higher education are becoming commercially oriented in order to fill in funding and enrollment gaps, and this practice has contributed to developing a sense of consumerism in students and their families. At the university in this study, there has been a significant culture-shift from collaboration to one of a more bureaucratic model. Staff are less likely to be included or consulted on decision-making. This lack of inclusion has led to feelings of occupational stress. “Major sources of stress common to the universities and among both general and academic staff were (a) lack of funding, resources and support services, (b) task overload, (c) poor leadership and management, (d) lack of promotion, recognition and reward and (e) job insecurity” (p. 512). This study indicates that academic staff (faculty) are most stressed regarding the amount of work they are required to complete, while administrative staff feel stress over their job roles and what is expected of them. A risk management approach is presented as a possible intervention for occupational stress in the university setting. “Risk management in occupational health and safety is systematic, based on facts and should be completed as a step by step process” (p. 513). “For an organization to develop policies and practices for the management of occupational stress problems, it is necessary to correctly diagnose the characteristics of the work and employment conditions that constitute risks for employees, to investigate the consequences of these conditions and to determine whether certain job categories are more at risk” (p. 513). An institution must be willing to invest the time and resources to identify and address occupational stress, or they will likely face increased

absenteeism, reduction of motivation and output, and even loss of staff. When looking at psychosocial factors, it is difficult to measure their severity based on duration (time) of the event causing the stress. Rather, these types of situations must be viewed as a chronic situation and measured in terms of the effects of long-term exposure.

Actions taken in past years by administration due to fiscal hardships, as presented by Keisha Love, Anthony Tatman, and Benjamin Chapman (2010), has resulted in a pattern of overworked employees in the university setting. “Work overload” has been defined as the feeling by staff that they have too many responsibilities and duties assigned to them which they are unable to satisfactorily meet due to gaps in training and available resources. Work overload can lead to job stress, which is characterized as an unpleasant emotional experience riddled with fear, dread, anxiety, irritation, and other negative emotions. The authors also address interrole conflict, which is when a person’s job stress interferes with their personal life. Work overload, job stress, and interrole conflict inevitably has an effect on staff job satisfaction. The authors used a quantitative survey to determine the levels of work overload, job stress, and interrole conflict felt by participants. This study was conducted in the United States, so it can inform other studies using American participants. However, it does not specifically address the different types of stress and manifested reactions felt by staff who work with transfer students.

Technology, the Extended Work Day, and Student Expectations

Michael Bittman, Judith Brown, and Judy Wajcman (2009) present the reader with the idea that the prevalence of cell phones has created a work environment that extends beyond the limits of the standard eight-hour work day. In addition to being able to be contacted at any time of day, some believe that the fear of falling behind causes employees to engage in work activities during their off hours. While this study also takes place in Australia, certainly cell phone usage

is just a prevalent in the United States. The speed of everyday life is increasing with the use of technology, and everyone is struggling to keep up. “Perpetual contact implies, among other things, that there is in principle less ‘dead time’ which cannot be used for contacting people or being contacted by them” (p. 2). People who feel more rushed in their leisure time are more likely to feel like that have to make up for that in their non-leisure time. The use of cell phones to complete work or tasks has given rise to a “third space” such as coffee shops, where people strive to increase their productivity to not fall behind. There is a certain connection between low technology users and low work-life interaction, and high technology uses with higher work-life overlap. Some researchers suggest that the feeling of work intensification by employees is due to the fact that technology allows more frequent and real-time monitoring of work progress by employers. Workflow in general can be closely tracked and results thus expected much sooner. The intensification of work demands is seen as a combination of evolving managerial styles based on the abilities of the technology, not just the prevalence and convenience of the technology itself. The results of this study do not support the hypothesis that increase technology usage directly related to feelings of time passing at a quicker pace. However, the researchers believe that while the results do not necessarily support the hypothesis, they do not necessarily negate it either. For some people, the ability to complete tasks during “down time” relieves stress instead of increasing it. The major uses of mobile technology during non-work hours are not work related, but that doesn’t mean some employees find themselves imposed upon during their off-time. The cell phone is not the only contributor to work-extending technology. “As this study shows, workers are likely to experience more work, at an intense pace, under greater time pressure with more stress and heavier use of the mobile phone, as a single package” (p. 15). While this study did not produce any significant data to support the idea that increased

cell phone usage positively correlates with an increased sense of time pressure and accelerated work timelines, it is still relevant to consider how the ubiquitous use of technology has influenced our everyday lives. Students have the ability to send communications to university staff any time of the day or night, and often times they become frustrated when they don't receive a response in a perceived "appropriate" amount of time.

Wendy Boswell and Julie Olson-Buchanan (2007) focus on the use of technology during non-traditional work hours. It takes into consideration the use of cell phones, email, and PDAs. Being able to connect to their work anytime and anywhere has reduced the time employees can claim as their own. Expectations of response to inquiries and resolution of issues increase with the perceived availability of employees. A unique aspect of this study looks at the types of employees that are more likely to engage in the use of technology for work purposes outside of their normal work hours. It is the opinion of the researchers that these are most likely to be those that integrate their personal worth and purpose with their job performance. "Technological advances have led to an increased use of [communication technology] for work and non-work purposes, during the workday and long after the traditional workday comes to an end" (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007, p. 12). The researchers concede that a weakness of their study is the fact that a wide range of employees were studied. It would be beneficial to study the effects of technology use based on job type, integrating specific norms and expectations. Staff that wish to "get ahead" may engage in use of technology after hours to complete tasks or respond to inquiries. This sets a precedent that leads to students expecting that all staff will be available after regular work hours. Co-workers of after-hours technology users may then begin to feel the effect of these actions when student expectations of accessibility and response time are transposed onto them. Workplace stress increases which can cause the ambitious to increase

their use of after-hours technology for work purposes, which completes the circle and creates an unsustainable cycle.

The increased use of technology, and thus expectation of quicker turn-around and completion of tasks, causes stress in employees. Ali Soylu and Stefanie Campbell (2012) explain that the expansion of the traditional workplace brought about by technology has caused greater demands to be placed on staff. Workplace stressors can lead to psychological distress, withdrawal behaviors such as absence and turnover, physical health problems, and decreased self-awareness. Many hours of productivity are lost when staff feel psychological distress. The authors posit that a certain amount of job stress is required to motivate staff to accomplish goals or tasks which they may not have believed they could complete. However, there comes a tipping point when the amount of work-related stress ceases to be useful and becomes detrimental. This article adopts the definition of *emotional stress* as internal and external forces between a person and his or her environment that physically or mentally impair the person. Technology such as computers, email, cell phones, and the Internet are so integrated into daily life (personal and professional) that staff have no choice but to utilize these tools, and many more, in their job functions. In addition to this, technology makes it possible, even very easy, for staff to be reached outside of their regular work hours. This can cause stress due to anticipation of receiving an upset response, or request for action, from someone at any time of day. The ever increasing global community and competition felt from that community demands staff utilize all forms of technology available to them. Emotional and physical stress translate into emotional and physical ailments, which decrease productivity.

