A Narrative Policy Analysis of the Responses to Tennessee Promise and Plans for Transfer Receptivity by Six Tennessee Public Universities' Presidents and Provosts

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A NARRATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES TO TENNESSEE PROMISE AND PLANS FOR TRANSFER RECEPTIVITY BY SIX TENNESSEE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES’ PRESIDENTS AND PROVOSTS

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Doctor of Education

By
Lori Elliott Buchanan

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A NARRATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES
TO TENNESSEE PROMISE AND PLANS FOR TRANSFER RECEPTIVITY
BY SIX TENNESSEE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES' PRESIDENTS AND PROVOSTS

Date Recommended 10/20/17

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To my parents who inspire and encourage me to follow my dreams

To my grandchildren who bring me great joy

To Tennessee Promise community college student transfers who strive for more
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The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program broadened access and affordability to postsecondary education in Tennessee. This policy innovation increased the number of students seeking to engage in postsecondary education. It also shifted some of the state’s students to the more affordable community colleges and colleges of applied technology for their first two years of college. Equally important, Tennessee Promise incentivized the presidents and provosts of the six public universities under review to expand existing transfer receptivity efforts as their universities prepared to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

The purpose of this narrative policy analysis based on Roe’s (1994) four-step process is to document and describe how presidents and provosts at six Tennessee public universities responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Employing the theoretical lens of policy innovation and diffusion, I engaged with the leaders’ stories, including interview transcripts, local news articles, and publicly-accessible documents found on the universities’ websites.

The study’s findings indicate the majority of university leaders responded to the policy innovation’s broadening of access and affordability to postsecondary education by preparing their universities to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. They did so while working within a difficult enrollment context, i.e.,
declining university headcounts since Fall 2011; declining numbers of high school graduates; lifting of University of Tennessee’s enrollment cap; and shifting from the use of a performance-based funding model targeting enrollment to the use of an outcomes-based model that primarily rewards student progression and degree completion.

The university leaders simultaneously sought to offset Tennessee Promise’s impact on enrollment while moving their universities’ enrollment growth agendas forward. The leaders responded by revising scholarships; extending community college partnerships; committing to receive student transfers; expanding retention efforts to include student transfers; and assessing policies, practices, and programs. Future plans include integrating student transfers and sustaining efforts. Working within shared governance, a majority of the leaders communicated institutional priorities, administered available resources, and led institutional change, all of which resulted in diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program broadened access and affordability to postsecondary education in Tennessee. This policy innovation increased the number of students seeking to engage in postsecondary education. It also shifted some of the state’s students to the more affordable community colleges and colleges of applied technology for their first two years of college. Equally important, Tennessee Promise incentivized the presidents and provosts of the six public universities under review to expand existing transfer receptivity efforts further as their universities prepared to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

This narrative policy analysis documents and describes how the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee public four-year universities responded to the Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program during its staging and implementation years. Of interest were their narrative stories about this policy innovation and how the innovation contributed to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Employing the theoretical lens of policy innovation and diffusion (Rogers, 2003), I engaged with the leaders’ storied interviews, local news articles, and publicly-accessible documents and other information that were found on the universities’ websites. Using Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis four-step process, the data were analyzed and reported on Tennessee Promise and the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

Legislated in 2014, the Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program is a component of Tennessee Governor Haslam’s Drive to 55 Initiative. The overarching Drive to 55 goal is for 55% of Tennessee adults to hold a postsecondary degree or
certificate by 2025. Tennesseans needed to earn 210,000 additional degrees by 2025, so that Tennessee reaches the national average point (Wright & Deaton, 2012). In 2014, 39.3% of Tennessee adults held a postsecondary credential compared with 45.3% of adults in the United States (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, n.d.). Work remains in order to gain the nearly 16 percentage points needed to achieve the Drive to 55 goal by 2025.

Beginning in Fall 2015, high school graduates who pursue associate degrees or certificates are eligible to receive the Tennessee Promise scholarship award for up to five semesters in which they are enrolled as full-time students. In order to participate, they are required to attend mandatory mentoring sessions in which they receive assistance in applying and enrolling in college from mentors arranged through partner organizations. The students are required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as well. They also are required to complete eight hours of community service each semester and hold a 2.0 GPA while progressing through college (Tennessee Promise, 2014). Tennessee Promise is called a last-dollar free community college program because the scholarship funds the tuition and fee dollars not covered by the Pell grant, the Tennessee HOPE lottery merit-aid scholarship, or Tennessee Student Assistance Award. Students are able to use the award to attend any state’s eligible institutions, including community colleges, colleges of applied technology, or those universities offering associate degrees (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2017b). Through the Tennessee Reconnect Act of 2017, Tennessee added a similar last dollar scholarship for adult residents (Tennessee Reconnect, 2017). Tennessee Reconnect is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
While Tennessee Promise shifts students to Tennessee community colleges and colleges of applied technology where they are able to take college coursework at a lower cost, the freshmen and sophomores who receive the HOPE scholarship and plan to attend a university are impacted adversely. As part of the Tennessee Promise legislation in 2014, the Tennessee HOPE scholarship original dollar amount of $2,000 for full-time students was reduced by $250 to $1,750 per enrollment term for those attending university in their freshman and sophomore years. However, financial circumstance improved with the HOPE dollar amount increasing to $2,250 per term for students during their juniors and senior years (Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation, n.d.). Beyond the financial cost to students, the state projected as many as 2,000 students who expressed interest in attending universities would shift to the Tennessee Promise-eligible institutions during Fall 2015. Statistics covering the first year of Tennessee Promise are provided in Chapter II.

Drive to 55 and Tennessee Promise benefitted from prior work accomplished by Tennessee public colleges and universities in response to the Tennessee Complete College Act (TCCA) of 2010. TCCA laid an important foundation with legislated articulation and transfer policies addressing transfer pathways, common course numbering for general education core courses, and designated applied science degree courses that were not previously transferrable to universities. Reverse transfer and prior learning assessment efforts also were added (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2014). In addition, TCCA legislated the shift from a performance-based funding model that targeted enrollment to an outcomes-based model that primarily rewards institutions for student progression and degree completion. This outcomes-based model now guides
Tennessee public higher education funding. Building on the TCCA work, the Tennessee Promise scholarship policy innovation was poised to contribute to diffusion of transfer receptivity in Tennessee.

The time period under review for this study began when the Tennessee Promise legislation was introduced in January 2014 and ended in July 2017. By the end of just over three years of staging and implementation, there was limited numerical data, e.g., associate degree completion, available for quantitative analysis. Tennessee Promise community college student transfers were (a) enrolling in their first year at university, (b) completing coursework toward an associate’s degree at community colleges or those universities that offer associate degrees, or (c) dropping or stopping out of college.

For this study, I targeted the leaders of the six universities formerly governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) and now local board-governed as of 2017. These universities educate a larger percentage of the state’s community college student transfers, and twice the number of students attend here as attend the four University of Tennessee institutions (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2014). Additionally, I am most familiar with the six former TBR institutions, which include Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, and University of Memphis. I am beginning my 32nd year of service at Austin Peay State University; I attended Tennessee Technological University for two years in the 1970s; and I have several family members who attended Middle Tennessee State University.

Due to a desire to understand how the leaders of these six universities responded to Tennessee Promise, as well as how they prepared to receive Tennessee Promise
community college student transfers, I used a qualitative research paradigm. My study’s qualitative findings will inform later studies that examine what occurred as a result of Tennessee Promise, e.g., how community college student transfers were able to persist to baccalaureate degree completion. By considering relevant narratives about how these university leaders prepared for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, greater disclosure and better attention to circumventing obstacles that block student success at the university level may occur. My dissertation adds new knowledge about transfer receptivity to the scholarly record, as well as contributes toward informing university policies, practice, and programs on which student transfers rely as they persist toward the successful completion of baccalaureate degrees.

A review of the literature on transfer receptivity revealed more research studies in which students served as participants than studies in which university leaders participated. Since my doctoral program focuses on educational leadership, I was particularly interested in the leaders’ perspectives regarding transfer receptivity. Therefore, I decided to use university leaders as participants in my study.

While it is true that mid-level administrators plan, implement, and direct the specific policies, practices, and programs related to transfer receptivity, it is the university presidents who set the tone and work within shared governance to communicate institutional priorities, administer available resources, and lead institutional change (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 2016). In addition, I anticipated that a large percentage of the decisions made in response to Tennessee Promise and planning for transfer receptivity would likely be executed out of the universities’ academic divisions. Therefore, I was interested in the perspectives of
the university provosts as well. With this in mind, I decided to request interviews with the 12 presidents and provosts at the six Tennessee public universities under review.

Eight leaders, three presidents and five provosts, granted interviews during June and July of 2017. Interviews were transcribed and I recorded detailed field notes at the end of each campus visit. In addition to the interview and field note data, I gathered and reviewed over 250 publically-accessible documents from university websites and local news articles appearing in the three years during which Tennessee Promise was legislated, staged, and implemented.

Using Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis four-step process for identifying dominant narratives, which along with the counter stories lead to metanarrative/s that may better inform decision-making, I analyzed the collected data. This process informed my research findings about the diffusion of transfer receptivity as it related to the Tennessee Promise free college scholarship policy innovation. I gained an understanding of how the six public universities’ presidents and provosts responded to Tennessee Promise, and planned transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, between January 2014 and July 2017.

Beyond this introduction, Chapter I contains the background and context for the study, the problem statement, the conceptual framework, the statement of purpose, and the research questions. It includes the research design overview; the rationale and significance; and definitions of key terminology used in the study. The chapter ends with an overview of the organization of the remaining chapters.
Background and Context

The broader context for this study is the need to increase college completion in the US and within the individual states. As Tennessee and other states established the specific populations from which additional college students were to be drawn, determining which postsecondary institutions were able to accommodate these additional students was important. The manner in which Tennessee Promise and other financial aid, e.g., Tennessee HOPE merit-aid, was structured means that an increasing number of students will attend community colleges. Therefore, Tennessee Promise community college student transfers are destined to play a larger role in accomplishing the college completion goal.

Given the need to recruit and retain additional community college students, the university leaders must become more intentional in developing transfer receptivity so that more students succeed. Each university’s leaders will be wise to examine what is currently being done, then improve upon the support offered to community college student transfers as they persist to degree completion. More detailed information about the background and context for this study is found in Chapter II.

Problem Statement

Bahr, Toth, Thirolf, and Massé (2013) noted the need for more research on post-transition processes, i.e., how four-year colleges and universities are addressing the transition and success of community college student transfers. The authors’ post-transition processes included five specific concepts: integration, involvement, environmental pull, capital, and transfer receptivity. According to Jain, Herrera, Bernal, and Solorzano (2011), transfer receptivity was “the institutional commitment by a four-
year college or university to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully” (p. 252). Along with one additional author, this latter group of authors believed that universities need to engender a transfer receptive culture made up of five elements, including:

- establishing transfer of nontraditional students as a high institution priority;
- providing outreach and resources that focus on the specific and unique needs of transfer students;
- offering financial and academic support;
- acknowledging the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family; and
- creating an appropriate framework of assessment and evaluation that can lead to future scholarship on transfer students.

(Jain, Bernal, Lucero, Herrera & Solorzano, 2016, p. 1014; Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

The five elements of a transfer receptive culture dovetailed well with the AASCU presidential competencies that I targeted, i.e., working within shared governance, communicating institutional priorities, administering available resources, and leading institutional change (AASCU, 2016). I decided to consider these five transfer receptive elements along with the leadership competencies in the Chapter V discussion of how the six Tennessee public universities’ leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study contains two higher education concepts and one theory. The two concepts are (a) free college as informed by state merit-based aid and its impact on college enrollment and degree completion and (b) transfer receptivity for community college student transfers. The theory is policy innovation and diffusion. Free college, a policy innovation, connected with and set into motion a diffusion of university transfer receptivity that will enable community college student transfers to successfully persist to baccalaureate degree completion. The visual conceptual framework is presented as Figure 1 and is found in Appendix B.

Tinto (2012) reminded those who work with college students that academic, social, and financial supports are necessary to ensure student success. It is the case that free college and state merit-based scholarships assist community college students in overcoming financial obstacles to enrolling in college and persisting to degree completion. However, in order for community college student transfers to successfully persist, four-year institutions also must pay attention to transfer receptivity in the form of policies, practices, and programs that address academic and social support for student transfers as well. While strategies for helping native students and student transfers succeed may vary, all three types of support are crucial for all students to succeed.

Observing that most of the literature addressing student transfer success focused on what community colleges were doing, Bahr et al. (2013) called for research that addressed post-transfer transition processes, i.e., how four-year colleges and universities are addressing the transition and success of community college student transfers. The authors indicated that the future research about post-transfer transition processes should
target five concepts: *student integration*, i.e., identifying with the institution; *student involvement*, i.e., investing energy in experiencing campus life; *environmental pull*, i.e., managing priorities and obligations that compete with college, *capital*, i.e., gaining cultural knowledge and making social connections; and *transfer receptivity*, i.e., post transfer transition support by four-year institutions. The first four concepts are directly influenced by the fifth concept, transfer receptivity, which is about how four-year institutions receive and support student transfers.

The Tennessee Promise free college scholarship and mentoring program was a policy innovation that contributed to the diffusion of transfer receptivity, which will enable Tennessee Promise community college student transfers to persist to baccalaureate degree completion successfully. McLendon and Cohen-Vogel (2015) pointed out the potential for use of policy innovation and diffusion theory in studying phenomena present in higher education, as well as use of the theory in setting research parameters on policy specific to education at the state level. The authors also suggested that researchers consider interviewing those who create and carry out policy to solve issues. These ideas all informed how I approached this research study. The policy innovation and diffusion theory provided a useful theoretical lens through which I viewed the university leaders’ narrative stories about Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this narrative policy analysis based on Roe’s (1994) four-step process is to document and describe how presidents and provosts at six Tennessee public universities responded to the Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Of interest were
the leaders’ narrative stories about this policy innovation and how the innovation contributed to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Employing the theoretical lens of policy innovation and diffusion, I engaged with the storied leader interviews, local news articles, and publicly-accessible documents and other information that I found on the universities’ websites.

Central Research Question and Subquestions

I followed Creswell’s (2013) advice in posing a central research question along with subquestions that then informed the interview questions. My central question is: How did the presidents and provosts of the six Tennessee public four-year universities respond to Tennessee Promise and prepare to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers who seek to persist and complete degrees? Subquestion one is: How did the presidents and provosts respond to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation? Subquestion two is: How did the university leaders prepare to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers? Subquestion three is: How did the presidents and provosts plan to ensure future transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

Research Design Overview

This qualitative study uses Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis four-step approach for examining dominant narratives, along with counter stories, in order to develop metanarratives that may be used in decision-making. Interviews were requested with each president and each provost at the six public four-year universities formerly part of the Tennessee Board of Regents and now local board-governed beginning in 2017. At least one interview was obtained at five of the six universities, and two interviews were
obtained at three institutions. A total of eight university leaders, i.e., three presidents and five provosts, were interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately 47 minutes. I also examined local news sources and publicly-accessible documents found on the six universities’ website as well. Details about the research design and methodology are found in Chapter III.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study began with my desire to help all students to succeed, including those who transfer from community colleges to the universities. As I learned more about the Tennessee Promise program, I realized that the public university where I worked, as well as other Tennessee public universities, have an opportunity to serve Tennessee Promise students when they transfer to our institutions.

Bahr et al. (2013) indicated there is interest among multiple audiences regarding how to help community college student transfers successfully transition, persist, and complete university degrees. Monaghan and Attewell (2014) suggested additional research to determine what obstacles were keeping community college students from continuing at four-year institutions. Bahr et al. (2013) pointed to a research gap about processes to assist community college transfer students who enter universities, and the limited number of publications that gauge how policies and practices affect transfer students’ degree completion. The authors also noted that more multi-institution studies are needed.

Interest in transfer receptivity will continue to grow as the number of community college student transfers increases. This study examines how the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee public universities worked within shared governance to prioritize and
resource transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs. The study contributes to understanding what occurred with respect to transfer receptivity during the years in which Tennessee Promise was staged and implemented, and it will inform how universities can support student transfers better. Documenting and describing the actions taken by six Tennessee public four-year universities’ leaders as they prepared to receive future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, this study adds to the knowledge base on transfer receptivity. It also will inform future qualitative and quantitative research studies, as well as the transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs provided by universities in Tennessee and beyond.

**The Researcher’s Perspective**

My experiences, both as a student and as a faculty member, led to my interest in this topic. Observing the challenges that face today’s student transfers, as well as remembering my experiences as a student transfer, helped inform my examination of how six Tennessee public universities and their presidents and provosts responded to Tennessee Promise and planned to provide transfer receptivity.

During 31 years of service at Austin Peay State University (APSU), I have interacted with many student transfers, assisting them with library research and addressing issues brought to the provost’s office. As a faculty member, I have been involved in shared governance, serving as faculty senate president and chairing a number of standing committees; contributed to the university’s past two quality enhancement plans and overall accreditation efforts; and collaborated with disciplinary faculty in developing course content related to library research. As an interim assistant provost/assistant vice president of academic affairs for two years, I assisted an interim
provost/vice president for academic affairs and an interim vice president for strategic planning in preparing and completing the SACS-COC accreditation reaffirmation process; assisted faculty who were developing academic program proposals; directed APSU’s quality enhancement plan’s staging and implementation; facilitated a campus-wide e-portfolio/assessment platform acquisition project; initiated first-year faculty orientation/mentoring program modifications; and coordinated a process whereby community college student transfer scholarship recipients are welcomed by their academic department chairs who share opportunities for students to become engaged in enhanced learning activities designed to involve students academically and socially in the department, college, and university.

My undergraduate journey included time as a traditional first-time, full-time student athlete, a student transfer, a stop-out student, and a part-time student working full-time. Having completed my first year at Martin Methodist, which was a two-year private liberal arts college at the time, I transferred to Tennessee Technological University and completed my sophomore and junior years. Stopping-out of college to work full-time at Duke University Libraries for the next four years, I supported my husband and myself while he continued as a full-time graduate student. After two years, I returned part-time and graduated within two years from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, then immediately entered Indiana University, Bloomington as a full-time student with a graduate assistantship. While these experiences occurred over 35 years ago, I can still remember well some of the difficulties that came with being a student transfer.
Definitions of Key Terminology

Community college student transfers are those students who complete coursework and perhaps an associate degree at a community college, then transferred to a four-year college or university.

Diffusion of policy innovation is “the process by which a [policy] innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (Rogers, 2003, p. 11).

Merit aid is broad-based student financial aid that is funded by the states.

Natives are students who enter a four-year college or university soon after finishing high school.

Post-transfer transition processes covers five concepts: integration, involvement, environmental pull, capital, and transfer receptivity (Bahr et al., 2013).

Transfer receptivity is “the institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for students to transfer successfully” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 252).

Summary

This study adds to the knowledge base on transfer receptivity. It also will inform future qualitative and quantitative research studies, as well as the transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs provided by universities in Tennessee and beyond.