Darlaston-Jones, Pike, Cohen, Young, Haunold, et al. (2003) present the student as a consumer. "As such, students are becoming more conscious of their customer rights and of gaps

between their expectations of service delivery and the reality of that service. Not only does this service gap present a quality assurance challenge for universities, it is also likely to contribute to student withdrawal” (p. 4). 56 students completed a questionnaire to assess their expectations in relation to university faculty and staff. “Results indicate there is a significant difference between students' expectations and their reality, with expectations being higher” (p. 4). Due to students being viewed as consumers, assessment has begun to be approached from a business perspective. There is an assumption that disappointment and resentment can result if expectations are not met. This is regardless of whether or not the expectations are realistic or based on needs, as opposed to wants. Students arrive at their college or university with a certain amount of preconceived ideas of what their experience will be. Student attrition is partially attributed to a disconnect between expectations and experiences. This study indicates that students have a lack of understanding regarding even the most basic operations of a college or university and that this lack of knowledge sets students up for disappointment. Students are expecting to receive more practical, hands-on assistance in college and that is not always possible. “Students need to have facilities and resources available to them at times that are convenient to students not just the university” (p. 12). This study focused on a specific group of students at an Australian university, so not all results can be generalized. However, this study does provide insight into student understanding and support services which can be used to direct further study.

There has been a significant shift in expectations and enrollment management office approaches to student needs. “Whether they are being recruited to a two- or a four-year institution, Millennials require (and, more important, expect) more TLC as they proceed through the enrollment funnel” (p. 39). While it is never possible to make a sweeping generalization that describes every single member of a group with perfect accuracy, there are characteristics unique

to Millennials such that it is to the benefit of college and university staff to be aware of them. The first of these is that Millennials have a consumer mindset when it comes to their higher education experience. Students want, and expect, access to resources and information at any time during the day or night. Updates to their information or answers to their questions should occur in real time. There is a growing sense of immediacy that guides student requests for information and services. “Even though an institution’s website may clearly indicate decision dates for admission, Millennials may call frequently to check the status of their applications. Similarly, transfer students may expect to be able to track their transcript evaluations for credit in real time in the same way they would track a package they ordered” (p. 39). Students view higher education as a service they are paying for, and as such they expect the same type of access and turn-around that they receive from retailers. Another trait of Millennials of which college and university staff must counteract is their reluctance to thoroughly read important documents. Students may sign a form just to get it out of their way, or they may not submit something critical to a process because they didn't read the email that stated the form was required. “Even parents of Millennials expect instant and ongoing involvement in all stages of their children’s matriculation, from admission to alumni. In theory, parental involvement is an asset, but for many enrollment management professionals, it can become problematic” (p. 40). Some parents perceive enforcement of FERPA as bad customer service. The author suggests three strategies for reaching a middle ground with students. These are: (a) develop a “one stop shop” for all of their enrollment management needs; (b) provide information for parents so that they feel empowered and involved without interfering; (c) take advantage of social media and technology because it is not going away anytime soon.

While it is a good thing that student records are more and more “real time”, that also has a certain amount of negative effects for the staff that maintain those records. Students may see something that is incorrect or missing, simply because their record is currently being worked on, that causes them to believe the staff member does not know how to do their job. Students often want to know why their records don’t show the “way they should” instead of requesting a conversation to understand why credit was applied in the way it was.

Articulation and Transfer Credit Evaluations

Research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative recruitment strategies that have been employed in recent years due to the increasing population of transfer student. Charles Hannon (2013) addresses alternative recruitment strategies to better serve transfer students in the recruitment process. As such, a business-like approach has been adopted at Washington and Jefferson (W&J) College. The first change W&J made was to evaluate transcripts for all applied transfer students, even if they had not accepted yet admission to W&J. This process change addresses a previously significant area of concern for transfer students. Knowing as early as possible which units will transfer is of great advantage to any transfer student. Internal communications regarding transfer students was increased at W&J in order to facilitate the evaluation of each student, as well as to implement and maintain consistency within the evaluations and credit granted. In addition to student’s being more informed, W&J has been able to build a repository of course equivalencies which will serve to benefit future students. Campus-wide changes have been implemented to improve the quality and frequency of transfer student transition to W&J College. Hannon’s article addresses a key aspect of this study, namely transferability of credits and applicability of these credits toward a student’s ultimate degree goal.

Alexander Ott and Bruce Cooper (2014) present their readers with a qualitative study regarding the transfer credit process and institutions that provide evaluations “early” versus those that provide them “late” (“early” is defined as before the enrollment deposit deadline; “late” is after the deposit deadline). The researchers looked into how the variables of bureaucratic structure, technology, personnel, articulation agreements, policy, and quality of transfer student service relate to a campus’ choice or ability to provide early or late evaluations. This is accomplished through a combination of interviews, document review, and focus groups. Of the six variables previously listed, policy and quality of transfer student service turned out to be indicative of early versus late institutions. Those institutions that provide early evaluations of transfer credit have policies in place to support this effort, and in turn receive good feedback regarding their service to transfer students. However, for the most part, “late” institutions do not have appropriate policies in place and thus receive poor reviews of their service. The other three variables did not reliably predict an institution’s ability to provide early transfer credit evaluations.

Connections to the Literature

Workplace stress and the effects it has on employees is a very complex subject and the literature addressed in this review has provided a significant amount of information toward the overall understanding of this complicated topic. Research ranged from the general understanding of workplace stress, to the impact of technology on the modern employee, to the importance of transfer credit evaluations in the university setting. Looking at the literature through the lens of Lazarus’ Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), researchers are able to recognize the phenomenon of workplace stress as the product of interactions between two or more people or events. These interactions put relative amounts of strain on the employee

which cause mental and physical disturbance. Circumstances significant enough to result in occupational stress strengthens the importance of applying this understanding to enrollment management staff in relation to their interactions with students.

Studies involving occupational stress (the effects of technology on the workplace and student expectations) and the significance of accurate credit evaluations are integral to the development of stress mitigation techniques and improved communication between staff and students. Existing knowledge of the subject of general occupational stress is well established, but there remains a need for further investigation into the ways this is felt and manifested by transfer evaluation staff in the university setting of higher education. Continued efforts must be made to determine the degree to which enrollment management staff must be empowered in order to be confident when upholding their decisions in light of student questions. There is an increased need to understand the experiences of the specific work tasks related to student transfer credit which will allow for concentrated efforts to be made in relation to coping strategies and management of student expectations.

Research has shown that the effects of stress in the workplace can lead to a wide range of mental and physical reactions. These reactions can result from overwork, lack of support, increased use of technology, and pressure felt from the need to provide accurate transfer credit evaluations earlier and earlier. Institutions of higher education must do all that they can to provide support to their enrollment management staff so that these staff members can, in turn, provide the best possible support to the students they serve. Therefore, it is important to determine the degree to which workplace pressures felt by enrollment management personnel affect the performance of the professional. Identifying elements that impact this specific group of higher education employees in relation to this unique student population is the main focus of

this study. In the next chapter of this study, the methodology used to gather data is defined and discussed. This includes which types of participants were included, how these participants were chosen, information regarding the qualitative interview used for the data collection tool, and how the information was collected and analyzed.

Chapter Three - Methodology

This chapter covers the details of the research design, which includes the participants, the setting for the data collection, and the specific instrument that was utilized to gather the data. Attention was given to the procedures that were used for this study and the ways in which the data was analyzed. The world of higher education cannot claim that it is immune from the phenomenon of occupational stress. This research enhances the existing literature regarding occupational stress and will assist higher education administrators with implementing improved processes and methods for mitigating feelings of anxiety and distress experienced by enrollment management staff.

What are the workplace pressures experienced by enrollment management personnel? Pressures resulting from the new technologically savvy and degree-focused transfer student population can cause enrollment management staff to experience stress, anxiety, and frustration. Transfer students are now the vast majority of those attending college, but even so, within that group no two students are exactly the same and so they cannot be evaluated as such. Those tasked with evaluating the myriad of credit students bring in with them must be correct and timely, as well as clear communicators when called upon to do so. Considerable time and effort is put into a student's coursework at every stage in the process and this may translate into student anxiety and concern over the appropriate and accurate application of this credit. There is substantial research available that addresses the concept of occupational stress, how it manifests both physically and mentally, and how the ever increasing use of technology plays a role in staff accessibility and student expectations.

Design

This study identifies the unique workplace pressures felt by enrollment management staff. The research conducted makes use of a qualitative interview design to determine these stressors. “A popular approach in educational research, the one-on-one interview is a data collection process in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time” (Creswell, 2014, p. 218). Interviews are a prevalent research design due to the ability to obtain personal accounts relevant to the topic being studied as well as providing the opportunity to observe non-verbal data displayed by the interviewees. As this study focused on enrollment management staff, the students they serve, and the mental and physical stress felt as a cause of interactions between these two groups, face-to-face interviews were an appropriate choice for data collection. Interviews help identify specific experiences that give a unique insight into a very specific area. This information can lead to improvements in the mitigation of certain stressors as well as the development of coping strategies for the staff to implement. The purpose of these interviews was to speak with professional university staff in the area of enrollment management to determine the unique stressors they experience. Creswell (2014) states that “in qualitative research, you ask open-ended questions so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (p. 218). This group is expected to be well-spoken, thoughtful, and forthcoming in the information they share due to the requisite skill set needed to be a university staff member, as well as their vested interest in improving their working environment as well as that for all other enrollment management professionals. Following this reasoning, an interview design is well suited to this study because the goal of the research is to determine the workplace pressures felt by enrollment management staff.

Participants

Every effort must be made to be transparent regarding the intent and content of a study. E-mail communications sent to potential participants in this case included information on the purpose of the study and their rights should they choose to take part. Informed consent of participants is a non-negotiable aspect of a research study. See Appendix B to view the consent form that was emailed to the potential participants. Creswell (2014) asserts that “by providing this information, you will show a concern for the potential intrusion of the study into their workplaces and lives and set the stage for realistic expectations on their part” (p. 147). Participants have a right to know exactly what they are being asked to do, why they are being asked to do it, and the potential effects not only on themselves, but on other groups as well when applicable. Participants were not asked to provide their names as part of the requested information. Also, participants were informed that there are eleven (11) questions in the interview that took approximately one (1) hour to complete. There are no known risks with this research study and participation is completely voluntary. Contributors to this study may have chosen to stop the interview at any time, or not complete it at all. There were no negative impacts if a participant that did not play a part in, or complete, the interview.

Five enrollment management staff members took part in the interview process. The participants in this study work in a variety of higher education institutions, including three four-year public institutions operating on a semester calendar, one four-year public institution operating on a quarter calendar, one four-year private institution operating on a semester calendar, and one public community college operating on a semester calendar.

Setting for Data Collection

It is critical that California State University Channel Islands understands the needs of the students that choose to attend the University, and how the needs of this population effect the staff that work with them. The majority of students that attend Channel Islands stay close to home, which implies specific needs and resources available to this group during the transfer process. Ventura County has a high percentage of Hispanic families, and the culture of these families is such that they tend to stick together for emotional, financial, and other support.

Potential participants were contacted via email on Tuesday, January 5th 2016 to request their participation in the interview process. Interviews were scheduled between Friday, February 12th 2016 and Friday, February 26th 2016. This window of time was chosen to provide multiple time selections to maximize the participant availability. Every effort was made to conduct the interviews in person, but adjustments were made to video or phone interviews as needed. The interviews were expected to last approximately one hour, but understanding that each interaction would be unique, flexibility was exercised in adjusting available time to ensure satisfactory completion of the discussions. Participants were notified that the audio for each interview would be recorded to ensure accuracy of related information. Every effort was made to conduct each interview in person, but accommodations were made for alternative interview formats as needed. Data collection for this study took place as face-to-face interviews when possible, which occurred for two participants, as well as video interviews over the internet (one participant), and phone interviews (two participants) when required.

Instrument

Careful consideration was made as to the appropriate instrument to use for this study. An interview format, consisting of eleven questions, was utilized for data collection. More

specifically, an in-person, open-ended format was utilized. Creswell (2014) maintains that “one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably” (p. 218). Again, the interviews are expected to last approximately one hour each with additional time for follow-up as needed. A full copy of the interview instrument is included in Table 3.1, as well as Appendix C.

Table 3.1

Interview Questions

1) What is your current job title?
2) How long have you been in your current position?
3) What led you to apply for this position?
4) What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field?
5) Please describe a typical work day.
6) Please describe the average in-person interaction you experience with a transfer student.
7) What is your perception of the overall level of stress in your current position?
a. Follow up question, if not already covered: What are the major frustrations of this job?
8) What is the most stressful aspect of your job?
9) How do you go about determining how and when your work is completed?
a. Follow up question, if not already covered: What is the interaction (or ratio) between the duties you are assigned and the time you are given to complete them?
10) What are the most significant tasks or events that cause particular satisfaction or dissatisfaction for you at work?
11) From your perspective, what are the issues you see working in this field?

The first two questions ask the participant to state their job title and how long they have been in their current position. It is important to start with this basic information so that any patterns regarding length of employment may be established. Question number three asks the participant to articulate what led them to their current position. Abilities and personal qualities desirable for someone in enrollment management are addressed in the fourth question. The

inclusion of question five is intended to establish a baseline for the typical experiences and duties a staff member in this field encounters during an average work day. Certainly there are times of increase stress due to a particular deadline or event, but it is more in the interest of this researcher to determine the day-to-day issues that cause staff to feel overwhelmed or anxious.

Question number six moves on from the more general and foundational questions to ask the participant to describe an average in-person interaction with a transfer student. This is the first question in the interview designed to delve into the feelings a staff member has when working directly with a student. Face-to-face interactions are often quite different from phone or email conversations. At this point in the interview, questions seven and eight ask the participant to provide specific information on how they would rate their level of job stress, as well as what they feel is the most stressful aspect of their job. Do the participants tend to rank their stress levels high, or low? Do they feel in-person interactions with students are stressful? Is there an unknown factor that is the biggest contributor to feeling if anxiety and distress?

Next, in question nine, interviewees are asked how they determine the order of completion for their job duties. Feeling overwhelmed can cause staff to shut down emotionally, or cause dramatic decreases in productivity. Or, on the other side, staff may rush to complete work and this results in incorrect or incomplete information being provided to students or other campus constituents. For some staff, the ability to determine their own priorities and timelines can mitigate stress in the workplace, and so question nine seeks to determine the amount of control the participants feel they actually have. .