Chapter II contains six sections: (a) Tennessee Promise and free college scholarship programs; (b) background and context; (c) the conceptual framework; (d) policy innovation and diffusion as a theoretical lens; (e) state merit-based scholarships’ impact on college enrollment and degree completion; and (f) transfer receptivity for
community college student transfers. Chapter III includes the (a) rationale for use of qualitative narrative research design; (b) rationale for use of narrative policy analysis methodology; (c) researcher assumptions; (d) researcher’s role; (e) research sample; (f) information needed to conduct the study; (g) research design implementation overview; (h) data collection methods; (i) data analysis and synthesis; (j) ethical considerations; (k) issues of trustworthiness; and (l) delimitations and limitations of the study. Chapters IV and Chapter V conclude this dissertation.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program broadened access and affordability to postsecondary education in Tennessee. This policy innovation increased the number of students seeking to engage in postsecondary education. It also shifted some of the state’s students to the more affordable community colleges and colleges of applied technology for their first two years of college. Equally important, Tennessee Promise incentivized the presidents and provosts of the six public universities under review to expand existing transfer receptivity efforts further as their universities prepared to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

This narrative policy analysis based on Roe’s (1994) four-step process documents and describes how presidents and provosts at six Tennessee public universities responded to the Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Of interest were the leaders’ narrative stories about this policy innovation and how the innovation contributed to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Employing the theoretical lens of policy innovation and diffusion, I engaged with the leaders’ storied interviews, local news articles, and publicly-accessible documents and other information I found on the universities’ websites.

Chapter II consists of six sections: (a) Tennessee Promise and free college programs; (b) background and context; (c) the conceptual framework; (d) policy innovation and diffusion as a theoretical lens; (e) state merit-based scholarships’ impact on college enrollment and degree completion; and (f) transfer receptivity for community college student transfers. The first section presents Tennessee Promise and free college
scholarships programs. The second provides the study’s background and context, including postsecondary enrollment trends; individual states and their role in college completion; community college student transfers and baccalaureate degree completion; and transfer receptivity at the universities. The third section presents the conceptual framework along with the literature review and methodology to guide this study. The fourth section covers policy innovation and diffusion which was used as the theoretical lens. The fifth section reviews literature specific to the impact of state merit-based scholarships on college enrollment and degree completion, which informs the potential impact of Tennessee Promise. The sixth section reviews literature about transfer receptivity for community college student transfers, which informed the approach to this study as well.

**Tennessee Promise and Free College Scholarship Programs**

Free college scholarship programs are one of the more recent strategies that states are using to increase postsecondary enrollment and completion rates. The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program implemented in Fall 2015 was the first such program. According to the College Promise Campaign (2017), there are now more than 190 free college programs at the state and local levels in 40 states. In the last four years, Tennessee, Oregon, and Minnesota moved forward to offer free college to their residents; soon after, 10 more states began considering comparable legislation (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). These new free college programs will become embedded in the state higher education financial aid fabric, and they may result in additional opportunities for those students who wish to transfer to four-year institutions.
The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program is part of Tennessee Governor Haslam’s Drive to 55 campaign in which the goal is for 55% of Tennesseans to have some college education by 2025. This campaign “is not just about higher education, but it is critical for workforce and economic development in Tennessee. It is a drive to reduce unemployment and improve quality of life” (Tennessee Promise School Resource Guide, 2015, p. 3). Legislated through the Tennessee Promise Scholarship Act of 2014, Tennessee Promise funds college tuition and fees not covered by gift aid, i.e., the Pell grant, the Tennessee HOPE lottery merit-aid scholarship, and the Tennessee Student Assistance Award. It is a last-dollar free community college program. Tennessee residents may use Tennessee Promise funding to attend community colleges, colleges of applied technology, or other eligible institutions offering associate’s degree programs.

Beginning in Fall 2015 high school graduates who pursued associate degrees or certificates became eligible to receive the Tennessee Promise scholarship award for up to five semesters. In order to participate, they were required to attend mandatory mentoring sessions in which they received assistance in applying and enrolling in college. They also were required to complete eight hours of community service each semester and hold a 2.0 GPA as they progressed through college (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2017b). Tennessee Promise was an important policy innovation because it extended access and affordability so that more Tennesseans would be able to engage in higher education.

Tennessee Promise was modeled on Tennessee Achieves (formerly Knox Achieves), which coached or mentored students and provided financial assistance. Knox Achieves began in Knox County, Tennessee, in 2009. Broadening to nearly 25 counties
where nearly 45% of Tennessee graduating high school students lived, it then became Tennessee Achieves. Like Tennessee Promise, these two programs provides scholarships covering the last dollars that students need to attend community college. Compared with students who did not have access to these programs, those who did were more likely to head to college immediately after high school by nearly 25 percentage points (Carruthers & Fox, 2016). Given this evidence, Knox Achieves and Tennessee Achieves were judged successful pilots for Tennessee Promise.

The first Tennessee Promise Cohort of 16,291 students enrolled in college during Fall 2015. Of these, 6,505 enrolled again in Fall 2016, along with the 16,790 students in the second Tennessee Promise Cohort. By Fall 2016, Tennessee Promise students enrolled in college totaled 23,295. During Fall 2015, 85% of the Tennessee Promise students enrolled at the public community colleges or in one of the associate degree programs at Austin Peay State University. During Fall 2016, 86% likewise enrolled at these institutions, with Tennessee State University’s associate programs being utilized as well. Remaining students attended public colleges of applied technology or enrolled in private institutions that offered associate degrees (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2017b). While the first two years of Tennessee Promise were successful in increasing the number of Tennessee high school graduates who entered college, concerns remain about the potential impact of shifting enrollment from the universities to the community colleges.

My research is specific to the six former Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) universities, so the following statistics cover just the TBR system institutions. While community college first-time freshman enrollment rose 24.7% and college of applied
technology enrollment rose 20.0% between Fall 2014, and Fall 2015, the enrollment at the six universities decreased 8.4%. During this first Tennessee Promise year, 2015-2016, Austin Peay State University increased its first-time freshmen by 1.0%, while East Tennessee State University first-time freshmen decreased by 6.2%, Middle Tennessee State University first-time freshmen decreased by 8.2%, Tennessee State University first-time freshmen decreased by 1.8%, Tennessee Technological University first-time freshmen decreased by 18.1%, and University of Memphis first-time freshmen decreased by 12.6%. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is in the process of determining to what extent the increases in the college-going rate and first-time freshmen enrollment were a direct result of Tennessee Promise (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2017b). The official first-time freshman enrollment statistics for the second year of Tennessee Promise, 2016-2017, were not yet available when this dissertation was being written.

Tennessee Promise placed the immediate spotlight on Tennessee community colleges and the other eligible institutions. However, four-year institutions will be in the future spotlight as they support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers to baccalaureate degree completion. The policy innovation potentially boosts the number of students who Tennessee universities will receive as they seek to grow enrollments and increase the production of baccalaureate degrees to support the state’s need for an educated populace. As high school graduation rates continue to level off or decline, it is clear that Tennessee public universities will need to increase their numbers of community college student transfers to contribute additional baccalaureate degrees.
Background and Context

Increasing college completion is an important ongoing national goal for the United States. Reindl (2007) reported that in order to meet the country’s job needs by 2025, an additional 25.1% of the population must hold associate degrees, and an additional 19.6% will need to obtain bachelor degrees over what is currently produced. By 2025, 20 million more college-educated employees will be needed, including at least 15 million baccalaureate degrees, 1 million associate degrees, and the remaining 4 million comprising certificates and other non-degree college coursework (Carnevale & Rose, 2011). In light of this shortfall, determining how to produce additional graduates who hold associate and baccalaureate degrees required consideration of postsecondary enrollment trends.

Postsecondary Enrollment Trends

Population changes and enrollment rate changes influence enrollment trends. College enrollment rose 17% from 2004 to 2014. Between 2004 and 2009, more students sought out postsecondary education, while a smaller percentage did so between 2010 and 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). The percentage of high school graduates, age 16 to 24, who enrolled in postsecondary education immediately after high school was 70.1% in 2009 and 65.9% in 2013 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

According to United States Department of Education projections, postsecondary enrollments will grow 13% between now and 2020. However, given a 3% decrease in high school graduates nationwide marked by a flat or declining rate in 27 of the 50 states, the need for additional students outside of the high school graduate demographic to enroll
in postsecondary education is apparent (Handel, 2013). With respect to age, there was a higher percentage increase among students under 25 (18%), compared to those age 25 and older (16%), between 2004 and 2014. However, between 2014 and 2025, the inverse is projected, with a higher percentage increase for students who are age 25 and over (18%), compared with students who are under 25 (13%) (NCES, 2015). Besides student age, the other characteristics that potentially affect enrollment trends are sex (gender) and ethnicity.

The percentage of educated women and men is not statistically different: 32.7% of women and 32.3% of men hold bachelor’s degrees; 43.5% of women and 41.2% of men hold associate degrees; and 60.1% of women and 57.6% of men have some college coursework (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Therefore, the potential changes in population associated with gender will have minimal impact on the degree completion gap.

The gap in the number of degrees completed and those that are needed will be filled by population groups in which growth is occurring, i.e., “groups traditionally underserved in education, including American Indian, African American, Latino, low-income, and first-generation students” (Handel, 2013, p. 6). The specific population groups that will contribute toward increases in college completion will differ from state to state. For example, in order for the number of college-educated Tennesseans to increase, more African Americans will need to attend college (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and Jobs for the Future, 2007). As Tennessee and other states establish the populations from which to draw additional college students, they also will need to determine which postsecondary institutions are able to accommodate these additional students and support them as well.
Individual States and Their Role in College Completion

The individual states have a major stake in college completion. According to Longanecker (2005), “by creating ‘human capital’ to fuel economic growth and by providing the research engine to drive innovation and economic revitalization, higher education contribute[s] to the economic, social, and civic vitality of the states” (p. 57). Given the pressing need to educate the citizenry for future jobs resulting in return on investment to the individual states and the country as a whole, the importance of state governments paying attention to what is occurring in higher education becomes evident. Titus (2006) posited that there are a host of complex factors affecting states’ abilities to increase the number of citizens with degrees. It is clear that state officials must take into consideration many complicated, and sometimes unknown, factors in order to reach consensus on how best to increase college completion rates.

The oversight and funding of higher education primarily lies with the individual states rather than the federal government (U.S. Const. amend. X). While the federal government provides grants, e.g., Pell Grants, directly to students, any additional financial aid must come from the states or the individual postsecondary institutions.

Currently, the financial aid appropriated by the state and federal government does not fully cover the costs associated with attending college. For individual students, the inability to pay for college outright, or at least be able to repay loans within a reasonable timeframe, is creating problems. Consequently, funding the costs associated with increasing college completion rates is an ongoing challenge that will need to be addressed at the state level. According to Titus (2006), scholarships and grants provided by the states will likely mean the difference between students graduating or not.
States have devised various types of financial aid, i.e., need-based grants and merit-aid scholarships, to assist students in covering the costs associated with attending college. The latest form of state financial aid to emerge upon the scene is free college. The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program provides free college to high school graduates who enroll in the state’s associate degree and certificate programs offered by eligible institutions. It follows that some of these Tennessee Promise students will consider transfer to universities.

**Community College Student Transfers and Baccalaureate Degree Completion**

Handel (2013) suggested that community colleges will play a role in increasing degree completion rates because underserved students feel welcome and enroll there for extended periods of time. The author reported that “41% of the students who earned a bachelor’s degree attended a community college for five terms or more, and 60% attended for at least three terms” (p. 8). Historically, students successfully completed coursework or obtained associate degrees at community colleges. Some of these students also transfer to four-year institutions and successfully complete baccalaureate degrees.

A study comparing community college student transfers with university native students found that the transfers possessed a better chance of earning a bachelor’s degree at public universities (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). Other studies found that the community college student transfers do as well as native juniors (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011). Nationwide, the percentage of four-year degree earners who attended community college before transferring to university was 45% in 2011-2012 (Shapiro et al., 2012). That percentage grew by 4% in 2015-2016, when 49% of the students who earned a bachelor’s degree had previously attended
community college, and approximately half of these students were able to complete a baccalaureate degree in three years or less from the time they entered a two-year college (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). However, it is the case that only a small percentage of the community college students who expressed their intent to transfer to universities actually do transfer. According to Jenkins and Fink (2015), at least 80% want to pursue a baccalaureate degree, but only 25% transfer by the end of five years and just 17% finish a four-year degree by the end of six years.

These studies and statistical data provide evidence that many community college student transfers persist to baccalaureate degree completion once they transfer to the university level. Given that the number of high school graduates is declining at the same time the need for additional baccalaureate degree holders is increasing, it becomes increasingly important to find ways to encourage and support the remaining 55% of community college students who express an interest in pursuing a four-year degree to follow through on transferring to universities. One key to making this happen is to ensure that transfer receptivity is occurring at the university level.

**Transfer Receptivity at the Universities**

Pointing to the level of attention that has been given to examining two-year colleges’ effects on student transfers, Handel (2012) called for an examination of how universities receive and support student transfers. Cabrera, Burkum, La Nasa, and Bibo (2012) indicated there are many pathways leading to a four-year degree for socioeconomically disadvantaged students who typically began at community colleges. The authors believed that university-level opportunities to support student success and persistence toward degree completion are often missed.
Increasing the number of community college student transfers who persist in becoming baccalaureate degree holders will require four-year institutions to identify additional ways to provide needed support to those student transfers who wish to complete degrees. Titus (2006) posited that postsecondary institutions should be able to make adjustments that enable students to succeed. In addition to their mission to assist students in earning certificates and associate degrees, community colleges are tasked with encouraging interested students to prepare for transfer to universities where they may persist in earning baccalaureate degrees. Likewise, universities should be responsible for the work of receiving community college students transfers well and then providing them with the necessary supports as they strive to earn bachelor’s degrees.

Citing a number of articles about the difficulties that student transfers encounter in becoming acclimated to four-year institutions, Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) indicated that what is done at the university level is important. These authors pointed to policies, practices, and programs that contribute to student success. Assisting students during the transition to four-year institutions empowers them to focus their energies on integration and involvement, build capital at their new institutions, and manage the environmental pull in their lives. When four-year institutions pay attention to providing policies, practices, and programs that support these students, then the students become better positioned to persist to degree completion. Policies such as articulation agreements, transfer partnerships, reverse credit transfer, curriculum alignment, and applied baccalaureate degrees were cited as important in assisting community college student transfers in their transition (Bahr et al., 2013; Handel, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009; Wang, Wickersham, & Sun, 2017). Institutional
practices that assist student transfers include financial aid, communication during outreach and recruitment efforts, tracking systems, combating assumptions about student transfers, and individualized attention, as noted in four separate qualitative research studies (Cabrera et al., 2012; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009). Finally, programs, including orientation, transfer centers, advising, peer support, study groups, academic clubs, and undergraduate research, assist student transfers with integration and involvement at the university level (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009).

The need to increase the number of baccalaureate degrees in the US, as well as in individual states such as Tennessee, will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. The national and state agendas to ensure that a greater percentage of citizens will hold baccalaureate degrees in the coming years necessarily drive universities to find additional ways to recruit and support community college student transfers. With the number of high school graduates declining or remaining stable, most Tennessee public universities will need to draw additional students from other population bases. At least in part, the six public universities included in this study will need to recruit larger numbers of community college student transfers.

The university leaders will need to address transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs within the context of their universities’ own missions and locations. They will need to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. This includes mechanisms to assist students as they transition from the community colleges to the universities, as well as the necessary university supports as
they progress to degree completion. Progression and degree completion, which are primary outcomes that determine state funding, will in turn reward university efforts.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study includes two higher education concepts and a theory that has been used before in higher education research. The two higher education concepts are (a) free college as informed by state merit-based aid’s impact on college enrollment and degree completion, and (b) transfer receptivity for community college student transfers. Free college, a policy innovation, connects with and potentially sets into motion a diffusion of university transfer receptivity that will enable community college student transfers to persist to baccalaureate degree completion successfully.

Rogers (2003) defined the diffusion of innovations as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (p. 35). The various characteristics of the innovation diffusion process, including different stages and key actors are mirrored by the higher education policy innovation and diffusion process. McLendon and Cohen-Vogel (2015) reported that the policy innovation and diffusion framework was used to pinpoint factors affecting the adoption of policies, and one study about how merit-based college aid diffused across states had a common author (Cohen-Vogel, Ingle, Levin, & Spence, 2008). McLendon and Cohen-Vogel (2015) suggested the potential usefulness of interviewing key informants and examining the stages during which the greatest influence by others occurred. This informed my use of policy innovation and diffusion as a theoretical lens.

The two higher education concepts of free college and transfer receptivity are quite intertwined. On the one hand, free college scholarship programs, e.g., Tennessee
Promise, are one of the more recent strategies that state officials are using to increase postsecondary enrollment and completion rates. The state merit-based scholarship programs, which began in the early 1990s, were a similar strategy; and they may serve to inform the potential impact that free college programs will have on enrollment and completion. On the other hand, university transfer receptivity will be crucial in supporting community college student transfers to progress and complete baccalaureate degrees.

Bahr et al. (2013) observed that most of the literature addressing student transfer success focuses on what community colleges were doing. These authors called for research that addresses post-transfer transition processes, i.e., how four-year colleges and universities are addressing the transition and success of community college student transfers. The authors indicated that the future research about post-transfer transition processes should target five concepts: student integration, i.e., identifying with the institution; student involvement, i.e., investing energy in experiencing campus life; environmental pull, i.e., managing priorities and obligations that compete with college; capital, i.e., gaining cultural knowledge and making social connections; and transfer receptivity, i.e., post transfer transition support by four-year institutions. The four concepts besides transfer receptivity, i.e., integration, involvement, environmental pull, and capital, are influenced directly by how four-year institutions receive and support student transfers, i.e., transfer receptivity.

According to Jain et al. (2011), transfer receptivity is “the institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for
students to transfer successfully” (p. 252). The five elements of transfer receptivity include:

- establishing transfer of nontraditional students as a high institutional priority;
- providing outreach and resources that focus on the specific and unique needs of transfer students;
- offering financial and academic support;
- acknowledging the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family; and
- creating an appropriate framework of assessment and evaluation that can lead to future scholarship on transfer students.

(Jain et al., 2016, p. 1014; Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

Universities need to engender a transfer receptive culture made up of these five elements.

Together, free college scholarships and transfer receptivity provide important student supports. As Tinto (2012) reminded those who work with college students, “support is a condition that promotes student success,” and he suggested “three types of support that promote success: academic, social, and financial” as “elements of a Model of Institutional Action” (p. 258). It is the case that free college and state merit-based aid scholarships assist community college students in overcoming financial obstacles to enrolling in college and persisting to degree completion. However, to ensure that community college student transfers successfully persist to baccalaureate degree completion, four-year institutions also must to pay greater attention to transfer receptivity in the form of policies, practices, and programs that address academic, financial, and
social support for these students. While strategies for helping native students and student transfers succeed may vary somewhat, these three types of support, i.e., academic, financial, and social, are crucial for all students to succeed.

The broader context for this study is the need to increase college completion in the US and within the individual states including Tennessee. Community college student transfers are destined to play a larger role in accomplishing the college completion goal. Given the need to enroll additional community college student transfers, four-year institutions must become more intentional in developing transfer receptivity so that students progress and succeed in completing baccalaureate degrees. Each institution will be wise to examine what it does, then improve and expand upon the supports currently offered to community college student transfers.

**Policy Innovation and Diffusion**

The policy innovation and diffusion theory serves as a useful lens through which to gather university leaders’ stories concerning Tennessee Promise free community college and transfer receptivity. Tennessee Promise is the policy innovation connected with the diffusion of university transfer receptivity that will enable community college student transfers to successfully persist to baccalaureate degree completion. The responses to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation and the resulting diffusion of transfer receptivity described in the narrative stories told by Tennessee public university leaders are of interest in this study. Therefore, a review of the literature on the use of policy innovation and diffusion in higher education research is included.