The next two questions, ten and eleven, request that the interviewee reveal their personal opinions on the tasks they perform that cause the most dissatisfaction, , as well as what they perceive to be the major issues working in enrollment management. These questions were

included to allow for the opportunity to identify similarities across the data that could lead to identifying common types of stressors. Mitigation of these stressors allows enrollment management staff to focus on the work they are doing, rather than worrying about feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

Procedures

For this study, data collection began with contacting enrollment management staff members at various campuses within Ventura County. Email requests were sent out to the identified staff members, requesting their participation in the study. The next step of the process was to set up interview dates and times for those that have agreed to participate. Steps for this procedure were designed as such for convenience of participation. University staff are busy people, and capturing their attention, even for just one hour can be difficult. It is the goal of this research design to be easy, convenient, and straight-forward. This approach eases the participant into the survey, and provides the researcher with more information with which to analyze the data later on in the process. Data collection and analysis was conducted away from the participants' view. All conversations were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. It was the hope of this researcher to be able to affect change where needed in the information presented to, and support services designed for, transfer evaluation staff at California State University Channel Islands. If successful, any implemented changes could be presented at future conferences as best practice recommendations.

Analysis

Analysis of received data involves much more than developing a concluding statement regarding findings. A significant amount of preparation goes into organizing the data before it can be analyzed. "Initial preparation of the data for analysis requires organizing the vast amount

of information, transferring it from spoken or written words to a typed file and making decisions about whether to analyze the data by hand or by computer” (Creswell, 2014, p. 238). A preliminary review of the data was performed to become familiar with the general sense of what has been gathered. Methods utilized to identify themes in this study were to first get the audio files of the five interviews transcribed into text. This was completed by a friend who listened to each audio file individually and typed the conversations word-for-word. Payment was given to the transcriber for his time. Next, each of the interviews was formatted with two inch margins on both sides to allow for note-taking. Each transcript was printed and coded by hand (open coding). Individual interview questions were highlighted within the body of the text for easy identification, which also provided context for participant responses. On the left side, sections of text were assigned general designations, which were intended to guide analysis. Simultaneously, each document was reviewed and any notes or ideas were written in the provided margins on the right-hand side. Similar qualitative interview and analysis techniques were used in the 2009 study by Ott and Cooper. This review assisted in decisions regarding optimal organization of the data and if additional data may be required. The next step in the analysis was the coding of collected data. Creswell (2014) tells us that “coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (p. 243). Coding and analysis was performed by hand in this study. Analysis can only be trusted if all of the previous steps in the research study have been well-developed. Beginning with the research question, and going all the way to analysis, the steps build off of each other. A good foundation will set up a research study for reliable data and analysis of that data.

There has already been a considerable amount of research conducted addressing the concept of occupational stress, how it is perceived by staff, and how it may be viewed as a

product of the interaction of an employee and their work environment. While the established literature is a great foundation on this topic, there is room for further research. This research identifies trends that will assist university administrators and staff to better support the student population that California State University Channel Islands serves, as well as the staff that interact with them. More specifically, the results of this research study will be used to create communication plans, resources, and support services through the office of enrollment management that will increase California State University Channel Islands' staff knowledge of how they can approach and mitigate feelings of anxiety and stress.

Chapter Four – Analysis and Results

Common themes which emerged in this study were: (a) staffing and structure; (b) evaluation of transfer credit; (c) professionalism, policy, and procedure; (d) managing expectations; (e) stress and other emotional perspectives. Enrollment management staff play a key role in the higher education careers of students. Understanding the experiences that enrollment management staff have and how they navigate their internal duties and external expectations provide a more substantial understanding of higher education as a whole. A qualitative interview design was chosen because of the ability to obtain personal accounts relevant to the topic being studied. Participants were chosen based on their roles within enrollment management areas. Interview responses received from participants were analyzed to reveal themes. The information supported existing literature, as well as provided additional insights not found during the literature review. Data was collected through responses to eleven predetermined interview questions. The set of questions that participants were asked is provided in Appendix B. Pseudonyms have been assigned to each institution and participant, and they will henceforth be referred to as: Wilma Larson from Institution A, Dorothy Carter from Institution B, Lisa Tucker from Institution C, Tina Powers from Institution D, and Jessica Avery from Institution E. The first three questions of the interview solicited some basic demographic information for each participant. The remaining eight questions focused on the experiences of the participants in relation to their job duties.

Staffing and Structure

Question eleven in the interviews asked participants to identify the issues they observe working in their field. By analyzing the interview responses, and highlighting commonly occurring words or concepts, it became obvious that a major, fundamental issue experienced by

enrollment management personnel is that of staffing. In the context of this research, staffing refers to the number of individual personnel assigned to a task, employment background of those personnel, and their job duties and responsibilities. Organization of staff and the areas they report to, as well as physical office space, differs significantly between each of the institutions represented in this study. Campus sizes, where the participants work, ranged from approximately 4,000 students to 42,000 students.

Table 4.1

Institutional Information

Institution Name	(Public/Private)	Term Type	State	Total Student Population
Institution A	Private, 4 year	Semester	CA	4,126 (as of 2016)
Institution B	Public, 4 year	Semester	CA	41,548 (as of 2015)
Institution C	Public, 4 year	Semester	CA	7,102 (as of 2015)
Institution D	Public, 2 year	Semester	NV	35,512 (as of 2013)
Institution E	Public, 4 year	Quarter	CA	22,301 (as of 2016)

Note. Student population information obtained from individual institution websites. Represents most recent data available.

Regardless of size, an overall belief that campuses are short-staffed was present in all interviewees' responses. Taking on the workload of others in addition to their own was a common occurrence. Absence of staff, either by lack of positions, lack of budget, or outages, places stress on those in the office. Participants reported always being busy, in one way or another. Tina Palmer from Institution D revealed:

With the transfer credit process, some of the issues – I would say staffing. I'm talking a little bit more about that there is a lack of staffing in the credit office.

We lack financing to hire more, or they don't make it a priority. I think that is a

big issue because, well, I think they're under a lot of pressure to get these things done. They're understaffed...Lack of staffing causes a slower turn-around time; they're probably under – [a] great deal of pressure.

Participants conveyed a general sense of autonomy; the ability to determine their own daily tasks, guided by larger campus deadlines. Wilma Larson from Institution A stated:

We're definitely not micromanaged as evaluators. It really truly is [that] we operate on deadlines...my work day and what I decide to do in that work day is 100% deadline driven. We are free to do what it is we feel like we need to do on any given day. If I get sick of putting in transfer work one day and say 'That's it, I'm done. This is brain-numbing', then I can go on to something else, just so long as I can get it all done [by] the deadline.

Autonomy, in relation to daily tasks, was commonly mentioned by participants as the normal state of their offices, with only occasional reminders or interruptions by other staff or supervisors. At times it can be difficult to complete a particular project due to relying on another area or staff member to complete a prerequisite task. Lisa Tucker from Institution C pointed out that it is difficult to update transfer credit in a timely manner when her area is waiting on students or other institutions to send final, official transcripts (L. Tucker, personal communication, February 16, 2016). While participants indicated that their direct supervisors strive to protect their time, occasionally an overall area at an institution are directed to work on the same project to support one specific area, regardless of regularly assigned job duties. Work gets done through a combination of team effort and adherence to deadlines.