According to Cohen-Vogel et al. (2008), the policy innovation and diffusion framework was “rooted in a more expansive set of diffusion research traditions, the oldest
of which grew out of anthropology” (Rogers, 2003, p. 340). Rogers (2003) defined diffusion of innovations as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (p. 35). With regard to adopting an innovation, Rogers (2003) established “five adopter categories: (1) innovators, (2) early adopters, (3) early majority, (4) late majority, and (5) laggards” (p. 280). He also described the innovation process as comprised of initiation, i.e., “information gathering, conceptualization, and planning” through the “agenda-setting” and “matching” stages; and implementation, i.e., “events, actions, and decisions involved in putting the innovation to use” through the “redefining/restructuring,” “clarifying,” and “routinizing” stages (p. 421). Rogers also wrote about the “champions,” “change agents,” and “opinion leaders” (pp. 27-28) who propelled innovation processes along. The noted characteristics of Rogers’ diffusion of innovation theory are similarly found in use of policy innovation diffusion as a theoretical framework in higher education research.

McLendon and Cohen-Vogel (2015) reported that the policy innovation and diffusion framework has been used by researchers to establish the factors affecting the adoption of policies. For example, Cohen-Vogel et al. (2008) used the framework in their study of how merit-based college aid diffused across states. McLendon and Cohen-Vogel (2015) also pointed to the potential use of the policy innovation and diffusion theory in education policy research. The authors suggested the potential for interviewing key informants and examining the stages during which the greatest influence by others occurred. This informed use of policy innovation and diffusion as a theoretical lens in this study.
While policy and innovation diffusion had been applied primarily to policies at the state and interstate levels, the theory also might be applied within a system of postsecondary institutions, such as the six four-year universities that were formerly part of the Tennessee Board of Regents and became local board-governed in 2017. I was interested in interviewing key university leaders regarding the phenomenon of transfer receptivity which followed the legislated Tennessee Promise free college policy innovation. How rapidly and at what stage/s did transfer receptivity ideas diffuse among the six public universities? Who were the “early adopter” and “late adopter” universities and leaders who conceived and implemented transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

An examination of the narrative stories is needed to understand university leaders’ transfer receptivity responses following the Tennessee Promise policy innovation. Such an examination would benefit from using the policy innovative and diffusion theoretical framework. University presidents and provosts have stories to share. They do not act in isolation from one another. While they must determine what works best on their individual campuses, presidents and provosts are open to the ideas generated by their colleagues across Tennessee and the nation.

Because the narrative stories associated with how university leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers were diffused across time and place, it is appropriate to view such stories through the policy innovation and diffusion theoretical lens. Tennessee Promise community college student transfers needed university leaders to find ways to support them so that they could persist and successfully complete baccalaureate degrees. The
policy innovation diffusion theoretical lens helped me to determine how leaders responded to the policy innovation and planned the diffusion of transfer receptivity.

State Merit-Based Scholarship Programs

The state merit-based scholarship programs developed in the early 1990s are a similar strategy to free college scholarship programs, e.g., Tennessee Promise. Therefore, merit-based aid may inform the potential impact that free college programs have on enrollment and completion. This literature review is limited to empirical studies that consider state merit-based aid’s impact on enrollment and completion, but first an overview of merit-based scholarship programs is provided.

During a course project conducted in Spring 2015, several other students and I determined that approximately 30 out of 50 states provided merit-based scholarship programs. Of those states that awarded merit aid, 18 offered scholarships that were last dollar, i.e., covering the remaining costs after other state and federal scholarships and grants were applied. The remaining costs were defined differently by each state. Most states covered only the remaining tuition costs. While a few states covered all remaining tuitions and fees, others covered only a small amount, e.g., $1,000. The most generous state was Alaska, which covered up to $4,755 in qualifying costs of attendance including tuition, fees, required books, supplies, and equipment, room and board, and transportation. Nearly every one of the 30 states that awarded merit aid required either a minimum high school grade point average or academic standing, e.g., top 10% of the class. Six states required students to perform volunteer service hours (Western Kentucky University [WKU], 2015).
Conducting a selective review of the literature addressing the impact of state merit aid programs on overall enrollment, persistence, and degree completion, I identified 11 quantitative empirical studies. No qualitative studies were detected. Four studies were published prior to 2011 and the remaining seven studies were published between 2011 and 2016. There were six single-state and five across-state studies. Research covered five individual states: Georgia (Cornwell, Mustard, & Sridhar, 2006; Dynarski, 2000); Florida (Zhang, Hu, & Sensenig, 2013); Missouri (Muñoz, Harrington, Curs, & Ehler, 2016); Tennessee (Welch, 2014); and West Virginia (Scott-Clayton, 2011). The remaining research covered multiple states (Domina, 2014; Farrell & Kienzl, 2009; Sjoquist & Winters, 2015; Toutkoushian & Hillman, 2012; Zhang & Ness, 2010). The summary findings of all the research studies together, followed by the methodologies and findings of the individual studies, are provided in the following sections.

Six studies indicated that states offering merit scholarships increased overall college enrollments at a faster rate than those that did not (Cornwell et al., 2006; Domina, 2014; Dynarski, 2000; Farrell & Kienzl, 2009; Muñoz et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2013). One study confirmed that state merit aid increased enrollment, primarily in research and doctoral universities (Zhang & Ness, 2010). Three studies also indicated that merit aid led to increased degree production (Scott-Clayton, 2011; Welch, 2014; Zhang et al., 2013). A single study indicated that merit aid had a greater effect toward increasing enrollment than did state appropriations (Toutkoushian & Hillman, 2012). The more generous the merit aid, the larger the increase in attendance (Domina, 2014; Farrell & Kienzl, 2009). In one study, college participation rose faster when merit aid was limited to public institutions (Farrell & Kienzl, 2009). When merit aid was available, one study
found the largest enrollment increase occurred at two-year colleges (Domina, 2014). Merit aid was found to extend access when part-time enrollment was permitted (Farrell & Kienzl, 2009; Zhang et al., 2013). While these studies examining merit aid’s impact indicated increases in enrollment and degree completion, a single across-state study questioned whether or not merit aid had a positive effect on enrollment and degree completion (Sjoquist & Winters, 2015).

Concerns were voiced by several researchers regarding democratization and diversion of students (Cornwell et al., 2006; Dynarski, 2000; Farrell & Kienzl, 2009; Munoz et al., 2016). Issues of democratization were evidenced in the states’ decisions to provide state merit aid funding to those already planning to attend college, as well as to include GPA requirements that excluded marginalized populations and financial need requirements that complicated the application process. The issue of diversion involved the shifting of students away from four-year institutions to community colleges. The methodologies and findings of the individual research studies, the single-state followed by the multi-state, are reported in the following sections.

Quantitative state merit-based aid research studies typically employ regression discontinuity and differences-in-differences estimations. Such statistical analysis approaches assist in overcoming inferential issues associated with attempting to “establish causal effects using observational data” (Schneider, as cited in Hu, Trengove, & Zhang, 2012, p. 323). According to Hu et al. (2012), regression discontinuity tests whether students whose eligibility scores, e.g., ACT, are close to cut-off threshold are similar. In other words, are those who score slightly above the threshold more likely to persist than those slightly below. Differences-in-differences estimations test before and
after, i.e., policy and time effects for the treatment group and time effect for control group. If time effect is the same for both, then the difference between the two differences provides an estimate for the policy effects.

Dynarski (2000) utilized the 1989-1997 October Current Population Survey (CPS), the Bureau of Labor Statistics state-level unemployment statistics, and the NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data (IPEDS) to examine how middle- and upper-income student attendance was affected by the Georgia HOPE merit aid program over time. The author used difference-in-differences estimations to test the before and after effects of Georgia HOPE merit aid on individual enrollment at different times compared with a control group consisting of South Atlantic and East South Central Census Divisions states. Using within-state control groups, Dynarski (2000) compared the initial younger high school graduates (18 to 19) with a control group of older students (23 to 24) eligible later, as well as comparing those with family incomes above $50,000 to those below $50,000.

Dynarski (2000) determined that HOPE merit aid increased 18- and 19-year old enrollment by 7 to 8%. Compared with students in the control group, Georgia white attendance increased 12.3%, while there was no increase in black attendance. Also, when the attendance of low-income students was compared with that of high-income students, a widened gap was found. The author’s results indicate that “for each $1,000 of subsidy the college attendance rate of middle- and upper-income youth rises by four to six percent” (p. 631). Dynarski (2000) estimated that around 80% of HOPE dollars went to those planning to attend regardless of merit aid.
In a second Georgia HOPE research study, Cornwell et al. (2006) used NCES IPEDS data covering 1988-1997, five years before and five years after the Georgia HOPE merit program implementation. They adopted two primary control groups: one included Georgia’s five bordering states and the other included the 14 Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) states besides Georgia. Using the differences-in-differences approach and estimating a regression model to determine the merit aid program’s impact on student enrollments, the author tested the before and after effects of the treatment, i.e., HOPE, on enrollment.

Cornwell et al. (2006) reported that when compared to the other SREB states, Georgia institutions achieved a 5.9% enrollment increase, i.e., 2,889 more freshmen each year during 1993-1997, the five years after HOPE was implemented. The authors also stated that “HOPE increased the black share of Georgia college enrollment by 2.7 percentage points” (p. 783). Georgia’s historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) gained an average of 990 more students. While unable to confirm an increase at two-year colleges due to how IPEDS categorizes data, i.e., not separating degree from diploma and certificate, the authors established that “HOPE raised enrollment enough in the institutions to offset the scholarship’s 4-year-2-year relative price effect” (pp. 779-780). Cornwell et al. (2006) focused their study on the HOPE program’s impact on institutions. On the other hand, Dynarski’s study targeted the merit aid’s impact on individuals. Breaking the gains down between public and private four-year institutions, the authors determined that a 9% increase (1,861 more students per year) at public four-year institutions and a 13% increase (1,311 more students per year) at private four-year
institutions occurred. Concern was expressed that merit aid dollars were primarily funding students already intending to go to college.

Utilizing 2000-2001 through 2003-2004 available from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission data, Scott-Clayton (2011) analyzed West Virginia PROMISE’s impact on college achievement or persistence. The author employed regression discontinuity around the ACT threshold score of 21, as well as a cohort analysis with difference-in-differences to examine two cohorts before and two cohorts after the implementation of PROMISE. A bounding exercise also was used for selection bias issues.

Focusing on achievement and persistence, Scott-Clayton (2011) determined that PROMISE recipients near the end of their first year were “nearly 25 percentage points more likely to have earned 30 or more credits, the threshold for Promise renewal” (p. 616). This achievement continued through their junior years, then ended as students ceased to renew their merit aid applications. Students were “9.5 percentage points more likely to have completed 120 credits after four years” and “nine percentage points more likely to have a 3.0 cumulative GPA” (p. 623). Scott-Clayton noted the completion rates of bachelor’s degrees within four years and five years rose 9.4 and 4.5 percentage points, respectively.

Zhang et al. (2013) examined Florida’s Bright Futures Program using NES IPEDS Enrollment and Completion Surveys to determine the impact of the program on full-time, first-time enrollment and degree completion. The authors employed multiple regression analysis and difference-in-differences estimations. The comparison group of non-merit states was compiled from SREB members. Data from five years before (1992 to 1996)
and five years after (1997 to 2001) the program’s implementation were included for the enrollment effect; for degree attainment, the time periods of two to three years were set for associate degrees, and four to five years for baccalaureate degrees. While enrollment before the implementation of Bright Futures was stable when compared with other SREB states, it began to increase in 1997. The authors next used regression analysis to compare Florida four-year institution enrollments with three groups: all other states; all other SREB states; and the SREB states that were non-merit aid prior to 2001. The authors reported their results based on the third group.

With a mean pre-program 26,000 students, Zhang et al. (2013) ascertained the overall full-time first-time Florida four-year enrollments increased by 22.3% (~5,000 students). At public community colleges, while the full-time, first-time enrollment grew by 19.1%, the part-time enrollment increased by 44%. Baccalaureate degree production increased by 6.6%. Zhang et al. (2013) noted “most of the growth in degree production is due to increases for minority groups” (p. 760). Non-white student degree production rose by nearly 8%, while white student degree production rose only 0.4%. Associate degrees increased by just over 10%. The part-time students attending public research and doctoral institutions in which 50% of all part-time students attended, increased by 109% (900 students).

Welch (2014) utilized Tennessee Higher Education Commission administrative data to determine the Tennessee HOPE merit scholarship’s impact on entering community college freshmen in 2005-2009. The author noted that randomization was not possible to overcome selection bias, e.g., the same student cannot both receive and not receive the scholarship. The unobserved ability of those students who were merit aid-
eligible compared to those who were not also affected selection bias, i.e., ability may correlate to eligibility, as well as persistence and degree completion. Therefore, the author used regression discontinuity design and compared scores below and above the 21 ACT score threshold to evaluate the impact of HOPE eligibility.

Welch (2014) concluded that HOPE merit aid local impacts were not significant in terms of persistence or degree completion for students near the ACT cutoff score of 20.5, but may it impact those who have higher scores. However, the author acknowledged a caveat with regard to using regression discontinuity, i.e., that it is “known for having strong internal validity, but [it] lacks external validity in that the estimated effects of HOPE eligibility are local around the discontinuity” (p. 19). Welch’s research indicated “a significant but small effect on cumulative hours after two years” (p. 18). She determined that 38% of the community college students transferred to a university. Approximately 9% completed a two-year degree by the end of three years and 15% completed a four-year degree by the end of five years.

Using Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 1992-2010 school-level administrative data, Muñoz et al. (2016) examined the average intent-to-intent (ITT) effect of Missouri’s A+ Schools on college enrollment. NCES Common Core of Data was used for controlling variables relating to socioeconomic status. Five years of data from 1992-1997 provided information prior to the implementation of the program. The authors used difference-in-difference estimations and fixed effects regression modeling to compare the effect of A+ Schools on enrollment against non-A+ Schools, as well as the before and after effect as schools became designated A+ Schools over time.
Muñoz et al. (2016) reported that implementing A+ schools raised the overall number of students attending college by 2.9%. In community colleges, 5.2% more students enrolled. The authors postulated that, while knowledge of aid led to better academic preparation which in turn led to democratization, i.e., more students attend who might not have, the A+ Schools two-year scholarship led to diversion of students from four-year programs. Also, while those who attended community college have historically found it difficult to transfer to university, perhaps the better high school academic preparation they now receive would help move students to transfer successfully and complete four-year degrees. This ends the review of the eight single-state studies, and the four across-state studies are now reported.

Farrell and Kienzl (2009) included all states and the District of Columbia in their research study. They used 1992-2004 NCES IPEDS state-level data to determine whether such aid led to increased enrollment and students remaining at in-state postsecondary institutions. Controls for each state’s socio-educational and economic factors that might influence enrollment were included. The authors employed a fixed effect regression approach, taking into consideration the different points in time, i.e., difference-in-difference estimation, that each state implemented merit aid programs with multivariate panel data analyses.

Farrell and Kienzl (2009) found that participation in college rose faster when merit aid was limited to public institutions. States with merit scholarships experienced on average 4.6% higher enrollments at in-state public institutions than states not offering merit aid. In states where merit aid was very generous, i.e., covered full tuition, 5.5% more students enrolled in college. Initially, when merit aid was implemented, enrollment
increased; however, increases leveled out as “the state merit award amount, college choice restrictions, and enrollment eligibility in the estimates” were considered over time (p. 170). Permitting part-time enrollment was deemed beneficial; it provided access to students who might not otherwise be able to attend college. However, the authors ended their article by expressing concerns that need-based funding for lower socioeconomic students was not increasing.

Zhang and Ness (2010) used IPEDS Enrollment Survey, College Board, and Common Core data in their study that included all 50 states. They sought to examine the impact of merit-based aid on enrollment: those residents who remained instate, those who left to attend college elsewhere, and total college enrollment. The authors used multiple regression analysis and the differences-in-differences method. Zhang and Ness determined that on average and overall, the number of first-year students and resident numbers was increased in those states granting merit aid. They also noted that, within those states offering merit aid, the increase in total enrollment primarily happened at the research and doctoral institutions but not in non-research and doctoral institutions.

Toutkoushian and Hillman (2012) constructed a panel dataset covering all the states, and the year 1988 and every other year between 1992 and 2008. The sources for their data included NCES’s Digest of Education Statistics, Grapevine, IPEDS, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and the National Associate of State Scholarship and Grant Aid Programs. They used the fixed effects estimation method to analyze their constructed dataset. Toutkoushian and Hillman concluded that merit aid produced greater effects than state appropriations with regard to increasing the number of students who attended college. They determined that
investing an additional $1,000 per capita increased the number of students attending college by 14.5%. However, similar state appropriations increased the number of students attending by just a little over 2%.

Domina (2014) used the NCES National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) to study the effect of merit aid eligibility requirements on student success for 21 merit aid programs introduced from 1992 to 2004. Using multivariate analysis models with cross-cohort comparison design, the author examined the merit aid effects in states with programs compared to those without, controlling for student demographic factors, e.g., race and income, and policy changes, e.g., banning affirmative action. In states with merit aid, enrollment increased at a faster rate, and the largest enrollment increase occurred at two-year colleges. Domina noted that state merit aid programs impacted college-going behavior. The author determined that more generous aid had a greater impact. He also pointed out that eligibility requirements that include financial need as well as academic grades may lower enrollments due to complications in making application.

Sjoquist and Winters (2015) used 2000 United States Census and 2001-2010 American Community Survey data in examining the effect of merit programs on enrollment and degree completion in 25 states that implemented merit aid between 1995 and 2004. The authors examined the intent-to-treat effect with a differences-in-differences estimation using a treatment group composed of those students exposed to strong state merit aid programs. Their control group was made up of those students living in states without merit aid, as well as those who had turned 18 prior to the merit aid becoming available in their states. The authors also used Georgia administrative data for
reviewing HOPE merit aid to find out how it affected graduation rates in Georgia’s public university system. Instead of difference-in-differences, they examined differences by time before and after HOPE was implemented.

With respect to both cases involving 25 states and the case of the University System of Georgia, Sjoquist and Winter (2012) concluded that merit aid may not affect whether students attend or how many graduate. They suggested adding policies, e.g., one that incentivizes graduation, i.e., if students fail to graduate, then they must pay back aid, and another that focuses aid on those who are low-income with the goal of increasing graduation. Regarding whether merit aid favorably impacts enrollment and persistence to degree completion, it is noted that this last study’s results ran counter to the other three across-state and six single-state studies that were cited.

The literature covering state merit-based scholarship programs answered some questions regarding enrollment and degree completion, but it raised others. While several studies indicated merit aid increased enrollment and degree production, the last study questioned whether such aid in fact increased enrollment. Additional studies will be needed to clarify all the nuances of merit aid’s impact on enrollment and degree production. Since additional students are required to meet the need for additional degree production, there will be further interest in how merit aid, and by extension free college, impact college enrollment and degree production.