Physical office set-up can also affect enrollment management staff in the execution and completion of their daily tasks. Dorothy Carter from Institution B indicated:

So it's been quite a process. So we just now moved into our new office space maybe three months ago...we're in tiny cubicles. I mean **tiny** (bolded for emphasis) cubicles...And so it's kind of loud, because if we're all talking to a student on the phone in our cubicle, which is tiny. It's sometimes hard to concentrate, or even to hear if you're on the phone, kind of thing. So yeah, we're still getting used to that, the noise level is a little bit high.

Not only did participants find it difficult to concentrate in large, open office spaces, they also encountered issues with lack of appropriate space in which they can meet with students. Dorothy Carter revealed that she still speaks with students at a front counter area because she is not comfortable meeting with them at her desk.

Interviewees indicated an increase in student contact as a requirement for the completion of their job duties. Staff are more often expected to possess both analytical and people skills, and that can be a difficult adjustment for some. In addition to this personality component, there were references in the interviews to the convergence of long-employed, older staff and newer, younger staff. Jessica Avery from Institution E observed:

And when I started here in 2002, I was one of the youngest here. And most of the women in the office were older women that had been working together for 20-30 years...so they'd been together and had done the same job for however long. And that was just what they did, that was a generational thing...then younger people started coming in...they expect a career path of some kind, so that has me a little curious to see what the longevity will be [for] the people that we're hiring now.

Personality types of enrollment management staff may be similar, but Jessica's statement indicates that the long-term career expectations of older versus newer staff are showing

signs of significant differences. Future studies regarding workplace experiences of enrollment management staff could potentially yield very different results.

Evaluation of Transfer Credit

Traditionally, professional staff employed in enrollment management positions answer a wide range of questions, from admission to transfer credit to graduation. An essential function performed by all interviewees is that of transfer credit evaluation. Duties related to this function include the review of student transcripts and test scores to determine applicable credit, potential course substitutions, and identification of specific course credit germane to degree requirements. Participants agreed that it is important for students to understand that there is a difference between a preliminary evaluation, usually conducted by Admissions staff, and an official, final evaluation completed by enrollment management staff. Generally, preliminary evaluations identify admissions requirements and confirm unit totals and GPA. An official evaluation goes further to ascertain specific general education, graduation, and major requirements. Evaluations, regardless of when they are completed, must be as accurate as possible because students base their registration decisions on the information provided to them by their institution. If the information provided is incorrect, or incomplete, students may end up taking a course that they did not need, or even not take a course that they did, in fact, need. Decisions made by enrollment management staff can affect a student's entire academic plan.

Establishment of standard processing times for receipt of official transcripts and completion of an evaluation is entirely dependent upon each institution. Dorothy Carter describes the process at Institution B:

So we tell students that if you're brand new...the transcript...it will take six to eight weeks for the process. Open the envelope, logging it in, getting [it] scanned,

getting [it] evaluated, and then we spit out the evaluation...we tell them six to eight weeks...Let's say you've already submitted a transcript but you've got a new semester on there. That certainly does not take six to eight weeks. That could take a couple of weeks.

Customarily, students contact staff directly to request an expedited process. If the student is concerned about receiving credit for a prerequisite, staff may update just that credit to allow them to register for their desired course, but all other credit will wait until the student's records come up during the regular review process.

Depending on the time of year, the volume of student records needing review will fluctuate. For campuses that admit students for spring terms, the turnaround for completion of final evaluations is much shorter than for students admitted in fall terms, due to the difference of length between winter and summer breaks. Lisa Tucker from Institution C describes it this way:

And then that's when we push, the push is going to start coming because orientation is going to come up and then you [have] enrollment confirmations and then, you know, it's just a whole cycle that repeats [be]cause then [it's] August now [and] we're juggling both Spring and Fall, you know, in August...then in January we're juggling once again. You know spring's such a quick turnaround that it's just...I lack a better word for it...annoying.

Tina Powers from Institution D shared that, in her experience, just a little more research can often help make a course-to-course equivalency determination that benefits the student. Staff reviewing coursework should not take short-cuts, nor give up too easily when searching for corroborative information. Tina indicates her view on this part of the process:

Because often times what I've seen... this attention to detail and the thoroughness... really understanding how this course may have a slightly different title, but in essence it could very easily substitute, or be in the equivalent, of this with a little bit of review. I've seen where a student will have taken a course again that, had that been investigated, they probably didn't need to do because it could have been remedied with a course equivalency process or a course [sub]. I think it's very important to have this attention to detail and this thoroughness because you could help the student save time and money. And frustration.

Obtaining and maintain a strong working knowledge of one's own institution, course descriptions, and catalog only serves to benefit the staff and the students for whom records are being assessed.

Professionalism, Policy, and Procedure

Quite a few individual tasks make up the average workload for an enrollment management staff member in higher education. Question number five requested that participants "please describe a typical work day". While the general consensus among participants was that there is no such thing as a "typical work day", there are tasks and duties that regularly occur. Staff are assigned such things as registering students, evaluating transfer credit, processing grade changes, reviewing residency statuses for tuition purposes, posting degrees, and ordering diplomas. Many processes occur concurrently and staff must be able to prioritize these varied tasks. Deadlines, whether set by the campus or the government, must be adhered to and, more often than not, drive those priorities. The fourth question in the interview asked for the abilities or personal qualities that contribute to success in enrollment management positions. Among those identified are attention to detail, thoroughness, good time management, good prioritizing,

critical thinking skills, good customer service, collaboration, and accuracy. Students do not always include sufficient identifying information when they send an email, for example, so an evaluator must be able to do research to find out the identity of the students and the nature of their inquiry. Dorothy Carter from Institution B put it this way:

And so you just have to learn that. They just don't know, even though you've known for this for twenty years. You just have to be patient... You just have to be knowledgeable, and basically just want to help the student. I mean, that's what we're there for. We're there to help the student, not just to do our job. Even though our job is that, we need to put the student first.

It is common practice in enrollment management for professional staff to have at least one person that can serve as a back-up in any given situation, but at times the circumstances are too complicated for any other staff member to take it over. Occasionally, the student may become upset and request to speak to someone else other than the current staff member. In these cases, it is appropriate for staff to call upon their supervisors for assistance. An overall level of professionalism must be maintained throughout all student interactions.

In addition to this, it is vital to possess a solid working knowledge of specific campus policies and processes. Tina Palmer from Institution D stated:

You have to understand college policy so that you are able to know your policy and interpret and communicate your policy effectively... And then knowing how to navigate through your college processes... so that they get that answer that they're looking for. Or if that doesn't go through, helping them go through the next step... So knowing your processes and keeping that relationship with the student...

More often than not, policy is what drives the processes and practices carried out by higher education staff. Professional staff in higher education must have a firm foundation regarding privacy concerns and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). “The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education” (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act). FERPA can become a concern if staff computer screens are accessible or visible to students while they are displaying other student information. If staff meet with students in an open space, they must ask the student’s permission to discuss their information in that setting. If staff take students back to their desk, computer screens should be locked or have the ability to turn away from the student’s view. Dorothy Carter from Institution B put it this way:

And it is weird...talking about privacy. Sure we want to help the student, but oh my gosh, there are records for students all over the place. I mean all over our desk[s], the screen is up with someone’s social security number on there. I mean, so talk about privacy. The student can see our computer screen...we’re always working so there is always transcripts, residency forms, and green cards on our desk[s]...People didn’t really think about that all the way through. Our computers are stationary. I mean, you can raise the screens but you can’t flip them either way.