**Transfer Receptivity for Community College Transfer Students**

Bahr et al. (2013) indicated that research about community college student transfers was shifting away from characteristics and behaviors of the students to how the four-year universities were administering policies, practices, and programs to receive
these students. Transfer receptivity was one of the concepts associated with post-transition processes targeted by these authors. Jain et al. (2011) coined the phrase, *transfer receptivity*, defining it as “the institutional commitment by a four-year college or university to provide the support needed for [community college] students to transfer successfully” (p. 252). The authors also developed five elements of transfer receptivity that universities may consider embracing in order to engender a transfer receptive culture. These five elements include:

- establishing transfer of nontraditional students as a high institution priority;
- providing outreach and resources that focus on the specific and unique needs of transfer students;
- offering financial and academic support;
- acknowledging the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family; and
- creating an appropriate framework of assessment and evaluation that can lead to future scholarship on transfer students.

(Jain et al., 2016, p. 1014; Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

The work of the three sets of authors was used to establish the boundaries for the review of the literature concerning transfer receptivity.

Five qualitative research studies (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Handel, 2011, 2012; Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017; Senie, 2016; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012), one mixed methods study (Jain et al., 2016), and one quasi-experimental study (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017) were identified for this review of the literature concerning transfer receptivity. In three of the five qualitative studies, university administrators, key stakeholders at the
board level, and faculty and staff from community colleges and universities were interviewed (Handel, 2011, 2012; Senie, 2016; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). The remaining two qualitative studies involved interviews with students (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017); and the mixed methods study used student focus groups to supplement what was learned through a student survey. The quantitative study used propensity score matching with a treatment group of community college student transfers and a control group of rising college juniors.

Handel (2011, 2012) interviewed 21 leaders at 12 universities committed to helping community college student transfers. These leaders shared their ideas for how universities may improve transfer. Questions were provided to those who were interviewed ahead of the interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The leaders’ comments were “coded into five domains: leadership and commitment, outreach and academic preparation, admission and enrolment, financial aid, and student and academic affairs” (Handel, 2012, p. 410). Example recommendations, one from each of the five domain areas, were:

- develop a strategic, as opposed to a tactical, enrollment plan, one that is mission driven and sees the recruitment and enrollment of transfer students as a long-term commitment [leadership and commitment];
- support community college counselors by keeping them up-to-date on programs and services at the four-year institution [outreach and preparation];
- grant community college applicants preference in the admission process over transfer applicants from four-year colleges and universities [admission and enrollment];
• fund scholarships specifically for transfer students [financial aid]; and
• monitor and assess the transfer student experience as you would the first-year student experience [student and academic affairs].

(Handel, 2011, no page numbers given)

Out of Handel’s 2012 study, a theory of “transfer-affirming” culture emerged with five transfer-affirming elements and 23 recommendations across the five domains. The author’s work complemented the transfer receptive culture that Jain et al. (2011) envisioned. Together, Jain et al.’s (2011, 2016) works and Handel’s (2011, 2012) work helped inform my understanding of what university leaders need to consider in planning for community college student transfers’ success at their institutions.

Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) were specifically interested in the role of university agents and policies and practices in receiving and supporting student transfers. Using organizational theory as a framework and a case study methodological approach with purposeful sampling, Tobolowsky and Cox conducted semi-structured interviews with 17 staff and faculty at a single university. They analyzed the data using the constant comparative method, which involved three stages of examining the interviews for emerging themes as the interview process occurred. In their analysis, the authors “structures, programs, policies, people, and practices that have contributed to the rationalized–and largely institution-wide neglect of transfer students” (p. 390). For example, the timeline for enrolling at the university was such that it was difficult for students to know what courses transferred for credit and what courses were needed, which also led to concerns regarding the availability of courses. This study’s findings
were particularly informative in my consideration of the difficulties that community college student transfers face in successfully making the transition to universities.

Senie (2016) applied Handel’s (2012) theory of a transfer affirming culture and Jain et al.’s (2011) transfer receptive elements. The author examined transfer articulation agreements between public universities and community colleges. Senie used several theoretical frameworks drawn from research on “organizational culture, state governance of higher education, the transfer mission of community colleges, and the culture surrounding transfer and articulation” (p. 270). Using a multisite case study methodological approach and purposeful sampling, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 people, including administrators, faculty, and staff from two community colleges and one regional university, as well as two board employees. The author also engaged 14 individuals in three focus groups and observed seven faculty meetings with a total of 70 to 140 people present. Senie used “inductive codes from the participants’ language and deductive codes drawn from the cultural theories applicable to the study” to analyze data (p. 277). The author’s findings pointed to several cultural gap issues including “underestimating a community college education, a disconnect among administrators, a love-hate relationship between university faculty and transfer students, and a failure to hear the transfer student voice” (p. 278). Senie recommended that community colleges and universities work to engender the Handel’s (2011) transfer-affirming and Jain et al.’s (2011) transfer receptive elements. This author’s study reinforced how I could use these five transfer receptive elements in considering the expansion of transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs at the six universities reviewed in my study.
Castro and Cortez (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with six Mexican community college transfers students a year or more after they transferred to a single university. The authors’ goal was to hear students’ transfer experiences and use what was learned to help create transfer receptivity at the university. Interviewees were solicited by email and snowball sampling provided additional students. In developing their conceptual framework, Castro and Cortez used Jain et al.’s (2011) concept of transfer receptivity and examined how institutions may “build institutional capacity to support the success of transfer students” (p. 80). They suggested university agents should prepare to meet students’ needs by first striving to recognize and understand “students’ lived realities and intersectionality between community and family” (Castro & Cortez, 2017, p. 88). They believed those working at the universities needed to examine their assumptions about these students and remove roadblocks to student success. This study informed my thinking further regarding use of transfer receptivity in my study’s conceptual framework.

Nuñez and Yoshimi (2017) used a phenomenological approach in interviewing 11 transfer students at a single university. The authors asked the students semi-structured questions developed from the themes they identified in their examination of the research on transfer students. They looked for patterns in the students’ responses. The authors determined that transfers believed their needs to be different from those students who began as freshmen at the university. They suggested:

- providing students well-functioning technical tools is essential;
- help[ing] students find a sense of belonging, offering access to supportive institutional agents is critical; and
• addressing transfer students’ emphasis on actualizing academic purpose is critical. (Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017, p. 185)

This study informed my approach to examining my study’s storied data to identify themes and look for patterns during data analysis.

Using the five elements of transfer receptive culture, Jain et al. (2016) evaluated one university’s summer transfer enrichment program. The authors’ theoretical framework was critical race theory (CRT). Students were selected to engage in the study using purposeful criterion sampling. After conducting a student survey to which 56 students responded, Jain et al. invited 22 students to the focus group discussions. The authors determined that four of the five elements of transfer receptivity were present in the program reviewed. Jain et al. suggested an institution establish the campus areas and individuals that were friendly to transfers. Their study concluded that stakeholder buy-in was necessary for the university to build a transfer receptive culture. This study helped me to understand the five elements of transfer receptive culture and their potential use in evaluating programs.

In the last study, a quasi-experimental study, Lichtenberger and Dietrich (2017) used “propensity score matching with a posttreatment adjustment to isolate the effect associated with what we considered the treatment” (p. 6) in order to determine whether there is a penalty for community college transfers relating to time to degree completion. The authors used data from the National Student Clearinghouse and the Illinois Board of Higher Education. A treatment group of Illinois high school graduates in 2003, consistently enrolled full-time for two years then transferred to university in fall semester of 2005. The comparison group was made up of students about to become college
juniors. The posttreatment adjustment involved matching the comparison individuals to similar individuals at the receiving university. Lichtenberger and Dietrich determined fewer than 30% of community college transfer students had completed their degree in four years compared to 48% of the rising four-year college juniors. This 18% difference was diminished to 5.5% after a fifth year, i.e., “125% of normal time,” and then was completely removed by the end of two years, i.e., “150 of normal time.” There was no significant difference in the two groups after that point in time. The authors concluded policies enabling community college transfers to be received more smoothly at the universities were needed. Other suggestions included (a) bridge program development to assist with the transition to university, and (b) two policy types assisting with credit transfer, including designated transferrable general education courses and degree major pathways recommending what students should take in their first two years to be ready to transfer into certain majors at the universities.

The reviewed transfer receptivity literature informed my approach to this study and demonstrated the need for universities to improve their policies, practices, and programs to receive community college student transfers. A research gap existed in that only three studies examined transfer receptivity from the perspective of university leaders. There is a clear need to examine how university leaders provide transfer receptivity to support community college student transfers in making a successful transition and persisting to degree completion.
Summary

Tennessee Promise increases access and affordability to postsecondary education in Tennessee. Since additional students are needed to increase degree production, there is interest in whether Tennessee Promise and other free college programs, which are similar to earlier merit aid programs, will impact college enrollment, student persistence, and degree completion. In addition, the universities and their leaders will need to provide transfer receptivity that enables Tennessee Promise community college student transfers to persist and successfully complete baccalaureate degrees. If this occurs, the effects of Tennessee Promise may be extended further. Finally, the policy innovation and diffusion theoretical lens is helpful in determining what is already occurring, as well as what is being planned at the six Tennessee public universities under review.

The broader context for this study is the need to increase college completion in the US and within the individual states including Tennessee. Because the number of high school students is declining or flat, community college student transfers are destined to play a larger role in accomplishing the college completion goal. Given the need to enroll additional community college student transfers, four-year institutions must become more intentional about expanding and developing additional transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs so that more students may succeed. Each institution is wise to examine what is currently being done, then improve upon the support offered to community college student transfers as they enter universities and seek to persist to degree completion.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program broadened access and affordability to postsecondary education in Tennessee. This policy innovation increased the number of students seeking to engage in postsecondary education. It also shifted some of the state’s students to the more affordable community colleges and colleges of applied technology for their first two years of college. Equally important, Tennessee Promise incentivized the presidents and provosts of the six public universities under review to expand existing transfer receptivity efforts further as their universities prepared to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

The purpose of this narrative policy analysis based on Roe’s (1994) four-step process was to document and describe how presidents and provosts at six Tennessee public universities responded to the Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Of interest were the leaders’ narrative stories about this policy innovation and how the innovation contributed to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Employing the theoretical lens of policy innovation and diffusion, I engaged with the leaders’ storied interviews, local news articles, and publicly-accessible documents and other information that I found on the universities’ websites.

The time period under review began when the Tennessee Promise legislation was introduced in January 2014 and ended in July 2017. By the end of just over three years of staging and implementation, there was limited numerical data, e.g., associate degree completion, available for quantitative analysis. Tennessee Promise community college
student transfers were (a) enrolling in their first year at university, (b) completing coursework toward an associate’s degree at community colleges or those universities that offer associate degrees, or (c) dropping or stopping out of college.

Because I wanted to understand how these university leaders responded to Tennessee Promise, as well as how they prepared to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, I used a qualitative research paradigm. My study’s qualitative findings will inform later studies that examine what occurred as a result of Tennessee Promise, e.g., how community college student transfers were able to persist to baccalaureate degree completion. By considering relevant narratives about how these university leaders prepared for Tennessee Promise student transfers, greater disclosure and better attention to circumventing obstacles that block student success at the university level will occur. My dissertation adds new knowledge about transfer receptivity to the scholarly record, as well as contributes toward informing university policies, practice, and programs on which student transfers rely as they persist toward the successful completion of baccalaureate degrees.

Qualitative research enables researchers to comprehend a phenomenon more deeply by examining it through the perspectives of those whom they interview or observe (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative research paradigm is well-suited for the study of higher education phenomena where the assumption is that leaders make decisions based on what they believe to be true. Leaders pay attention to what they experience, i.e., the meaning they make from what they experience in their lives. In this study, it was important to understand how university leaders made decisions based on their experiences with regard to Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity.
I documented and described transfer receptivity by exploring the central question: How did the presidents and provosts of the six Tennessee public four-year universities respond to Tennessee Promise and prepare to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers who seek to persist and complete degrees? Subquestion one was, How did the presidents and provosts respond to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation? Subquestion two was, How did the university leaders prepare to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers? Subquestion three was, How did the presidents and provosts plan to ensure future transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

In this chapter, I describe my study’s research methodology. First, the rationales for use of a qualitative narrative research design and the narrative policy analysis methodological approach are provided. Next, my assumptions as a researcher and role as the researcher in this study are delineated. The research sample and an overview of needed information are covered. Research design implementation, data collection methods, and the data analysis and synthesis methods are addressed. Ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness then follow. The chapter concludes with the delimitations and limitations of the study and a chapter summary.

**Qualitative Narrative Research Design**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) noted that qualitative research enables the researcher to gain a more profound understanding of a phenomenon that is in keeping with how those who participate in the phenomenon see it. Chase (2005) suggested to researchers that the narratives they examine are both empowered and curbed by their context, and that this should be kept in mind when comparing one narrative to another.
Given the breadth and depth of higher education practices, qualitative narrative research served well as a means through which to mine rich narrative data to achieve this study’s purpose. Narrative research enabled me to understand whether, when, where, and how the presidents and provosts at the six universities responded to Tennessee Promise and planned to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers during Tennessee Promise’s staging and implementation years.

Creswell’s (2013) defining features of qualitative narrative studies also were helpful in determining how to engage in narrative research. Establishing the narrative research boundaries for this study involved collecting stories that conveyed how the university leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and planned to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. By examining the narratives recorded in publicly-accessible university website documents along with those reported in local news sources, as well as the stories shared by university presidents and provosts, I was able to view the chronology of events and activities that had occurred.

The social constructivist tradition made it possible to capture and describe the multiple viewpoints of the presidents and provosts who worked within shared governance, communicated institutional priorities, administered available resources, and led institutional change. Assuming a constructivist interpretive stance, I committed to collecting ideas that surfaced in the stories heard during interviews with the leaders, as well as in the narratives found during a review of documents and news sources.

The interviews conducted with university leaders, along with my field notes and the publicly-accessible university documents and local news sources, provided richly detailed, storied information used to document and describe the leaders’ responses to the
Tennessee Promise policy innovation and the diffusion of transfer receptivity that occurred across the six Tennessee public universities. I reviewed the stories for themes, looked for turning points, and remembered the role of context in the stories under review (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 1989). It was important to remember that we shape our realities based on the details we choose to remember (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 1989). In the case of this study, the university leaders’ narrative stories about Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity they told during the interviews were based on the details they remembered and were willing to share.

**Narrative Policy Analysis**

This qualitative study used Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis paradigm. Roe suggested narrative policy analysis is useful for examining policy issue questions where decisions are being made “in the face of high uncertainty, complexity, and polarization” (p. 2). In this study, the narrative of the Tennessee Promise policy innovation dominated the complex, uncertain, and polarized policy issue question of how to grow college enrollments in order to increase the number of college-educated Tennesseans. Roe’s narrative policy analysis was ideal for examining the postsecondary education phenomenon of transfer receptivity as it related Tennessee Promise. This was due to the fact that stories, some of which deal with policy issues, are often told by higher education constituencies, including elected officials, policy administrators, taxpayers, faculty and staff, students and their parents. Narrative policy analysis is beneficial for higher education researchers in that we can observe the dominant narrative/s, as well as the counter stories, employed to construct the metanarrative/s that postsecondary education leaders use to inform decision-making.
Roe (1994) designed his four-step process through which “literary theory can help policy analysts, among others to deal more effectively with policy issues” (p. 4). The author’s four steps included (a) establishing the dominant policy narrative/s; (b) identifying counter stories to the dominant policy narrative/s; (c) using the counter stories along with the dominant narrative, [to] create a metanarrative that is “told by comparison;” and (d) determining if the resulting metanarrative sheds light on decisions or policies considered. Using Roe’s four-step process of narrative policy analysis, I reviewed the storied data, documenting and describing the meta-narratives constructed for decision-making and communicating decisions by the university leaders who responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared their universities to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

Hampton (2011) described his use of Roe’s (1994) four steps of narrative policy analysis to inform participatory policy development at the University of Wollongong in Australia. The author used the process to build consensus over a policy governing graduate attributes. First, a dominant narrative was determined from institutional documents. A counter narrative or story was developed through discussions with others. The author consulted with the faculty to generate meta-narratives which were then used to engender support and decisions relating to policy, i.e., shared governance. In this way, Hampton first established the dominant narrative, then considered a counter-narrative in generating a metanarrative that was used to make a required decision about policy.

Before using narrative policy analysis, it was important that I understood the process and its components. Roe (1994) defined stories as either “scenarios” with “beginnings, middles, and endings” or “arguments” that have “premises and conclusions”
He suggested the stories “commonly used in describing and analyzing policy issues are a force in themselves and must be considered explicitly in assessing policy options,” and he labeled them policy narratives (p. 2). These descriptions characterized the stories surrounding the Tennessee Promise policy innovation leading to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers well.

When preparing to use policy narrative analysis as a research methodology, the researcher should understand policy narratives as Roe (1994) intended, i.e., “stories (scenarios or arguments) which underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for policymaking in situations that persist with many unknowns, a high degree of interdependence, and little, if any agreement” (p. 34). Roe’s characterization detailed in the previous sentence may be applied in the case of narrative stories reflecting the circumstances surrounding state financial support for higher education in general, as well as more specifically, for stories about scholarship programs such as Tennessee Promise. Additionally, it is possible to apply this characterization to narrative stories about the individual university campuses serving both native students and community college student transfers since there likely were a wide range of opinions regarding the need to shift resources, as well as refocus and expand policies, practices, and programs to serve future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

Using Coleman’s (2014) short news story written at the time Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam announced Tennessee Promise in the State of the State Address, I explored how Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis four-step process might work in considering the Tennessee Promise free college scholarship. The first step “starts with the conventional definition of stories and identifies those policy narratives in issue of high
uncertainty and complexity that conform” (Roe, 1994, p. 3). In this case, the policy narrative was Tennessee Promise free community college tuition, which dominated the complex, uncertain, and polarized policy issue question of how to grow college enrollment in order to increase the number of college-educated Tennesseans.

The second step was “to identify those other narratives [counter stories] in the issue that do not conform to the definition of the story or that run counter to the controversy’s dominant policy narratives” (Roe, 1994, p. 3). Counter stories expressed by those interviewed:

Memphis Congressman Steve Cohen indicated that free college meant (a) the demise of the HOPE scholarship and (b) four-year colleges, e.g. University Memphis and LeMoyne Owen, will be harmed due to encouraging attendance at community colleges and people not be able to afford four-year institutions. The article noted that Cohen was known as “the father of the Tennessee Lottery.” [Cohen fought hard for lottery legislation to fund Hope scholarships and he also sought to protect the four-year colleges and universities in his district.]

Two University of Memphis students saw pros: benefit to community college students and getting students to attend college, as well as cons: “it’s also going to be taking away from students like me and I had to pay for four years of school.” [The two students saw the advantage of more students able to attend community college, but they believed that they did not benefit personally.]

The third step was to “compare the two sets of narratives (stories on one hand, and counter stories on the other) in order to generate a metanarrative ‘told’ by the comparison” (Roe, 1994, p. 4). A metanarrative was generated from the counter stories
offered by Memphis Congressman Steve Cohen surrounding the demise of the Hope scholarship and the harm done to four-year institutions by Tennessee Promise. The metanarrative reflected these counter stories whereby Governor Haslam said he believed that there would be sufficient lottery reserves to cover free tuition because Tennessee Promise was a last dollar after all other aid was considered. Also, the governor indicated the Hope Scholarship was to be reduced by $1,000 during the first two-years at four-year colleges, but then increased by $2,000 during the last two years. Governor Haslam stressed that free tuition would not cost the state anything and the impact would be “priceless.”

The fourth and final step occurred when “the analyst determines if or how the metanarrative, once generated, recasts the issue in such a way as to make it more amenable to decision making and policy-making” (Roe, 1994, p. 4). Free tuition that did not cost the state anything recast the issue, i.e., increasing the number of college-educated Tennesseans through growing college enrollment. Supporting Tennessee’s “Drive to 55” initiative in which 55% of all Tennesseans to be college educated by 2025, was deemed crucial to meet workforce needs.

The previous example demonstrated how I intended to use narrative policy analysis in examining the storied data that I collected. By using narrative policy analysis and considering the stories that I gathered through the lens of policy innovation and diffusion, I was able to pinpoint how the university leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and planned to provide transfer receptivity for future Tennessee Promise community college transfer students.
**Researcher Assumptions**

Using a social constructivist interpretive framework supported and enhanced my examination of stories surrounding transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise student transfers. This interpretive framework meshed well with the narrative research approach that I chose in which information was shared by individuals through their stories. The stories surrounding the issues that educators face inform the decisions that they make in the interest of educating their students. In other words, stories enhance their awareness and understanding of why they do what they do. Creswell (2009) stated:

> Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences…. [which are] varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. (p. 8)

Adopting this interpretive framework made it possible for me to capture and describe the multiple viewpoints about transfer receptivity. Using this framework enhanced my understanding of the university leaders’ viewpoints regarding transfer receptivity. I took advantage of the opportunities I had to share how others viewed the phenomenon. My assumptions mesh with a social constructivist framework where:

- multiple realities are constructed through [individuals’] lived experiences and interactions with others [as relates to] ontological beliefs (the nature of reality).
• reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences [as relates to] epistemological beliefs (how reality is known).

• individual values are honored, and are negotiated among individuals (as relates to) axiological beliefs (role of values).

• more of a literary type of writing is used. Use of an inductive method of emergent ideas (through consensus) obtained through methods such as interviewing, observing, and analysis of texts [as relates to] methodological beliefs (approach to inquiry).

(Creswell, 2013, p. 36, as adapted from Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

My ontological assumption is to be constantly learning and engaging in learning within a community. As a researcher, I assume that participation in a community of learners enables everyone to learn through the experiences and insights of others, and thus, they add to what they all are able to individually experience and conceive (epistemological). I also assume that individual values should be honored and there should an open, respectful process for negotiating a common understanding of values among individuals (axiological). Finally, I am inclined toward decision-making through the sharing of ideas and consensus-building (methodological). Engaging together in the collective experience of learning through the sharing of ideas informs better action. By paying attention to the stories surrounding events, I become better informed and educated about the world in which I live. In the case of this study, it was through a thorough consideration of the narrative stories from local news sources, publicly-accessible university documents, and
the interviews with university leaders that I was able to understand how the leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and were planning to provide transfer receptivity.

**The Role of the Researcher**

My self-awareness and self-disclosure as a researcher were important to this qualitative research process. What interested me most in engaging in this research was determining what was being done to effect changes in transfer receptivity designed to assist Tennessee Promise student transfers in successfully completing baccalaureate degrees at the six Tennessee public universities under review. Speaking with authority to benefit student transfers was my intention in doing this research.

My experiences, both as a student and as a faculty member, led me to examine this topic. My undergraduate journey included time as a traditional first-time, full-time student athlete, a student transfer, a stop-out student, and a part-time student working full-time. While these experiences occurred over 35 years ago, I can still remember well some of the difficulties that came with being a student transfer. During 31 years of service at Austin Peay State University, I have interacted with many student transfers. As a library faculty member and an interim assistant provost/assistant vice president of academic affairs, I have been involved in shared governance. Remembering my time as a student transfer, as well as observing the challenges that face today’s student transfers in my role as an educator, helped inform my examination of how the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee universities responded to Tennessee Promise. Memories also informed my review of how universities and their leaders planned to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.
The Research Sample

My study’s conceptual framework and research questions guided my decisions regarding the research sample. Six Tennessee public universities, formerly part of the Tennessee Board of Regents and now local board-governed beginning in 2017, served as the sites for this study. The six universities included Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University, and University of Memphis. I selected these six universities because they traditionally accept a large portion of the TBR community college students as student transfers.

Within each university, I sought to interview those individuals who possessed the most influence over decisions regarding responses to Tennessee Promise and providing transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. I targeted the presidents and provosts of the six public universities because they have stories to tell about how they responded to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation and how they planned to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. These leaders participate within shared governance, communicated institutional priorities, allocated available resources, and lead changes that occur on their campuses. Moreover, there is a gap in the transfer receptivity research in that more studies have been conducted with students as participants than there have been studies with university leaders as participants.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) indicated that samples for qualitative research studies are typically purposeful. Table 1 in Appendix C provides a descriptive list of the three purposeful sampling types. I used comprehensive sampling (Goetz &
LeCompte, as cited in Miles et al., 2014) to indicate that all cases, i.e., the six designated universities and their leaders, were to be examined. Criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to indicate that interviews with the universities’ twelve presidents and provosts were being sought. While I included snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) in the event that a president or provost designated another person/s for me to interview, no leader did so.

**Information Needed to Conduct the Study**

Information was gathered through a review of approximately 250 publicly-accessible university documents and local news sources. Also, I requested a single interview with each of the presidents and provosts at the six universities. An overview of the contextual, demographic, and perceptual information needed is provided in Table 2 found in Appendix D. A matrix of data sources and research questions is found in Table 3 found in Appendix E. These tables were based on Bloomberg and Volpe’s (2012) templates.

**Research Design Implementation**

The theoretical framework of policy innovation and diffusion and the narrative policy analysis methodological approach guided my study’s research design. The steps that I took to implement the research design are provided as follows.

1. Before data were collected, a selective literature review was conducted. I reviewed the literature regarding (a) policy innovation and diffusion; (b) the impact of state merit-based aid on college enrollment and degree completion as it may inform the potential impact of the Tennessee Promise free college scholarship policy innovation; and (c) transfer receptivity for community college student transfers.
2. In addition to the literature review, I developed the background and context information, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the research questions, as well as in the methodology.

3. Following my dissertation proposal defense, I obtained institutional review board approval of my study’s procedures and processes with regard to human subjects. The WKU Institutional Review Board approved informed consent document is found in Appendix A.

4. I continued with my examination of publicly-accessible university documents and local news sources as I prepared to conduct interviews.

5. University presidents and provosts were contacted to request and arrange the interview dates.

6. I explained the informed consent document, obtained signatures, and conducted the interviews with the presidents and provosts.

7. As I conducted my research, I continued my review of the literature.

**Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative research design allows the researcher to be more flexible in making adjustments in the collection of data as the phenomenon is explored (Creswell, 2013). Using the theoretical lens of policy innovation and diffusion, I gathered publicly-accessible university documents from the universities’ websites and local news articles through the online Newsbank database. I followed Patton’s (2002) advice to use documents to prepare for the interviews. The documents further informed how I approached the second phase of data collection involving interviews to gather leaders’
perspectives about Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

Carefully-framed, intentional interviews enable researchers to understand participants’ experiences and perspectives better (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2002). The purpose of conducting interviews with the university presidents and provosts was to gather information to answer the study’s research questions. I wanted to learn about the leaders’ responses to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation that led to diffusion of transfer receptivity from the university leaders’ perspectives.

Roe (1994) advocated a more open-ended stance in interviewing in order to allow participants to convey their stories. With this in mind, I initially elected to use an unstructured interview protocol to gather information. However, by the end of the first interview I decided it was best to adjust my protocol and utilize semi-structured questions. This adjustment process is described in detail in the Phase II: Interviews with University Leaders section and also in an audit trail excerpt in Appendix K.

Together, the documents, local news sources, interview transcripts, and field notes provided richly-detailed information about Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity. The two phases of data collection are described in detail as follows.

**Phase I: Publicly-Accessible University Documents and Local News Articles**

Collecting narratives conveying each university leader’s story within the broader context of what occurred state-wide guided how I approached the process of gathering publicly-accessible university documents and local news articles. I carefully constructed common terms to search within each university’s website; these terms included each university name, each president’s name, each provost’s name, Tennessee Promise,
student transfers, transfer students, and transfer or transfers. I also used various combinations of these search terms to expand my search to the broader web environment. During Summer 2015 I conducted a preliminary search for information that resulted in over 20 publicly-accessible documents from the universities’ websites and beyond, as well as local news articles via the online Newsbank database. Sources included:

- AP (Austin Peay State University) News: New APSU Promise to award scholarships to all of Tennessee’s high-achieving community college graduates, September 24, 2014
- AP News: High school students can get a traditional college experience at APSU using Tennessee Promise, February 4, 2015
- Austin Peay State University Office of Admissions, Tennessee Promise webpage
- East Tennessee State University News: ETSU unveils scholarship opportunities for incoming students, October 23, 2014
- 2014 Legislative and Budget Update, East Tennessee State University Faculty Senate, February 24, 2014
- Opportunities for Renewal and Reflection During the 2014-15 Academic Year, East Tennessee State University Faculty Senate, September 22, 2014
- East Tennessee State University Faculty Senate Minutes, October 20, 2014
- Middle Tennessee State University Guaranteed Transfer Promise Scholarship webpage
- Tennessee State University Community College Initiatives webpage
Tennessee State University Newsroom: Tennessee State University to Sign Memorandum of Understanding with Southwest Tennessee Community College, September 10, 2014

Tennessee Technological University, Transfer Student Admissions Scholarships webpage

University of Memphis Staff Senate Meeting Minutes, May 15, 2014

University of Memphis Community College Transfer Scholarship Application

Can our community college system honor Tennessee Promise? Tennessee Ledger, November 14, 2014

Austin Peay Responds to Tennessee Promise, WKMS, Murray State’s NPR Station, September 17, 2014

ETSU hoping new scholarships lure new students, Net News Service, October 24, 2014

McPhee reveals new financial aid packages (MTSU), Daily News Journal, September 18, 2014

MTSU adds scholarship money for new students, The Tennessean, September 17, 2014

MTSU launches True Blue Tour of area community colleges, Tennessee Board of Regents website

A final list of all the publicly-accessible documents and local news sources consulted are arranged by university and chronologically. The list is found in Appendix L.
Phase II: Interviews with University Presidents and Provosts

During Summer 2017 I gathered richly detailed information through the interviews that I conducted with eight university presidents and provosts. I recorded field notes as well. Interview questions were used to solicit richly detailed descriptions of the university leaders’ impressions of Tennessee Promise. The questions were carefully crafted to prompt the leaders to discuss their responses to Tennessee Promise, as well as their plans for addressing transfer receptivity. I was interested in how the leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and how they prepared to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

The process of developing and refining the interview questions was guided by Agee’s (2009) reflective process, as well as Yow’s (2005) strategies for questioning. I remained open to further interview question refinement during the document review process. Based on my experiences with the interview process itself, I also was open to adjusting questions. After conducting the first interview, I decided that I needed to adjust my interview protocol’s unstructured questions into semi-structured questions. I discussed this with my dissertation committee chairperson who concurred. I shared the revised protocol with my chair for her review and approval, and then began using it in my second interview.

I converted the unstructured questions with additional embedded follow-up questions into semi-structured questions. The content of the semi-structured questions remained essentially unchanged. I simply expanded the questions to include contextual information in order to prompt the leaders to share their stories better. For example, rather than asking:
What has your institution done and what is it doing to prepare for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers? *Follow up as needed:* What practices have changed in preparation for Tennessee Promise transfers?

I first provided contextual information:

Campus practices include addressing financial aid, as well as communication during outreach, recruitment, and orientation efforts. Additionally, efforts to combat assumptions about student transfers are a part of establishing practices that assist students to succeed.

and then asked the question:

As a leader, how do you motivate your staff to examine and adjust practices that enable your university to serve Tennessee Promise community college student transfers better?

The question revision proved to be effective in eliciting more richly detailed responses.

I changed the question format for two reasons. First, several questions requested specific details about policies, practices, and programs about which a university president or provost might not know all the details. These leaders were focused on the broader issues, so I decided it was best to adjust the questions to focus more broadly on the leaders’ roles in communicating institutional priorities, allocating available resources and leading change. Second, during the first interview the responses to the unstructured interview questions did not yield the richly detailed information I had envisioned during the interviews that I had planned to last approximately one hour each. The original interview protocol with the unstructured questions and follow up questions is found in Appendix F. The revised interview protocol with the semi-structured questions is found
in Appendix G. A matrix (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) mapping the revised interview questions to the research questions is provided in Table 4 found in Appendix H.

I conducted a total of eight interviews; each interview lasted approximately 47 minutes. I interviewed both the president and provost at three universities. I interviewed the provosts at two universities; the two presidents declined to be interviewed. Both the president and the provost at the sixth university declined to be interviewed as well. Patton (2002) indicated the importance of reviewing the recorded data and reflecting upon what was learned following each interview. After each interview, I reviewed the digital recordings to determine whether they were flawed in any way. In all cases, there were no flaws. I arranged for transcriptions to be completed immediately as well. Additionally, detailed field notes based on my recollections of what was said in the interviews and what I observed were completed. Completing this phase of the process in a disciplined manner ensured that the data were ready for data analysis and synthesis.

**Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Using word-processing software and NVivo qualitative data analysis software, I managed and organized the storied data, including university documents and local news sources, interview transcripts, and field notes. I analyzed the data while data collection was underway (Miles et al., 2014). My dissertation chair and I reviewed the first two interview transcripts together for richness and understanding.

Using Roe’s (1994) four-step narrative policy analysis process, I determined the counter stories to the dominant narratives of Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. I also identified the meta-
narratives created by university leaders from the dominant narratives and counter stories. A majority of the university leaders used these metanarratives to make and communicate decisions within the campuses’ shared governance processes. The decisions focused on needed changes in response to Tennessee Promise and plans for providing transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

I coded by using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software and by hand. Using initial codes derived from my conceptual framework and the literature review, along with the storied data with which I engaged, I described patterned themes and applied them to the data set. Adapting and using Anfara et al.’s (2002) code mapping strategy, I provided the initial codes, patterned themes, and application to the data set in Table 5 found in Appendix I. Also, using a matrix of findings and sources for data triangulation (Anfara et al., 2002), I provided a list of the major findings by categories matching the research questions in Table 6 found in Appendix J.

**Ethical Considerations**

Because human subjects participate as the sources of data, institutional review board approval was obtained before conducting the research. The WKU Institutional Review Board approved informed consent document is found in Appendix A. Interview participants were provided the informed consent document and they provided their written consent before the interviews began. Careful consideration was given to negotiating access, building rapport, efficiency, reciprocity and other aspects of conducting data collection (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).
Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was present to the extent that qualitative study methodology and findings are trusted. I carefully attended to “the key considerations of trustworthiness” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) by utilizing strategies for addressing validity and reliability in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling (Miles et al., 2014) enabled me to establish trustworthiness. I also employed four additional strategies, including (a) triangulation of sources, (b) member checks of the interview transcripts, (c) an audit trail, and (d) reflexivity in order to ensure trustworthiness in my study. I addressed transferability as well.

For this study, I used Patton’s (2002) steps to accomplish triangulation of the data sources, including (a) comparing what I observed and recorded in my field notes with what was said in the interviews that I conducted; (b) comparing what was conveyed in public venues, e.g., local news sources, to what was said in private, e.g., interviews; (c) examining the data to see whether what was said was consistent over time, i.e., at the time Tennessee Promise was first announced compared with three years later; (d) considering the different viewpoints expressed by the presidents and provosts, both within the same university and across universities; and (e) reviewing the information conveyed in the interviews to see if it was similar to the information found in the publicly-accessible university documents. Carefully attending to these steps ensured that those who read my study’s results could believe that I relayed what transpired in a trustworthy manner. My matrix of findings and sources for data triangulation (Anfara et al., 2002) is provided in Table 6 found in Appendix J.
In each case, I shared the interview transcription with the leaders whom I interviewed for their member checks. I requested that they review what was transcribed for accuracy and add any additional information that they may have remembered after the interviews (Merriam, 1995). When appropriate, I also requested additional information regarding what was said (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I received three out of eight responses to the member checks that I emailed to the presidents and provosts. I received no additional information from those interviewed. Along with the triangulation of sources, these member checks strengthened the internal validity of my study.

An audit trail was my third strategy. I used the audit trail to provide detailed information about all aspects of my study (Merriam, 1995). Together with triangulation of sources, an audit trail strengthened my study’s reliability. An audit trail excerpt is provided in Appendix K.

Finally, I engaged in reflexivity as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I began this process when I presented my perspectives as a researcher in Chapter I, and continued by stating my researcher assumptions and role as a researcher in Chapter III. At different points during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of this study’s data, I took time to examine and reflect upon my biases as they related to this study as well.

Whether the findings of this study are considered transferable to other universities will need to be determined by readers of the study. I strived to provide rich, thick descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of what I learned about the leaders’ responses to Tennessee Promise and their plans for providing transfer receptivity to the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. The details that I provided should aid readers in deciding whether the study is transferable.
Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations and limitations speak to the restrictions that I set for this study and any outside stipulations that were imposed, respectively (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Two delimitations existed with this study. First, the study was conducted in just one state, Tennessee. Second, the study was limited to six public universities.

A limitation of the study was that by interviewing university presidents and provosts only, any information that may have been provided by the mid-level directors concerning responses to Tennessee Promise and plans to provide transfer receptivity to the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers was not included. Readers will need to determine the extent to which my study’s results may be transferred to other types of institutions and to other states. They will need to consider how the leaders in other types of institutions and in other states use dominant narratives and counter stories to generate metanarratives for making and communicating decisions about policies similar to the Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program.

Summary

Qualitative narrative research was used as the methodology for documenting and describing how the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee public universities responded to Tennessee Promise and planned to provide transfer receptivity to future Tennessee Promise community college students. Using Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis four-step process, I examined the stories conveyed through publicly-accessible university documents and local news sources, along with the stories told by the university leaders during interviews, in order to gain a better understanding of what occurred during Tennessee Promise’s staging and implementation years. The information that I needed to
conduct the study was outlined in this chapter. The research sample, research design and data collection methods, along with data analysis and synthesis, were described as well. Finally, ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness, as well as the limitations and delimitations of the study, were discussed.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis proved to be a useful methodology for examining how the six Tennessee public universities' twelve presidents and provosts responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity. As the various Tennessee public university constituencies shared counter narratives in response to the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise, the university presidents and provosts began creating metanarratives for use in their universities’ decision-making processes. Along with the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise, the university leaders made use of their constituencies’ counter narratives to create the metanarratives to be “‘told’ by the comparison” (Roe, 1994, p. 155). The presidents and provosts also employed these metanarratives as they communicated decisions about institutional priorities and the allocation of resources relating to their universities’ preparations for responding to Tennessee Promise and receiving future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Thus, the leaders led the institutional change that was necessary in response to the advent of the Tennessee Promise policy innovation.

The purpose of this narrative policy analysis based on Roe’s (1994) four-step process was to document and describe how presidents and provosts at six Tennessee public universities responded to the Tennessee Promise, and prepared to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Of interest were the leaders’ narrative stories about this policy innovation and how the innovation contributed to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Employing the theoretical lens of policy innovation and
diffusion, I engaged with the leaders’ storied interviews, local news articles, and
publicly-accessible documents and other information found on the universities’ websites.