The ever increasing reliance on computers and software programs in higher education must be approached with a certain degree of caution. Errors can occur in data management systems,

either by user error or by an internal coding error within the system itself. In either situation, an evaluator must assess the situation and make any needed adjustments.

Establishing and maintaining professional relationships across campus is an important piece in the successful evaluation of credit and overall student support. One way these relationships are cultivated is through campus-wide meetings and committee participation. Increased faculty understanding of what is required for the assessment of transfer credit serves to improve their contributions to the process. If campus staff and faculty remain isolated from each other, it can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication. People are more likely to be flexible and accommodating when they are aware of their effects upon one another. Enrollment management staff members spend quite a bit of time negotiating the internal dynamics of office politics. Tina Powers from Institution D offered this example:

I'm sure you've experienced this too. You work amongst colleagues that are likeminded in terms of trying new things and getting involved, and trying to make things better and then you have the group that tends to be what I would call entrenched. And they are...kind of the old guard. They're very resistant to change, and they don't want you to move forward because that might make them look bad. Or they then [would] have to work harder. That dynamic too is definitely stressful because I know that happens probably everywhere.

A recurring concept within participants' responses is in reference to the need for a certain amount of professional distance needed for staff. More than one participant relayed the belief that having a certain level of emotional disconnection can help mitigate stress related to work volume or student interaction. Jessica Avery from Institution E put it this way:

If we get emotionally involved it makes it worse. At least it would for me... So if I can maintain some distance, some professional distance, I guess? I don't know how to describe it. You know, without getting upset about [it] you can say 'This is what's going, this is what you're trying to do, and this is why it won't happen. I'm not saying you're an idiot for not doing this, so don't call me an idiot'...

All interviewees stated their desire to do a good job and help students. However, Dorothy Carter from Institution B stated:

That's probably the most stressful thing. You want to do it right. You want to do the job right, but oh my gosh, there are ten different projects you're working on and they all have to be done yesterday. That's very stressful, because you want to touch all of them, but you cannot finish them all.

Interruptions are a common occurrence for staff in support positions, as they must address all student concerns regardless of advanced notification or not. Patience plays a key role in these cases. Enrollment management staff can sometimes be viewed as "gatekeepers" to student goals, whether it is being admitted to the institution, registering for a desired class, or receiving their degree. Participants affirmed, over and over again, the need for a certain degree of professional distance regarding student interactions. Lisa Tucker from Institution C put it this way:

Some students don't like the reason and they continue to be argumentative. They continue to try to find ways and...I'm empathetic towards [them]...however it gets to [a] certain point [where] I can only be empathetic with you for so long...because at the end of the day...I have to remind myself that it's not my fault, it's the policy. They didn't follow policy.

Regardless of the situation, with the exception of blatant aggression or violence, enrollment management staff must maintain their professionalism at all times.

Managing Expectations

Higher education is not always an easily understood experience for students. Professional staff must establish clear and intentional ways for students to obtain information. Management of expectations regarding when, where, and how staff can be contacted is the most fundamental level of this concept. Most commonly, higher education staff communicate with students through the use of electronic mail (email) and/or phone, and some staff may also have walk-in or scheduled appointments with students. Priorities must be determined in order for tasks and processes to be completed in a timely and appropriate manner. In addition to this, other steps may be taken to establish consistent delivery of information to students. Dorothy Carter describes the phone set-up at Institution B this way:

I read my email, because we get a lot of emails from students. I try to take care of that right away, because if you don't answer them back right away, they're going to call you on the phone...on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays our phones start at eight thirty. And then they close at four thirty. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, those are our night hours. The phones open at ten until six thirty, and that's the same as the counter time. The phones and counter times are the same.

Voicemail can be time-consuming and can sometimes even be counter-productive. By the time staff would listen to voicemail messages, research the question or issue, and call the student back, more often than not, the student has obtained the desired information from someone else. Students often want immediate results, but more than one interviewee affirmed that they can

only do what they can do in a given day, and they should not be made to feel bad about work that did not get done.

Interviewees were asked how they approach a situation in which they are asked the same question over and over, either by the same person or by a different person each time. Participants indicated the belief that they should not blame students for asking questions; it is their job to explain, so they should remain calm and listen. The student is asking this question for the first time, or they are simply not processing the information provided to them in a way that is making sense. Wilma Larson from Institution A stated that if the same question does arise often enough to be of note, perhaps it would be an opportunity to examine the process and adjust communication efforts to assist in student understanding:

I don't really think about it, I just do. Even though I may have frustration... a student has asked you the same thing and... they haven't understood it so you change the wording and make it clear to them... or that a different student has asked the same exact question, they're not there to waste your time, but because they really truly don't understand the process or the question or the answer.

On occasion, an upset student comes to campus demanding a meeting with an evaluator regarding their records. An upset student may be looking to hold someone accountable, or just to listen to their concerns. Lisa Tucker from Institution C feels that, in these types of situations, staff must be emotionally strong and stand firm in the validity of the information they are providing. Lisa went on to state her belief that students and staff must often work together to resolve a question or concern, and both groups must work together to accomplish goals. The perceptions of students may not always reflect facts, but staff must remember that for students,

their perceptions are their realities. Tina Powers from Institution D recognizes her role is assuring anxious students:

So being able to look at that transcript and say ‘This D will come in, but this D won’t come in’ and quote that based on the policy. Being able to [relieve] their fears that when [they] submit [their] credit to us, we’re going to take them and apply them to the classes that will be equivalent.

It is important for enrollment management staff to stick to reality and relay only facts when working with students. Staff must be firm in the information they provide.

Staff expectations are commonly managed through established dates and deadlines. Strict deadlines and requirements must be consistently communicated to students, in a directed effort to reduce confusion and maximize student comprehension. Students may not understand cycles or processing requirements. Certain times during the year there is more pressure on staff time and resources. Study participants have found they will be held accountable by students who speak up if the processing of requests has become backlogged. Generally, there was a common desire among participants to be able to help students find their direction. Along the way they appreciate getting to know students better and having the chance to build relationships.

Stress and Other Emotional Perspectives

Experiencing stress in the workplace is common among enrollment management personnel. The seventh question prompted participants to ascertain their perception of the overall level of stress in their current positions. This was followed up by question eight which asked for a bit more detail by asking what participants believe to be the most stressful aspect of their jobs. Participants stated many times that they often feel stressed and worry that they didn’t make any meaningful progress. High stress times come in cycles and slower times are viewed as

a relief. Sometimes participants identified feelings of stress regarding the fear of making mistakes. Dorothy Carter from Institution B described this emotion in this way, “Well, I think you definitely need to be analytical. You have to pay close attention to detail, because you don’t want to make a mistake and deny someone, for instance” (D. Carter, personal communication, February 15, 2016). However, not all staff experiences are stressful or dissatisfying.

Participants conveyed a common appreciation for being able to assist students with a situation that the student believed to be too difficult.

Professional staff experience a wide range of emotions related to their employment aside from stress, such as gratitude, guilt, and sympathy. Wilma Larson from Institution A relayed:

I had my associate’s degree; that’s as far as I had gone... So when I came to this job interview they said, ‘By the way, did you know that you can take classes for free at [Institution A]?’... So then I worked on my bachelor’s, and then after [that] I went on to my master’s [degree]... So, why not stay at a place where they helped you get your four year degree? Plus your master’s [degree]? It’s like I owe them a lot for giving me that education as well.