The central research question was: How did the presidents and provosts of six
Tennessee public four-year universities respond to Tennessee Promise and prepare to
provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers
who seek to persist and complete degrees? Subquestion one was: How did the presidents
and provosts respond to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation? Subquestion two was:
How did the university leaders prepare to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee
Promise community college student transfers? Subquestion three was: How did the
presidents and provosts plan to ensure future transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise
community college student transfers?

I responded to the research questions using the storied data in publicly-accessible
documents retrieved from the six university websites, local news sources, eight interview
transcripts and field notes. Using initial codes derived from my conceptual framework
and the literature review, along with the storied data with which I engaged, I described
patterned themes and applied them to the data set. I coded the data by using the NVivo
code mapping strategy, I provided the initial codes, patterned themes, and application to
the data set in Table 5 found in Appendix I. Also, using a matrix of findings and sources
for data triangulation (Anfara et al., 2002), I provided a list of the major findings by
categories that match the research questions in Table 6 found in Appendix J.

This chapter contains the study’s findings based on my analysis and interpretation
of the storied data from the sources that I gathered. Because the study’s informed
consent document indicated that identifiable interview comments were to not appear and strict confidentiality was to be maintained, no universities or university leaders are named within these findings. As I obtained informed consent at the beginning of the interviews, and also during the interviews and the member check process, I received follow-up inquiries from several university leaders regarding the need to maintain confidentiality. Therefore, I did not label in any way identifiable, any of the leaders’ comments that were recorded or reported in the interview transcripts, publically-accessible university documents, and local news sources. I simply referred to leaders as “a leader,” “one leader,” or “the third leader” in the example. I also removed the names of the universities or community colleges where they were included and used [the named university] or [the named community college] instead. In making these adjustments in reporting my study’s findings, I honored the informed consent statement and respected the leaders’ wishes.

First, a collective overview of the universities, their leaders, and the universities’ overall enrollment context prior to and during Tennessee Promise’s first two years is presented. Next, I document and describe how leaders engaged in decision-making and communication of decisions through the generation of metanarratives from the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity, along with the counter stories that circulated among the various campus constituencies. The remaining sections of the chapter present the study’s findings, which are arranged and reported by the research questions targeting (a) how the university presidents and provosts responded to Tennessee Promise, including their support for the policy innovation and concerns about its impact, followed by their responses to the policy innovation; (b) how the university leaders planned to provide transfer receptivity to future Tennessee Promise community
college student transfers; and (c) how the presidents and provosts planned to ensure transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers in the future. This chapter ends with a final note about shared governance and a summary highlighting the major findings before moving to a discussion of those findings in Chapter V.

**The Universities, Their Leaders, and the Universities’ Enrollment Context**

This section begins with the six universities’ collective overview, including information about Carnegie classifications and overall enrollment. Next, information is provided about the university presidents and provosts, including longevity in their current positions, their most recent higher education experience, gender, and ethnicity. Finally, the overall enrollment context of the six universities is provided.

**Universities**

The six universities formerly governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) and now local board-governed were established as state normal schools for teacher education during the first two decades of the 20th century. One is now a designated Carnegie doctoral university: higher research activity institution; four are designated Carnegie doctoral universities: moderate research activity institution; and the sixth is a designated Carnegie master’s university: larger programs institution. In Fall 2016 the six universities ranged in headcount between 10,460 and 22,159.

**Leaders**

Among the 12 current presidents and provosts serving at the universities under review, one president has served for over 15 years and one provost has served over 20 years at their respective institutions. The other 10 leaders assumed their current duties
between 2012 and 2015. Two presidents are women and four presidents are men; two are non-white and four are white. One provost is a woman and five provosts are men; two provosts are non-white and four are white.

One president had served as the chancellor in another state higher education system and as an associate executive director at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. A second president had served as a vice chancellor at the Tennessee Board of Regents. The third and fourth presidents had served as Tennessee public university provosts. The fifth president had served as a provost and the sixth president had served as a dean, both at public universities in other states.

One provost had served as a vice chancellor at the Tennessee Board of Regents. A second provost had served as a vice provost and dean at a Tennessee public university. The third provost had served as a provost and the fourth had served as a dean, both at universities in other states. Of the third and fourth provosts, one arrived prior to the announcement of Tennessee Promise. The other arrived two months before Tennessee Promise was implemented in Fall 2015 and built upon the work accomplished by an interim provost who had served since the time that Tennessee Promise was announced. Appointed in 2016 and 2017, the fifth and sixth provosts were interim provosts, one previously serving as an associate provost and the other as a department chair.

These are the leaders who responded to Tennessee Promise. They also planned transfer receptivity for future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

**The Universities’ Enrollment Context**

An examination of the overall enrollment of the six universities between Fall 2006 and Fall 2011 indicated that headcount increased by 15.4% (12,876 students).
However, the overall headcount decreased by 7.5% (7,203 students) between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014 (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2017a). As a result of the state’s transfer, articulation, and completion agenda legislated by the Tennessee Complete College Act of 2010, as well as the additional enrollment decreases that had occurred between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014, the 12 university presidents and provosts were already focusing additional attention to enrollment. Besides bringing tuition dollars to their institutions, enrollment was the crucial first step in fulfilling student progression and completion outcomes that would provide their institutions with additional state funding.

With the announcement of Tennessee Promise in early 2014, the university leaders projected the future impact of this policy innovation on their universities’ enrollment numbers as they pursued their universities’ growth agendas to contribute to Drive to 55.

Students began participating in Tennessee Promise in Fall 2015. By the beginning of the second year of Tennessee Promise, the overall headcount at the six universities had decreased by 2% (1,963 students). While two universities increased headcounts, with one increasing by 3.4% (340 students) and the other by 1.4% (784 students), the other four universities’ headcounts decreased between 2.9% and 8.4%.

Between Fall 2006 and Fall 2016, the enrollment numbers indicated that two universities’ headcounts had decreased by approximately 3%; the third and fourth universities had maintained increases within a range of approximately 4% to 8%; and the fifth and sixth universities had each maintained increases nearly 14% (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2017a).

Enrollment provided the broader context in which leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and addressed transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college
student transfers. Beyond the broader enrollment context, it was important to understand how the leaders were engaging in shared governance and communicating institutional priorities, resource allocation, and the changes that would enable their universities to survive and thrive moving forward. Using Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis, I examined publicly-accessible data to understand what had occurred.

**Counter Stories and the Meta-Narratives Told by Leaders**

Using Roe’s (1994) four-step narrative policy analysis, I identified multiple cases at the six universities under review where the university leaders constructed meta-narratives by using the counter stories that were circulating among the various campus constituencies, along with the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity. Using the meta-narratives, the leaders engaged in decision-making and communication about the need to increase enrollments, including retaining students so that they progressed to degree completion. Using this analysis process was helpful in gaining a better understanding of how the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity was playing out at the universities. Evidence of my narrative policy analysis is provided in the following section.

The first case involved a leader at one of the universities offering associate degree programs. The leader used the dominant narrative, along with counter stories, to generate a meta-narrative for decision-making. The university’s enrollment office was receiving calls about Tennessee Promise. Since the Tennessee Board of Regents had indicated that universities with associate degree programs should not openly recruit or widely advertise their associate degree programs to students receiving Tennessee Promise, the staff needed to know how to respond to inquiries. The shared governance meeting minutes indicated:
[The named university] cannot compare year to year with community colleges – we can’t compete with free. But students can be shown that their 4-year degrees will be less expensive and they will have more opportunities at [the named university] than at a community college. Here they have access to tutoring, study abroad, etc.

Along with the dominant narrative, the leader used the counter stories of “we can’t compete with free” and “here they have access to tutoring, study abroad, etc.” (in fact, the community colleges provide some tutoring and students have access to study abroad opportunities), to generate a metanarrative of “more opportunities” at the university. By considering the metanarrative, a decision was made and communicated that staff should prepare low-key recruitment information and quietly market the university’s associate programs. Soon after, information about use of the Tennessee Promise scholarship began to appear on the University’s website. One of the University’s information webpages included the header “high school students can get a traditional college experience at [the named university] using Tennessee Promise.” Tennessee Promise scholarship eligibility information, a student checklist, and a Tennessee Promise award calculator were all added to the University’s financial aid webpage. Additionally, “What is Tennessee Promise?” information was added to the admissions webpage.

In the second case, a leader addressed assumptions made about community college student transfers when communicating the university’s decision to provide community college graduates with guaranteed transfer student scholarships to the university. As the scholarship was announced, the leader stated:
I’m a community college graduate, having earned an associate’s degree from [the named Tennessee community college], so I know these students have received a quality education. They’ve proven they can succeed in a college environment, and we want to provide them this financial assistance so they can succeed in earning a bachelor’s degree at [the named university].

The counter story implicit in the leader’s message was that some believed students who attended community colleges did not receive a quality education and they would not succeed at the university. Using these counter stories along with the dominant narrative, the leader created a meta-narrative that led to the decision and communications that the university would offer community college graduates the guaranteed transfer scholarships.

In the third case involving discussions about the recruitment of students eligible for Tennessee Promise, a leader expressed concerns about college choice and student under-matching. According to the shared governance meeting minutes:

[The named president] said [s/he] is not opposed to Promise and [her/his] concerns are that students will make an ill-informed college choice decision and they will not make a proper fit.

This leader later stated in the interview that I conducted:

For first-generation college students who have academic ability, I think that those students are being under matched….my fear is that you have first generation, low-income, African-American students who would do very well at [a named university] or here, who are going to under-match.

Along with the dominant narrative, the leader used counter stories of college choice, student fit, and the potential for students with academic abilities to under match, to
generate a meta-narrative that was used in decisions about new upcoming recruitment approaches to help offset the impact of Tennessee Promise and grow enrollment.

In the fourth case in which decisions relating to seamless transfer of course credits were communicated, a leader addressed assumptions made about the education received by community college students. The leader indicated during an interview with a local news source:

The Tennessee Transfer Pathways is a great program and [the named university] is poised to recruit these students…. Over the past year, our Division of Academic Affairs has worked on establishing a seamless process for community college students to transfer to [the named university]. This includes re-establishing relationships with the respective academic divisions for a wider acceptance of credit hours.

This leader used the counter narrative of programs not accepting transferred credits along with dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity, to create the meta-narrative used in communicating about decisions to pursue a more seamless process for community college students to transfer to the university.

The fifth case was of a similar nature to the previous and was recorded in a shared governance meeting minutes covering a discussion of Tennessee Promise and the Tennessee Completion Act:

The Tennessee Pathways were designed to normalize courses across the state to make transferring easier. In good faith, we are obligated to accept things on the pathways. If there are any concerns about the pathways, they need to be addressed and changed at the pathways level and not just at our institution.
Along with dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity, the leader stated the counter narrative of whether an individual campus was able to adjust transfer pathways as it might wish in order to generate the meta-narrative. Reiterating the decision that was made at the pathway level and the need to follow it in good faith, the leader indicated that decisions addressing and changing pathways needed to go through the proper channels.

In the sixth case, a leader shared information about a potential collaborative partnership with two nearby community colleges. It became clear that members of the university community took issue with this possibility. According to the shared governance meeting minutes, the leader relayed:

[The named university] may begin assisting administratively with [the named community college] and [the named community college] to form a multi-institution collaboration. This decision is with the [TBR] Chancellor now to determine how things progress from here. [The Named leader] acknowledges that it is not our goal to be in the community college business, but [the leader] points out we have a significant interest to ensure that community colleges do well in our town, especially if their students continue their educational career with us. This is still in the infancy stages, but [the leader] wanted to notify [the specific campus body] that this may be something coming for the university. Some [members of the body] raised concern about stepping in when TBR should be assisting community colleges and about getting involved again in developmental education.

The leader was incorporating the counter story of not wanting to take on business normally residing with community colleges along with the dominant narrative of transfer
receptivity to point out the metanarrative of the university interest in community college student transfers.

On several occasions, one leader directly addressed counter stories about grade inflation, watering down academic programs, or diminishing academic rigor or academic standards. The leader created a meta-narrative to communicate about the decisions made and additional resources allocated for expanding student success and retention initiatives, which were designed to serve both native students and student transfers. Following are some excerpts of what was recorded in shared governance meeting minutes and reported in local news sources:

[The named leader] said that the [the named student success and retention plan] was not going to compromise academic standards. [The leader] said that the plan was for [the named university] to help students who are making an effort. This emphasis on retention and graduation is not code for grade inflation. It’s the right thing to do. And it’s also perfectly aligned with the goals of the Tennessee General Assembly and governor’s office. As [the body’s members] at [the named university], I know you are on board with this emphasis.

It is important to note that these new ideas do not include watering down academic programs or relaxing rigor. We have a moral imperative to not only enhance the present academic experience but to also continue to add value to the degrees already obtained by our alumni. Thus, we are not lowering the bar; we are – in many instances – raising the standard for all of us, including students.

Speaking of the changing higher education landscape, the leader indicated the urgency of preparing for the future, stating “the results will take time but we cannot afford to take
our time.’’ This leader also stated ‘‘there is no consideration that once some students are enrolled, they shouldn’t be here.’’ The leader was consistent and persistent in the messages delivered during the three years under review in this study.

In the final case, a university leader used a counter narrative to characterize the university’s decision regarding the recruitment of any Tennessee Promise students. A shared governance meeting minutes and a local news source reported that the leader indicated:

Generally, students being affected by this [Tennessee Promise] program are not those who we are targeting for our institution. Only about 75-100 students at the [the named university] were affected. Over the long run it will be a benefit for us, because after 2 years it actually broadens the pool of students available for us to recruit.

It [Tennessee Promise] will also lay the foundation for a greater number of students to transition to four-year colleges and universities like [the named university].

Tennessee Promise will provide a ‘‘great opportunity’’ for students who might not have gone previously. The program is so well structured we may lose some freshmen but will pick up some transfers.

The leader used the counter narrative that these students were not the university’s students, but they may be able to attend later. This was an interesting counter narrative to consider in juxtaposition with the counter narrative in which the leader was concerned that students were under matching in their college choices.
The previous analysis provided an understanding of the environments in which the leaders were operating. The cases served to inform the ways in which the university leaders were addressing the assumptions being made about Tennessee Promise students and Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Leaders also were responding to reactions by campus constituencies about expanding student recruitment, enrollment, and retention efforts, as well as the modification of scholarships, the expansion of university partnerships with community colleges, and other changes. Along with the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity, these assumptions and reactions were the counter stories that the leaders used to construct meta narratives. They then used these metanarratives in making and communicating decisions about the need to increase enrollments and retain students who would progress to degree completion.

Several of the university leaders spent a great deal of time educating campus constituencies about the changes that were occurring and what would be necessary for the universities to survive and thrive in the future. In the words of one leader, “We are working in an environment defined by change.” This leader also stated:

The purpose of Promise is access. We can either stand over in the corner and complain about Promise taking 10% of our freshman class, or we can look at doing business differently, and we attempted to take the path of looking at doing business differently.

What follows are this study’s major findings in response to the research questions, beginning with the questions that addressed the university leaders’ responses to Tennessee Promise.
University Leaders Respond to Tennessee Promise

In this section, I respond to the first part of the central research question: How did the six Tennessee public four-year universities and their presidents and provosts respond to Tennessee Promise? and the first subquestion: How did the presidents and provosts respond to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation? The major findings included (a) the leaders’ support for the policy innovation but concern over its impact on their universities and students; (b) the modification and addition of scholarships reflecting the effort to retain students who lost HOPE scholarship dollars, as well as recruit and enroll Tennessee Promise students and future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers; and (c) the extension of community college partnerships to recruit future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

In my analysis leading to this section’s findings, I accomplished triangulation of the sources by (a) comparing what was conveyed in public venues, e.g., local news sources, to what was said in private, e.g., interviews; (b) examining the data to see if what was said was consistent over time, i.e., at the time Tennessee Promise was first announced compared with three years later; (c) considering the different viewpoints expressed by the presidents and provosts, both within the same university and across universities; and (d) reviewing the information conveyed in the interviews to see if it was similar to the information found in the publicly-accessible university documents.

Leaders’ Support

Soon after Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam announced Tennessee Promise in early February 2014, the university leaders began responding to the policy innovation. The leaders were responding to the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise within the
larger enrollment context in which they found themselves. While all of the university leaders expressed their support for Tennessee Promise, they also expressed concerns about the challenges that were faced by the four-year universities and their students.

All of the leaders indicated their support of Tennessee Promise. The leaders shared their impressions of how the policy innovation expanded access to postsecondary education and diversified the student population. Tennessee Promise prompted a conversation among Tennesseans regarding the possibility of going to college. The leaders believed that, by offering Tennessee Promise, the state was emphasizing the importance of education and the program would aid in boosting the state’s economy.

While a majority of the leaders believed that the policy innovation led to increases in enrollment, the leaders also thought it was too early to know Tennessee Promise’s impact on degree completion. They indicated the policy innovation worked to increase enrollment due to the publicity. Finally, they shared the impact of Tennessee Promise on their institutions and university students. What follows are the detailed impressions of Tennessee Promise that the leaders conveyed through publicly-accessible university documents and local news sources, as well as during the interviews with the leaders that I conducted.

**Broadening access for a more diverse student population.** Most of the leaders pointed out that the Tennessee Promise policy innovation broadened access to postsecondary education for Tennesseans. One leader stated:

> Historically in Tennessee, we've had a tendency on some occasions to say we don't educate people well enough, and then on other occasions we recognize that we don't educate enough people. I think Tennessee Promise is in my memory one
of the most significant commitments to access for higher education of any initiative that I can recall. I think that the issue of cost and escalating cost is a widely discussed factor in access, and I think the degree to which Tennessee Promise addresses that in a systematic way relative to the free community college tuition for Tennessee students, I think it is a significant opportunity.

With Tennessee Promise, the state committed to addressing financial cost in order to provide broader access for more of its citizens to attend college. Another leader spoke to the more diverse student population who will now enter college as a result of Tennessee Promise. Specifically, the leader stated that “the governor’s initiative will bring a more diverse student population, e.g., more Hispanic students and first-generation students, and potentially add more transfer students.” Access to postsecondary education for students and their families who had not been in a position to consider it before was on many of the leaders’ minds. Emphasizing the perspective of students for whom college previously was not an option, another leader said:

It has been well received by students many of whom may not have considered going into higher education but now they've at least taken a look at that and we've seen the fruits of that I believe. One of the things that I think Promise did was there were a lot of people that thought a higher education credential or degree was just out of reach, you know, financially…."Hey listen, we will ensure that you can go to school if you want to regardless of your socio-economic background," I think that's why it's working well and now we have more people looking at it. And of course, we've opened it up to adults, Tennessee residents. When you can provide financial incentives for folks to go to school, I think they will take
advantage of it and that's probably why we're seeing at least the initial surge in the number of students so far.

Tennessee Promise opened opportunities for more students to consider going to college. Based on what I heard the university leaders say, when the state officials legislated Tennessee Promise they changed the conversation about going to college among Tennesseans.

**Changing the conversation about going to college.** Several leaders spoke about how Tennessee Promise had changed the conversation about going to college. One leader posited:

What Promise has done is it’s changed the dinner table conversation because it’s easy to understand. There were students who never would have gone to college who qualified for the Pell because it was too complicated. But by saying Tennessee Promise makes it free, then that has changed the dinner table conversation. That is why you saw 4,000 more students enroll in college last year than the year prior. That’s why we had the single largest increase in college-going rates since they’ve been measuring college-going rate.

Tennessee Promise also changed the conversation among teachers and high school guidance counselors. According to one leader:

What Tennessee Promise did was change the conversation, because a lot of students didn’t know that they could go to college. They didn’t understand how much aid was available to them. What Tennessee Promise really did, was put the word “free” out there….and [it] really changed the mindset of not only students
but teachers [and] high school guidance counselors to have the conversations that
you can [go]. You can expect to go. You’ll have help to go.

Because of the Tennessee Promise free college scholarship and mentoring program, the
idea of affordability began to resonate in conversations among Tennesseans. The state
was indicating that education was important through its Drive to 55, Tennessee Promise,
and the other postsecondary education initiatives yet to come.

**Indicating that education is important.** More than one leader believed that, by
offering Tennessee Promise, the state was saying education was important. A single
leader’s statement captured this idea:

What Tennessee is saying to its residents is that education is important, and for
you to have your best hope to provide for your family, to contribute to the
economy, to have that life of choices going forward, you really need to have some
kind of education. It could be a bachelor’s degree, an associate’s degree, a
certificate. It could be a TCAT, you know, Tennessee College of Applied
Technology program certificate. The point is, you really need to have some sort
of advanced training and education to succeed in the current and future markets
that we’re expecting. So, I think it’s successful because Tennessee is making it a
priority. And, if that funnels down to all the families, I mean it’s truly
transformative, if you think about it.

By expanding access to college and making it more affordable, the state aimed to develop
the economy and improve quality of life.
Improving economic development. The university leaders believed Tennessee Promise supported economic development in Tennessee. In a news interview, a leader said:

Considering Tennessee has one of the nation’s lowest rates for students pursuing postsecondary education, any initiative designed to increase college attendance bolsters the state and helps it attract new industry.

During one of my interviews, another leader who was involved in local recruiting efforts with economic and community development stated:

The emphasis that Tennessee has placed on education [including Tennessee Promise], on higher education in recent years, is also paying off in very substantial ways in terms of economic development. I’ve been pretty heavily involved in a number of recruiting efforts with economic and community development. The fact that Tennessee was putting such an emphasis on education at all levels, it sort of sealed the deal for them.

Tennessee Promise was playing a vital role in Governor Haslam’s Drive to 55 campaign in which 55% of Tennessee adults need to hold a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2025. An educated populace was viewed as critical to economic development and quality of life in the state of Tennessee.

Increasing postsecondary enrollment. On the one hand, most of the leaders whom I interviewed believed that Tennessee Promise was increasing postsecondary enrollment. On the other hand, all of the leaders whom I interviewed believed the verdict was still out on degree completion after just two years. According to one leader:
I clearly think it’s increasing enrollment. The numbers that THEC released last year were a 4,000 student increase. Where you’re really seeing the enrollment increases are in Nashville and then at the TTCs [TCATS]. If there were more space in the TCATS, I think you’d see even more of an impact with Tennessee Promise.

Another leader indicated:

It’s clearly had a very positive impact on the rate of college attendance from high school graduates initially, and it’s still early, two years into it. There’s a lot of settling that’s still taking place, and I’m not sure where it’s going to end up, but for now the results have been very positive overall.

A third leader shared:

It’s my understanding that many of the community colleges in the state of Tennessee increased their freshmen enrollment….and TCATs also experienced a lot of growth…. In terms of degree completion, we’re just seeing those numbers now because the Promise has just finished its second year. We’ll know more what the transfer situation is when we get our final numbers.

However, a fourth leader pointed out that, if you look at the raw total number of students, Tennessee Promise may not have had quite the impact that some imagined. The leader continued to make the point:

Since 2011, the state of Tennessee has been declining in enrollment of higher education. So, if you had four years of decline, and even if you quit declining, that’s probably a net increase over your trajectory. So, I think part of the impact of Tennessee Promise was in arresting a decline and flattening out, and then
depending on the particular area, some increases. So, I think, you know, obviously if they had done it in a time of, you know, growth, it probably would’ve had a better impact.

The declining enrollment about which the leader spoke was due to the diminishing number of high school graduates. Tennessee Promise had just helped to stop the decline. Although it was a bit premature, I also was interested in how the university presidents and provosts initially perceived Tennessee Promise’s impact on degree completion.

**Impacting degree completion is still unknown.** All of the leaders believed the verdict was still out on degree completion. One leader stated:

> We’re just seeing those numbers now because the Promise has just finished its second year. We’ll know more what the transfer situation is. Right now, we’re up in transfers for fall, but until we get our final numbers, you know they don’t mean anything. So you’ll have to check that when the numbers are in.

In the second part of that statement, the leader was referring to the total number of transfers and not just the Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Of course, separating out the number of Tennessee Promise community college student transfers from the number of non-Tennessee Promise transfers will fall to the state higher education office to calculate.

During our interview, this unique opportunity was mentioned by a leader who indicated:

> This is just a beautiful time in that you have the implementation of a pure treatment. So you've got all the research on the front end. You've got the application of the treatment, and then you've got the research on the back end. I
just hope THEC is as open and transparent with their research on Promise as they were with their research on the Lottery.

Speaking of degree completion, another leader indicated community college students typically take longer than two years to complete associates degrees. The leader said:

If you assume that these students are going to go to two-year institutions and then looking out to the present that's suddenly going to impact our enrollment, I think that doesn't recognize the course taking habits of community college students, nor the financial capability of students. Many of these students, it's very difficult for them to take heavy loads, and it's very difficult for them to finish on time along the way.

Given that community college students typically took longer than two years to complete their two-year degrees, this university leader, and perhaps the other leaders as well, did not count on an immediate increase in enrollment in Fall 2017. They were basing their impressions on their past experiences with student transfers, as well as the number of Tennessee Promise students who enrolled in Fall 2015.

**Working due to the publicity.** The leaders targeted the publicity generated about Tennessee Promise as one of the primary reasons that Tennessee Promise worked. One leader indicated that “what Promise is, is an outstanding PR and marketing initiative more than anything else.” Discussing why they believe Tennessee Promise was working, in one leader’s words, “just the publicity of it. You know, you can’t go anywhere in Tennessee almost, and not hear about Tennessee Promise.” Another leader added, “when you visit the high schools, Tennessee Promise is, the posters are everywhere. School principals have mandated FAFSA completion.” Two leaders mentioned the importance
of the mentoring process. One ended by observing that it was up to students to follow through.

While university leaders supported Tennessee Promise and thought that it broadened access, increased postsecondary enrollment, and impacted economic development, they believed the policy innovation’s impact on degree completion was still unknown. The leaders also expressed concern over Tennessee Promise’s potential impact on their universities and students.

Leaders’ Concerns

A majority of the leaders expressed concerns about Tennessee Promise’s impact on their students and universities. They were concerned about students and institutional fit. They also worried that university students impacted by the HOPE scholarship dollar loss would transfer out of their universities to community colleges or other institutions, or they would drop out. Looking ahead, they also indicated their concerns about whether students would receive financial assistance as they transitioned to the universities to further their education. What follows are the detailed concerns the leaders conveyed through publicly-accessible university documents and local news sources, as well as during the interviews with the leaders that I conducted.

Students and institutional fit. While Tennessee Promise was positively impacting students by providing access, leaders were concerned about students and institutional fit. One leader stated:

Promise is moving people around, and it’s moving people around in positive ways and in not-so-positive ways. The positive ways are students who were not predisposed to go to college because it was too complicated, it wasn’t possible, it
wasn’t affordable - those barriers have been removed. On the other side of the continuum is for the first-generation college students who have academic ability, I think that those students are being under-matched.

In no way did the university leaders convey the idea that community colleges or their leaders were less able to serve students. Rather, this concern about institutional fit prompted several leaders to direct their universities to continue recruiting those Tennessee Promise students whom they believed their universities could serve well.

**HOPE scholarship dollar loss.** Several leaders also voiced major concern over the loss of $1,000 in HOPE scholarship monies by those students who chose to attend universities during their first two years of college. This reduction in HOPE lottery merit-aid money had been legislated along with Tennessee Promise to shift state dollars and students to the community colleges where it was less expensive for students to attend.

One leader said:

> In a state that has a low educational attainment rate such as Tennessee, no one can argue against providing greater access…. however, we need to keep a close eye on one element of the proposal: Cutting the lottery scholarship by $1,000 for freshmen and sophomores at four-year schools, then increasing it by $1,000 when they become juniors and seniors. Two or three hundred dollars can make a difference in terms of whether a student comes or stays at [the named university]. Putting that burden back on students and their families could prove a tough hurdle, [the named leader] added, and could cause some students to consider dropping out or forgo attending a four-year university.
This dollar loss was a major concern for at least two of the universities. The loss would prompt some of the leaders to consider whether to supplement the loss of HOPE dollars.

**Financial assistance for transitioning to universities.** Looking ahead, a university leader expressed the desire to “see better assistance for students who decide to make the transition to a four-year school.” Similarly, another leader shared:

This would have been a heavy lift financially, but my only regret is that they couldn’t extend Tennessee Promise to four-year institutions as well. I think that would make an even bigger difference in the long run.

These concerns, along with the impetus to recruit Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, likely led university leaders to consider extending scholarships to these future student transfers. Within the broader context of recruitment and enrollment, Tennessee Promise community college student transfers were needed by the universities.

**Enrollment challenge for the universities.** Several leaders referred to the challenge the policy innovation had presented for their universities with regard to enrollment. In capturing this idea, one leader stated:

It’s been a challenge, I think, for pretty much all the four-year institutions because of the shift in enrollment behavior, and so there’s been some adjustments that have had to be made on our part. But in the long run, it should be very beneficial.

While the leaders recognized the challenge they faced, most of them believed Tennessee Promise was the right thing to do. Summing up, a leader stated:

I think as you look at the landscape of higher education in the State of Tennessee, Promise has been among the most transformative policy initiatives that have been launched in the state since the creation of the community college system in the
1970s. It just changed the game. It changed the rules of engagement. It changed the way students and parents think and talk about college. It changed the way in which universities recruit. It was a disruptive initiative…. The whole country’s looking to the things that we're doing, and as much as Promise has been a royal pain in the neck, it was the right thing to do. I mean, it would’ve been a lot easier for everything to stay the way it was, but I think it's going to make us better institutions because we're having to work harder.

With respect to Tennessee Promise, the leaders were concerned about students and institutional fit and students would suffer from the HOPE scholarship dollar reduction. They also recognized the enrollment challenge the universities faced. These concerns expressed by university leaders provided me with an understanding of Tennessee Promise’s impact on the four-year universities and their students. What follows are the leaders’ responses to offsetting the potential impact.

**Leaders’ Responses to Offset the Impact**

The Tennessee Board of Regents staff estimated that the six universities would potentially lose approximately 2,000 of the students who had expressed interest in the universities due to Tennessee Promise. Along with a diminishing number of high school graduates and the declining university enrollments experienced since 2011, this projected loss meant that university leaders needed to decide how to stop the decline and stabilize enrollment, then continue to grow enrollment. Since the universities were primarily measured and funded by how many students progressed and completed degrees, the leaders needed to recruit and enroll students, and then retain them in order for their universities to survive and thrive moving forward.
The broader context for decision-making in responding to the impact of Tennessee Promise was recruitment, enrollment, and retention. This was borne out in the large number of recruitment, enrollment, and retention updates I found in the publicly-accessible documents from the six universities’ websites, as well as several local news sources I examined. One leader stated that “much of our work focused on offsetting the impacts of Tennessee Promise.” This policy innovation situated within this broader enrollment context also was evident during my interviews with the leaders. According to one leader:

If you go back to the time the [Tennessee Promise] legislation was passed three years or so ago, the challenge was looking at what are long-term impacts, longer-term impacts, and what are shorter-term impacts.

A second leader stated that “enrollment has become the number one priority at the university. There is a never-ending, daily push on enrollment.” Within the university documents and local news sources, I also found the leaders included recruitment of future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers in their plans. One leader indicated:

We are aggressively addressing student enrollment and retention with a detailed plan and focus on community colleges. Over the past year, our Division of Academic Affairs has worked on establishing a seamless path for community college students to transfer to [the named university].

Another leader stated, “our intent is to provide a quality, affordable option to students seeking a four-year university experience, while also reaching out to students seeking a
transfer destination that helps them reach their goals.” These student transfers were to play a role in increasing enrollment growth at the public universities.

In responding to the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise, the university leaders used the counter narrative of the loss of students to their universities to generate meta-narrative/s for use in making and communicating decisions about offsetting the impact of Tennessee Promise. Leaders ramped up recruitment efforts at their institutions to cover the loss of students over the next few years. Seeking to maintain momentum, they used different strategies to expand and diversify their recruitment bases in order to grow enrollment. The leaders considered their universities’ missions, locations, and any nearby institutions, e.g., community colleges, with whom they might partner, as they contemplated which approaches yielded students to recruit and enroll at their universities. They continued to recruit the Tennessee Promise students for whom they believed their universities to be the best fit. They also made preparations to recruit the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. These strategies were the leaders’ metanarratives they used in deciding to leverage scholarships and community college partnerships to offset the potential loss of students due to Tennessee Promise.

Leveraging scholarships and community college partnerships also contributed to their plans for providing transfer receptivity for future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

**Modifying and adding scholarships.** One way leaders stabilized enrollment and maintained momentum toward enrollment growth was to consider modifying and adding scholarships in order to target student populations the universities wanted to recruit and
enroll. In the case of one university, leaders examined their university’s entire scholarship portfolio. One of this university’s leaders stated during the interview:

We’ve in the last year done a complete review of our scholarship portfolio. I think that doing that gives you an opportunity to look at is your scholarship policy really reinforcing your enrollment plan. I think that as we look at some of the kinds of programs that have emerged, in some instances it's tweaks, in other instances it's new programs. I think there are opportunities for using student financial aid vis-à-vis scholarships as a policy that is more amenable to the transfer student.

In a local news source, the university’s other leader indicated the changes were made because of the university’s “need to grow and diversify.” Based on my document review and the interviews conducted, I determined that a majority of the university leaders adjusted their universities’ scholarships. A number of the universities modified their current transfer scholarships or added new transfer scholarships designed to target the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Two universities also added scholarships designed to offset the HOPE scholarship dollar reduction that was legislated by the Tennessee Promise Act of 2014. Along with the associate’s degree programs offered by two of the universities, these scholarships enabled the universities to offset some of the loss of students that was potentially due to the Tennessee Promise free college scholarship and mentoring program.

**Supplementing HOPE scholarship dollar reduction.** University leaders needed to consider how to deal with the impact of lost HOPE scholarship dollars by their universities’ first- and second-year students. A number of the first- and second-year
students statewide were potentially affected by this reduction. For example, over 800 of the students attending one of the larger universities received the Hope Scholarship. The Tennessee Promise Act of 2014 stipulated the HOPE scholarship be reduced by $500 each year during a full-time student’s freshman and sophomore years. Along with the Tennessee Promise scholarship, this further incentivized students to shift to community colleges due to the extra cost of attending one of the universities.

While students would benefit from an increase in HOPE scholarship monies during their junior and senior years, university leaders were concerned their losing money in the first two years could result in students (a) shifting from the universities to the community colleges, (b) dropping out of school because they lacked needed funds to attend, or (c) working additional hours while in school to cover costs. If students shifted to the community colleges or dropped out of school, the universities would experience further decreases in enrollment and in funding that included tuition and state dollars. If students worked additional hours while in school, it would become harder to retain them because they would have fewer hours to devote to their academic work.

According to shared governance meeting minutes, one university leader asked those attending for their thoughts on supplementing the HOPE scholarship reduction. A second university’s shared governance meeting minutes indicated the leader said:

Tennessee Promise will impact number of students who attend university on lottery scholarships; purchasing power of lottery scholarships was reduced by TN Promise so we have to respond from a scholarship perspective; we have responsibility to sit down and demonstrate to students the level of financial support we can provide as a university.
The leaders at two universities decided to provide supplements covering Hope lottery scholarship dollar reductions for students during their first two years at the universities.

According to local news sources, the first university’s leader reported:

[The named university] will supplement HOPE Lottery Scholarships by $1,000 for incoming students who stay on track to graduate in four years, and this leader also upped the ante:

And pay a [the named scholarship] to graduating seniors [who graduate on time in four years] that will return any tuition increases over the span…. Under the plan, [the named university] will pay $500 to students receiving the HOPE scholarship after each of their first two years.

This additional scholarship, which incentivized students to graduate on time in four years, was designed to encourage students to stay on track since it would become harder to continue beyond the fourth year once their HOPE scholarships and other aid were depleted. Leaders at this university also were concerned about students with academic ability under matching. As one leader at this university stated:

We certainly understand there are some students who should go to a two-year [school]; it makes sense for them for all sorts of reasons. But I think we also are aware that there are some students who might be lured by the so-called free tuition at community colleges who really would be better off coming here. So we’ve been making an effort to gingerly bring up that topic at recruiting events…. We need to talk about what we do and the benefits that we offer students and then let the students and their families figure it out for themselves.

These scholarships enabled this university to recruit Tennessee Promise students as well.
The second university’s leader also decided to follow up in providing first- and second-year university students with a $1,000 Promise scholarship supplement to replace the HOPE scholarship reduction. The leader was able to recruit Tennessee Promise students with the Promise scholarship supplement. According to shared governance meeting notes, as well as what I was told during the interview, the leader visited a large number of high schools and explained to students, their parents, and teachers how close in cost it was for a student to attend the university compared to attending a community college. This was due to the fact that Tennessee Promise was a last-dollar scholarship and students could use their Pell, HOPE, and other scholarship grants and awards at either institution. In this way, the leader was able to recruit and enroll Tennessee Promise students.

The two universities implementing these HOPE scholarship supplements were projected to lose between 500 and 1,000 Tennessee Promise students. Therefore, the scholarship supplements were likely a good investment leading interested students to think twice about shifting to community colleges rather than attend these universities. Additionally, the first university’s second scholarship that offset any tuition increases for graduating seniors who progressed to complete their degrees in four years was an additional incentive to attend there.

The third and fourth universities’ leaders decided not to cover students’ HOPE scholarship reduction. Shared governance meeting minutes indicated that the third university’s leader reported:

It is unclear how Tennessee Promise will affect us, but early application counts show us down in freshman applications at the low ACT range, which seems to be
the trend across other universities. It could be attributed to the Tennessee Promise, but it is unclear at this point.

In similar fashion, shared governance meeting minutes recorded that the fourth university’s leader said “generally students being affected by this [Tennessee Promise] program are not those who we are targeting for our institution. Only about 75-100 students at [the named university] are affected.” The third and fourth universities’ leaders may not have been expecting student losses of the magnitude that the leaders of the first two universities were anticipating.

The fifth and sixth universities offered associate degree programs that attracted and accommodated Tennessee Promise students. They were able to offset some of Tennessee Promise’s potential impact through student enrollment in these programs. The fifth university offered associate of applied science degree programs in engineering technology and management technology, as well as an associate of science degree in liberal arts. Between Fall 2014 and Fall 2016 when Tennessee Promise had been implemented two years, the engineering technology program had grown from 51 to 88 students; the management technology associate degree program had declined from 63 to 60 students; and the liberal arts program had grown from 101 to 1,066 students. A leader at the fifth university indicated:

We’re adjusting institutionally to this just huge change. Now, that will help us eventually as those kids start getting associate degrees, let’s say after two years, and then go on to get a bachelor’s. We will basically get two degrees in four years instead of one. The funding formula in Tennessee doesn’t distinguish between associate and bachelors. So, they’re both equal.
While the precise number of Tennessee Promise students who enrolled in the associate of science degree with a major in liberal arts program was not known, this program increased its number of enrolled students during this two-year timeframe.