The participants indicated they could become easily overwhelmed dealing with the workload and deadlines given to them. More than one participant stated that they do not feel like they have enough time in their day to get everything done and that they feel guilty working on other projects instead of meeting with students. Tina Powers from Institution D revealed:

I don’t feel like I have enough time at all. I feel guilty about blocking that time when it is a busy time for students and try not to if I can. But the homework, I call it literally homework, if there are those kinds of things during those busy times. It literally becomes after hours, or a weekend or something like that.

Because I just can't justify blocking time when I need to be having that time open for students.

Participants also felt that personal experience can inform professional practice. Lisa Tucker from Institution C revealed that she feels her own personality is often not a good fit for her job because she is so empathetic. She stated:

It hurts me a little. Not a little. It hurts me a lot because I know it's something I shouldn't be taking so personally, but it's hard for me not to. Because I know they're not angry with me...it's very hard to deny students. I always try to do triple checks...because I know what it's like to be denied from your dream school.

Overall, participants were sympathetic toward student goals and would try to find a workable solution as they recognized one person can make all the difference in a student's academic career. Participants also indicated that enrollment management staff must take the time to practice self-care or they may experience burn out. Lisa Tucker goes on to say:

It's a high stress job. Some people say, 'Oh, it's not that bad. You work in an office and talk to students all day. You get paid to do this little job.' But many fail to realize that it's an emotionally stressful job. It's not just the work that we're given; it's an emotionally stressful job.

While the individual tasks and routine processes of an enrollment management evaluator may not be particularly difficult, the student perceptions and expectations tied to their evaluation can create a stressful atmosphere.

Themes which arose from this study were identified as: (a) staffing and structure; (b) evaluation of transfer credit; (c) professionalism, policy, and procedure; (d) managing

expectations; (e) stress and other emotional perspectives. The data did not support the assumption made by this researcher that all participants would declare their work environments as stressful, even hostile. Participants did convey their perceptions of a certain level of stress regarding their job duties, but they also indicated their desire to be of help to students, which can be viewed as a positive characteristic of their work. Enrollment management staff encounter a wide variety of situations during the course of each work day, and participants revealed their belief that they can always expect to be busy. The following chapter reflects on this study as a whole and provide recommendations for future study.

More often than not, entreaties by students for one-on-one meetings to go over their credit are presumed to be confrontational. Two out of the five participants revealed that they frequently feel like they are on the defensive against student expectations, parents acting on behalf of their students, and the requirement to have the most precise information available as soon as possible. Students also have the capability to send communications to campus staff any time of the day or night, and they may become frustrated when they do not receive an answer in a “suitable” amount of time. Sometimes, enrollment management staff are working without any administrative support, due to budgetary constraints. Four out of the five interviewees indicated that having additional, qualified, and productive support staff can reduce the stress experienced by enrollment management staff, because the support staff can take on processes which may not be particularly difficult, but that take up a lot of time, providing more time for high quality student interactions.

The data supports the need for students to understand that there is a difference between a preliminary evaluation, usually conducted by admissions staff, and an official, final evaluation completed by records staff. Generally, preliminary evaluations identify admissions requirements

and confirm unit totals and GPA. An official evaluation goes further to ascertain specific general education, graduation, and major requirements. Evaluations, regardless of when they are completed, must be as accurate as possible because students base their registration decisions on the information provided to them by their institution. If the information provided is incorrect, or incomplete, students may end up taking a course that they did not need, or even not take a course that they did in fact need. All five participants' responses indicated that the students they work with are not fully aware of the transfer credit evaluation process at their institution. Lack of knowledge on the students' part regarding this process can cause confusion and, potentially, frustration. Occasionally, student attitudes and the way they approach the situation can affect the staff member's desire to assist. If a student is calm, collected, and prepared with required information, enrollment management staff may be more likely to go the extra mile to help a student, as opposed to a situation where the student is angry, aggressive, or disrespectful. Regardless of student attitudes, decisions made by enrollment management staff can affect a student's academic plan.

Chapter Five – Implications and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the mental and physical effects experienced by enrollment management staff that evaluate transfer credit and propose ameliorative responses so they can more effectively work with students. The research question for this study was: what are the workplace pressures experienced by enrollment management personnel? Five participants were interviewed and their responses were recorded and analyzed. Member checking was conducted by providing a copy of the full report document to each participant, requesting their feedback on the interpretation and presentation of collected data. Two out of the five participants responded, stating that they found the study to be of value and interest to the field of enrollment management and higher education as a whole.

Interview results pointed to themes that were consistent with the reviewed literature. Identified themes included (a) staffing and structure; (b) evaluation of transfer credit; (c) professionalism, policy, and procedure; (d) managing expectations; (e) stress and other emotional perspectives. Participants indicated a perpetual need for additional staff members in their work area to share the workload and, as a result, relieve stress. Taking on additional job duties outside of work they are typically assigned to can cause stress for enrollment management staff. Generally, participants revealed that they are always occupied with work-related activities, in one form or another. If enrollment management staff are overly preoccupied with their job (e.g. quality of work, support from administrators, etc.), they may become too distracted to be effective. If a staff member so worried that a student is going to yell at them during a meeting, how can they ensure they are giving that student the most accurate information? If the students become too defensive, the conversation may be thrown off track and may not recover. Dissension or strife may be caused by enrollment management staff worrying about what other

campus staff, or faculty, will say or do in a given situation. Each person employed by an institution of higher education is ultimately working toward the same goal of serving the needs of the student and providing support. Ott and Cooper (2014) assert that “key staff members leverage their relationship across departments in a way that compensates for staffing insufficiencies” (p. 22). Cooperation and collaboration are needed across campuses to provide the support that students require.

The focus of the job duties of participants is on the evaluation and application of transfer credit. Hannon (2013) reminds us that, to evaluate transfer credit effectively “require[s] a deep understanding of the transfer experience from the point of view of transfer students themselves, whose interests we serve and whose lives and futures we hope to help shape” (p. 51). Interviewee responses indicated that there is much more to what they do than the black and white, “yes or no” application of credit to a student’s record. All participants revealed a general desire to help students however they are able. This desire can lead to feelings of stress, inadequacy, and even failure. In general, staff that wish to “get ahead” may engage in use of technology after hours to complete tasks or respond to inquiries. This sets a precedent that leads to students expecting that all campus staff are available after regular work hours. Boswell and Olson-Buchanan (2007) remind us that:

Finding a link between [communication technology] use after hours and work-life conflict suggests that organizations need to recognize the toll that staying connected after hours may have on an employee’s personal life. The connectivity and flexibility afforded by [communication technology] appears to come at the price of heightened work-life conflict” (p. 605).

Co-workers of after-hours technology users may then begin to feel the effect of these actions when student expectations of accessibility and response time are transposed onto them. One participant indicated that workplace stress is directly proportional to bringing work home. As workplace stress intensifies, enrollment management staff may feel the need to increase their after-hours work, which creates an unsustainable cycle.

Enrollment management staff are obligated to meet the needs of multiple constituents in the course of their job. Students, faculty, administrators, as well as staff members, contribute to the transfer credit evaluation process through their specific roles as data providers, data evaluators, or policy enforcers.