The sixth university offered associate of applied science degree programs in dental hygiene and nursing. Unsuccessful searches of both the university’s and the state-level higher education offices’ websites were conducted for publicly-accessible information about the enrollment numbers for the two associate degree programs. However, as several of the leaders whom I interviewed pointed out, programs of this nature had a finite number of seats in them and it would take time and resources to expand the programs’ capacities.

*Providing scholarships for student transfers.* As indicated, a number of the universities modified their current transfer scholarships or added new transfer scholarships designed to target the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Prior to Tennessee Promise, the transfer scholarships offered by Tennessee public universities tended to be competitive and limited in number. After Tennessee Promise, several of the universities shifted from competitive scholarships to guaranteed transfer scholarships.

While a number of the universities chose to target the high-achieving community college graduates with the guaranteed transfer scholarships, one university provided guaranteed transfer scholarships to any Tennessee community college students who had earned between 45 and 105 credit hours and achieved a GPA of 3.0. This university chose not to exclude students without an associate’s degree. Another university added 10 new community college transfer scholarships that were to be used by a specific
community college’s students. Yet another university shared the expectation that student receiving a community college graduate transfer scholarship should participate in high impact practices designed to integrate them into the university.

It was clear that leaders considered transfer scholarships important in preparing to provide transfer receptivity to the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. As the university leaders announced the new transfer scholarships, they also made trips to the community colleges to offer these scholarships to students and meet with college officials. One leader whom I interviewed stated:

We went to community colleges in the state. It was a signal to say, we’ve always been interested in transfer students, because a lot of our students are nontraditional to begin with, but we want you to know that we’re also making a financial commitment, and started a scholarship program to receive the community college students who graduated with associate degrees to [the named university]. We’ve been preparing for this program from day one.

Beyond leveraging scholarships to attract student transfers and cover the HOPE scholarship dollar reduction, the leaders extended their community college partnerships. These community college partnerships also laid an important transfer receptive foundation for recruiting future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

**Extending community college partnerships.** Historically, the six Tennessee public universities under review worked with community colleges to help students continue their education toward a baccalaureate degree. Most recently, the Tennessee Complete College Act of 2010 legislated that the universities and community colleges
work on articulation and transfer policies together. As a result, several of the universities already were partnering with community colleges.

Once Tennessee Promise was announced, university leaders set out to strengthen their universities’ relationships with the community colleges. In an interview, one university leader spoke of:

The conversations that began almost three years ago, with our visits to the community college presidents that were available. We met with presidents and provosts, and in some cases, student affairs people and others, and talked to them about their students, and their goals, and to see what they were looking for, and how we could be responsive. And so, just building that relationship, and also identifying any problems that were known to those individuals that we could address for transfer students who were coming in.

This university president and senior administrative staff visited all of the community colleges in the months following the announcement of Tennessee Promise. The leader also extended scholarships to future Tennessee Promise community college graduates who were preparing to transfer to a university to pursue baccalaureate degrees. In my interviews with the university’s other leader, I learned the university planned to offer academic programming that would serve the students attending community colleges as well. A university staff position had been reassigned to work with the community colleges. Beginning with a specific community college, the staff member was to explore what two-year program would benefit from extending a university-level academic program taught at the community college using the cohort model. This effort eventually would extend to other community colleges and not be limited by geographic area.
Another university placed additional emphasis on extending its partnerships with community colleges by establishing an office to lead the community college initiative out of the university’s academic affairs division. Using several local news sources throughout 2014, the university leader announced this new community college initiative that “aimed at creating a seamless transition of two-year degree holders to [the named university], in the face of the new Tennessee Promise.” Based on further information shared in another news interview, the leader stated:

We have increased our internal focus on the community college initiative, and we are currently coordinating with several of the state’s community colleges to enhance [named university’s] position as one of choice for these potential students. [Named university] has embraced the community college initiative that the Tennessee Board of Regents has established to provide ongoing education, or to complement and/or to offer courses that help fulfill the associate degree.

The initiative aided the university in establishing additional community college partnerships which included “regular and sustained advising, mentoring and early identification to improve student outcomes.” Dual admissions and 2 + 2 programs, which were part of the university’s five community college partnerships already mentioned, were cited as well. During the rest of that year, two new partnerships emerged out of this new initiative. The first partnership addressed additional transfer pathways. It also included 10 new STEM scholarships for community college student transfers. The second partnership focused on reverse transfer and included dual admission as well. As a result, the university had seven partnerships established, and it would continue work to secure agreements with the remaining six community colleges in the coming year. These
partnerships prepared the university to recruit Tennessee Promise community college student transfers more easily in the future.

A third university intentionally extended prior established partnerships with nearby community colleges by placing embedding advisors on the community college campuses. Joint enrollment also was among the strategies employed. One of the university leaders whom I interviewed indicated:

One of the very first things we did when we saw Promise moving was to sit down with the leadership at both [the named community colleges] and say, “what can we do to ensure that this is successful for everyone?” …. We’ve done some things around marketing, but the bulk of what we’ve tried to do is to create personnel mechanisms and policy mechanisms that support students…. I doubt anyone in the state’s close to our joint enrollment numbers.

When I asked the university’s other leader about this, the leader shared:

If you look at some of the strategies, we're consciously increasing our placement of advisors on community college campuses…. I think that will be a strategy that will be successful. I think also if we look at the time that our transfer advisors, I'm talking about our admissions counselors, are spending at community colleges and in those areas, the conscious increasing of that as a result of the population is going to be a strategy.

The potential for the student to connect to the university was key. The first leader said:

The embedded advisor is able to connect them before they ever get here with clubs and organizations. So for a student who is at [the named community college] who wants to come here, the more that we can do to help plug them in
before they ever arrive, the higher probability that they’re going to have an outstanding experience at the campus. So that’s why this focus on joint enrollment, for me, is so critical because it’s providing that connection point before they get here. And then it’s really not a 2 + 2. So many of the students have dual-enrollment hours, so those dual-enrollment hours, they may only be at [the named community college] for a year before they come [to the university].

These two leaders clearly worked in tandem on their university’s behalf. Together, they planned strategies with the community college leaders to seamlessly recruit and enroll the student transfers from the local community colleges into the university.

At a fourth university, one of the university’s leader said, “We will actually be there with them [community college student transfers] giving them an opportunity to be a part of [the named university], even before they transfer.” The university’s other leader described the effort:

I think we're being more intentional about how we recruit. We're making more of an effort to go to the community colleges. We have [the named event], I think that's what we call it. There'll be a day in which counselors and deans and admissions people will go to, not every community college, but our major feeder schools, and really make an effort to show the flag, help them understand about [the named university], answer questions about that. So that's really only been going on a couple of years. I think you could attribute that, in large part, to Tennessee Promise.

This university designated transfer recruiters and transfer admissions specialists.

University teams visited eight community colleges to provide workshops highlighting
reverse transfer and transfer pathways. They accommodated students who were interested in dual admission status so they might enroll in classes at the university and also participate in campus activities, including athletics and cultural events.

While the full impact of Tennessee Promise was still unknown, the university leaders began leveraging scholarships and extending their partnerships with community colleges to prepare the way to recruit future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. As they remained focused on student recruitment and enrollment, the leaders also worked to address and provide transfer receptivity for all students, including the students who would finish at community colleges and then transfer to universities.

**University Leaders Plan to Provide Transfer Receptivity**

In this section, I respond to the second part of the central research question: How did the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee public four-year universities prepare to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers who seek to persist and complete degrees? and the second subquestion: How did the university leaders prepare to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers? The major findings were (a) the leaders’ commitment to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers; (b) the expansion of retention efforts to include student transfers; and (c) the assessment of policies, practices, and programs.

In my analysis leading to this section’s findings, I accomplished triangulation of the sources by (a) comparing what I observed and recorded in my field notes with what was said in the interviews that I conducted; (b) examining the data to see if what was said was consistent over time, i.e., at the time Tennessee Promise was first announced
compared with three years later; (c) considering the different viewpoints expressed by the presidents and provosts, both within the same university and across universities; and (d) reviewing the information conveyed in the interviews to see if it was similar to the information found in the publicly-accessible university documents.

In preparing to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, the university leaders were faced with several counter narratives reflecting campus constituents’ concerns about collaborations with community colleges; resources shifted to support student transfers; and whether community college students were academically prepared to succeed at universities. Several cases of these counter narratives were provided at the beginning of Chapter IV. Along with the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise within the broader context of recruitment, enrollment, and retention, the leaders used these counter narratives to generate meta-narratives for making and communicating decisions to provide transfer receptivity.

**Committing to Receive and Support Student Transfers**

As indicated in Chapter I, the six Tennessee public universities under review educated a larger percentage of the state’s community college student transfers, and twice the number of students attended here as attended the four University of Tennessee institutions. The effort to recruit and enroll student transfers became more visible as Tennessee Promise was staged and implemented. In my review of the universities’ various shared governance meeting minutes, I found attention was being paid to recruiting student transfers. During one meeting, it was reported a university leader stated that [the named university] “needs to be recruiting from the transfer student pool.” In another meeting, the minutes pointed out that “transfer students are looking very
similar to native students and [the named university] could build on that if we became a more transfer heavy institution.” It was clear that Tennessee Promise was fostering renewed interest in recruiting and supporting student transfers.

I also found evidence of the university leaders’ commitment in the interviews I conducted. One leader acknowledged the university’s tradition of receiving community college student transfers and helping them to succeed. The leader stated:

We’ve always been aware of transfers and have planned for them and recruited them and tried to treat them right when they got here. That hasn’t really changed, but I would say that the Tennessee Promise has sharpened our focus on that issue. Their commitment was visible in local news sources that appeared during the staging and implementation of Tennessee Promise. The university leaders repeatedly indicated their universities were anticipating the arrival of Tennessee Promise community college student transfers beginning in Fall 2017. In one local news source article describing that the university leader had recently signed agreement with a community college, the leader stated:

The school has been actively recruiting transfer students for years, and has been working with community colleges to make students' transfer into the university "seamless." Touting [the named university’s] ranking as the school that enrolls the most transfer students in the state, [the named leader] said partnerships like the one signed with [the named community college] are very strategic for the university. [The leader] said the university is now asking "with Tennessee Promise, how should [the named university] take its partnerships to the next level?"
These universities and their leaders showed a great deal of deal commitment to recruiting community college student transfers. The leaders also were preparing their universities to receive and support these student transfers.

**Preparing to receive and support the student transfers.** The university leaders indicated the universities were preparing to receive and support student transfers. During one interview, a leader pointed out that important groundwork had already been laid by the university in preparation for receiving student transfers. The leader stated:

we have a reputation for being reasonable in articulation and transfer. We’re also really understanding of the significance of the Tennessee Transfer Pathways Project. It’s very important that students seamlessly transfer so that they don’t lose credits, and that they really move into their junior and senior years fully prepared and ready to get started.

The articulation and transfer work that was legislated by the Tennessee Complete College Act of 2010 was a crucial foundation laid for Drive to 55 and Tennessee Promise. There are now over 50 pathways the Tennessee Promise community college student transfers can use to seamlessly transfer to the universities.

During the interviews, I asked the leaders how they wanted their staffs to receive and support these student transfers. One university’s leader said:

The students who come in through the Tennessee Promise will fit in that portfolio as transfer students who are appreciated and recognized by the faculty and staff as people we are obligated to help navigate that last two years to get that degree.

The other leader at the same university said, “I want them treated perfectly, because I want them to stay and graduate. I just want them all treated equally, equally well.”
Another university’s leader stressed the importance of serving each student as they are.

The leader indicated:

> What we've found is that if we simply work on a student as a student, and do that well regardless of where the student is, whether they're a freshman or whether they’re a transfer student, or whether they’re a continuing student, if we look at our completion policies which we’ve put in place…. part of the [completion] initiative was…. identifying the pathway and that's for all students. Getting the student on the pathway and then finally keeping them on the pathway, and so that's sort of been our objective for every student regardless of where they're coming from…. that we do it for every student, then the community college students will be positively impacted as well.

The leaders believed the universities should keep the focus on students. It was clear these leaders had expectations about how they wanted student transfers to be treated.

Several leaders believed many of the issues experienced by student transfers were the same or nearly all the same as those experienced by native students. One leader said, “I don’t know that we, not intentionally at least, differentiate between the transfer students and any other students.” This leader then continued:

> I don't fundamentally see any difference than any other student. There's always sub-populations of students that have unique characteristics and challenges…. Our goal is that regardless where they come from and how they get here, we want to help them be successful…. Transfer students are, I don't know if I can quantitate this, but probably 80% of the issues that transfer students have are the same that every other student would have. Another 20% might be relatively
unique in that they're coming from, for the most part, you assume that they're coming from an environment where they're receiving a little more personal attention.

Another leader said:

Well, we have an office of adult commuter and transfer students. [Another named leader] could speak with greater specificity around changes that they've made. We've not made many, because I don't view the Promise student as any different than the transfer student we were getting from [a named community college] before. There's not anything different about them because they're Tennessee Promise students.

While some leaders believed many of the issues experienced by student transfers were the same or nearly all the same as those experienced by native students, they acknowledged that differences may exist. One leader stated:

There's certainly an overarching philosophy about, yes, we welcome these students like we welcome any student. Our goal is to help them achieve their goals and be totally successful. The strategy then becomes a lot more nuanced once you understand who these students are, where they're coming from, what their goals are, what their majors are. I guess that's our approach right now is to really pay attention to the behaviors and understand as much as possible about this population of students so that we can put together a more comprehensive strategy for them.

Another leader spoke about the preparations that had been made to receive the student transfers. The leader said:
We’ve thought a lot about it and have tried to get prepared. I think it’ll be an issue of seeing how does it go. We’ve made a real effort to be ready, but there’s always going to be something that comes up that you didn’t anticipate or an opportunity to do something better. So, we’ll be paying attention to see if, in fact, it’s really all that different under the Tennessee Promise, and if so, we’ll adapt.

The leaders planned to observe these students to see how they fared. They also communicated an openness to adjusting how their universities received and supported these student transfers in the future.

**Establishing mutually beneficial relationships.** I wanted to understand the university leaders’ views regarding how their institutions can engage these student transfers in a mutually beneficial arrangement in which they benefit from being at the university and the university benefits by having the student transfers here. In response to my question, one leader said:

I just hope that we would look at the life of the student, and the life of the university, and how can the student benefit from a full university experience even if it might be a different experience. And how can the university benefit from these students that come in with experiences from other places, and really capitalize on what they know.

Another leader indicated:

I think of the university campus as a very dynamic community of scholars really, and all the elements. A first time entering freshman brings a unique perspective to that community just as a senior distinguished professor brings. It's at a different level, obviously, but have inputs from all sorts of directions and backgrounds and
experiences, whether it’s international students or transfer students or whatever. I think the opportunity is to engage that total community and really gain from all that breadth of experience and talent. I think the community college transfer student adds to that panorama, you know, that spectrum of talent and backgrounds. A lot of the community college transfers, I would expect at least that a number of them will probably be a little more sharply focused on what their future is and what they want their future to be because of that culture that they’ve experienced and survived.

A third leader stated:

I think just by diversifying our student body, there’s an inherent belief benefit to us, to the campus generally. There’s also a benefit financially. We’re under the funding formula now, so we want to see students progress. There’s the sweet, altruistic aim of making them better citizens, which I believe in that, and I think we do that, to students who are willing to put forth the effort. But there’s the other side, the financial side, we need them to progress and graduate. I think it is mutually beneficial for students to succeed.

My belief was reinforced that leaders still envisioned the relationship between their universities and student transfers to be more than just a financial arrangement, i.e., moving beyond merely a transactional exchange where student transfers paid tuition and received a degree from the universities.

**Addressing transfer receptive policies.** Now that the Tennessee Board of Regents was not providing oversight, as well as a structured approach for addressing policies as a result of the FOCUS Act, I wanted to understand how the leaders planned to
handle policies that enabled student transfers to enter and persist to degree completion.

One leader stated:

From my perspective, nothing's changed with FOCUS as it relates to transfer students. Tennessee Transfer Pathways is the guiding framework. The FOCUS Act requires that Tennessee Transfer Pathways remain in place. I really do not see FOCUS making any type of change for us in the manner in which we work with community colleges, we structure relationships, and we build those pathways. So I don't see FOCUS having an impact on that at all. For our institution in our section of the state, we have to work well together if we're all going to be successful. We cannot forge, excuse me, a quote unquote, totally independent path and ignore the community colleges because it would be at our financial peril.

Another leader echoed the economic perspective, but more directly indicated:

The economic benefit to the institution is the dominant push here. We need to incentivize the transfer student. Most institutions financially have available capacity at the junior/senior level where many of us were struggling with lower level capacity. If you've already got sub-cost to upper level curriculum and you have capacity that's available that's not generating tuition revenue, it's a very compelling case to push to get more transfer students.

This leader also reminded me that certain policies, e.g., transfer pathways, were legislated and that the state audited universities to make sure they were complying.

**Strategies the university leaders believed would be successful.** The university leaders had crafted a number of strategies to respond to Tennessee Promise, as well as to
prepare their institutions to receive and support future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. One leader stated:

We implemented a fairly comprehensive set of strategies in order to try to address that. Longer-term, we had to look at what are the kinds of opportunities that this investment is going to present over time relative to increased numbers of transfer students and increased overall rate of participation of higher education in Tennessee.

Another leader stated:

I think it's going to take a variety of different programs and different units available to support them. They come in and they have a variety of issues and difficulties that sometimes overlap with new freshman, but a lot of times they will be different. And so, we have to have a wide-range of programs and resources to deal with that.

I asked leaders which of the strategies they believed would be successful in preparing the universities to receive the student transfers. One leader responded:

I think if you look at some of the strategies, we're consciously increasing our placement of advisors on community college campuses. I think that will be a strategy that will be successful. I think also if we look at the time that our transfer advisors, I'm talking about our admissions counselors, are spending at community colleges and in those areas, the conscious increasing of that as a result of the population is going to be a strategy. I think the example I gave you earlier of trying to use faculty as a part of that mix will be of assistance. I think I mentioned to you that we'd done a restudy of our scholarship policies, that we'd
done a study of our deployment of our advisors.

Another leader replied:

I think it's departments who are eager to embrace them and advisors who are ready to advise them. I think it's hands on, it's one on one. It's not me giving a speech or the [other university leader] giving a speech, it's about working with them as individuals. And we don’t want them to get lost in the shuffle. We don’t want that for any student, but they [student transfers] do have a unique set of needs and we need to be mindful of that.

A third leader stated the importance of:

Informing the community about what we're doing. You always hear, at least I always hear, that "Oh, [the named university’s] one of the best kept secrets in the [the named area]." And so we don't want it to be a secret anymore. We need to publicize that and so our public relations office, we're looking at how do we take advantage of the resources we do have, but to get them in a way that impacts students? So you see new billboards going up. You see us trying to take advantage of social media to get that information out. Our website, we've done some work on that to make that more attractive and more…. And then interacting with our alumni, that's also very important to use them in a way that they help us tell our story.

Beyond these specific strategies targeting student transfers, universities were in the middle of expanding retention efforts for all students. What follows is how the university leaders made student recruitment, retention, and success everyone’s responsibility, and added practices and programs that targeted student transfers within these overall efforts.
Expanding Retention Efforts to Include Student