In the work environment, the individual has role demands that are a part of their responsibilities for accomplishing the task at hand. Conflict can emerge from inconsistent demands from the same person within the [organization]. There can be ambiguity when an individual's job expectations are not clear, leading them to experience stress from the confusion" (White et al., 2011, p. 554).

Participants indicated a need for clear direction from their supervisors and managers so that they can feel confident and competent when speaking with students. Boswell and Olson-Buchanan (2007) note that their "study arguably reflects that [communication technology] has allowed and perhaps even perpetuated employees to be connected in jobs where there is traditionally a limited expectation to be connected after work hours" (p. 607). Students have seemingly ever-increasing avenues of contact with campus staff. Thus, enrollment management staff must be diligent in their direct communication with students, as well as information provided via email, websites, and campus postings.

In addition, effects on the mental health of enrollment management staff was reported by all study participants. Gillespie et al. (2003) noted that “several staff reported being constantly exhausted or feeling anti-social due to the stress of their work, which impacted on their ability to fulfill personal goals, to develop and maintain personal relationships, and on their general quality of life” (p. 66). Generally, participants reported feelings of stress and of being overwhelmed in their efforts to effectively and efficiently complete their overall job duties.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Due to access to electronic devices, students may expect prompt responses to emails, regardless of time sent. They also assume their records will be updated within a few days of sending a document, not fully understanding the process. If an inaccuracy is identified in a student record, or even perceived, enrollment management staff may expect contact from the affected student to assess the information. There are times students may notice that course credit information is incorrect or absent, but this may be simply because their electronic record is currently being worked on. Students often want to know why their credit does not show in the way they expected instead of first requesting a conversation to understand why the credit was applied in the way it was. To be sure, mistakes are made now and then, but the time frame for recognizing and correcting errors has been drastically reduced. While it is commendable that student records are more “live” in terms of accessible information, this context also has a certain amount of negative effects for the enrollment management staff members that maintain those records.

Transfer credit, and its proper and correct application, is at the forefront of many university employees’ thoughts due to the ever growing number of transfer students in American higher education. A significant amount of work-related stress felt by enrollment management

staff is due to the minimal amount of control they feel they have in regard to the management of transfer credit evaluations. All five interviewees stated that they must enforce policies as part of their job duties, when they had no part in the creation of those policies. At times, staff are tasked with relaying decisions to students that they did not make, and if the student becomes upset the staff member may feel unsupported.

As staff move up in their roles and responsibilities within enrollment management, they can potentially develop more control, but still may not have the final say in many situations. If students are so inclined, they can request to speak to a supervisor and there is the potential of staff decisions being overridden, which can cause those staff members to feel disempowered. Students often expect immediate response to emails, regardless of time sent. They also may expect to see their records updated within a few days of sending a document, not knowing that the process of making the update to their record is often still a manual process conducted by a single staff member. If a mistake is made in a student record, or just perceived, you can be sure that someone will contact the campus as soon as possible to sort it out. To be sure, mistakes are made now and then, but the window for identifying and correcting mistakes has diminished to almost nothing. Transfer students are a unique group, with few students requiring the same service. Enrollment management staff may be worried about giving incorrect information in an increasingly complex landscape. Workplace stress inherently exists in every job, and this study adds to the foundational understanding of how work stress can affect job performance.

Occupational stress will be reduced with increased professional administrative staff. Well trained support staff will serve to ease the pressures of time on enrollment management staff, allowing them to focus more on their job duties. Additionally, access to multiple software and electronic evaluation services will greatly assist enrollment management staff in the

accuracy and timeliness of evaluations. Being able to meet timelines easier and earlier will result in less workplace pressures felt by enrollment management staff. Finally, professional development opportunities should be made available to, and utilized by, enrollment management staff on a regular basis. These workshops should range from skills such as transfer credit evaluations to interpersonal techniques.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study was limited regarding the five participants. All were female, and all but one worked at higher education institutions in California. Convenience sampling was utilized due to initial lack of responses to solicitation emails. Professional associates who serve as enrollment management supervisors on their higher education campuses were contacted to inquire if they, or their staff, would be interested in participating in this study. Additionally, there were time constraints in place for participants to be identified and interviewed, which resulted in the inclusion of only five interviewees. If additional time had been available, at least three more interviews would have been conducted, based on interested responses. Results would be more widely generalizable if additional participants could be interviewed to add to the demographical, institutional, and geographical diversity.

Reviewing the results from this study, a more in-depth study with additional participants could expand or redefine the individual themes in greater detail. Individual studies could be designed around each of the themes identified, as they are each of such significance that they revealed themselves. Participants were allowed to address the questions in whichever way they felt appropriate; they were not closely directed to answer in a particular way. Thus, it may be prudent to redesign the interview questions to seek more specific information regarding the occupational stress aspect of enrollment management staff workplace experiences. There was no

evidence to be found in the literature regarding occupational stress related to enrollment management staff in the United States, especially that which included aspects related to communications and auditing of internal processes by students through electronic means. Further study would add to the foundational understanding of how occupational stress can affect the job performance of enrollment management staff.

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*Appendix A***Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study
California State University Channel Islands*****Workplace Pressures Experienced by University Staff***

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Rachel Danielson. This study will identify factors that influence the mental and physical effects experienced by transfer credit evaluation staff in relation to one-on-one interactions with students.

Your participation will involve responding to eleven (11) in-person open-ended interview questions. This interview should take approximately one (1) hour to complete.

There are no known risks associated with this research. This research may help us to understand the particular workspace stressors felt by transfer credit evaluation staff and ways in which support services and resources can be enhanced to better serve this type of employee.

Your interview responses will be kept strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported anonymously.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Rachel Danielson at 805-437-3258 or email at rachel.danielson@csuci.edu.

Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (print): _____

Participant's signature _____ Date: _____

A copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records

*Appendix B***Interview Questions*****Workplace Pressures Experienced by University Staff***

Thank you for taking the time to answer a few questions. This interview is intended to identify factors that influence the mental and physical effects experienced by transfer credit evaluation staff in relation to one-on-one interactions with students.

The following questions will help administrators and staff better understand not only the types of experiences transfer credit evaluation staff have, but also the types of behaviors they exhibit when interacting with each student that requests a face-to-face meeting.

You will be provided with a copy of the questions for reference during the interview. Responses will require an open-ended, free form response and the interview will take approximately one (1) hour to complete.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the interview at any point without any consequences. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported anonymously.

If you have questions at any time about the interview or the procedures, you may contact Rachel Danielson at 805-437-3258 or email at rachel.danielson@csuci.edu.

- 1) What is your current job title?
- 2) How long have you been in your current position?
- 3) What led you to apply for this position?
- 4) What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field?
- 5) Please describe a typical work day.
- 6) Please describe the average in-person interaction you experience with a transfer student.
- 7) What is your perception of the overall level of stress in your current position?
 - a. Follow up question, if not already covered: What are the major frustrations of this job?
- 8) What is the most stressful aspect of your job?
- 9) How do you go about determining how and when your work is completed?
 - a. Follow up question, if not already covered: What is the interaction (or ratio) between the duties you are assigned and the time you are given to complete them?
- 10) What are the most significant tasks or events that cause particular satisfaction or dissatisfaction for you at work?
- 11) From your perspective, what are the issues you see working in this field?

Appendix C

NIH Certificate Information

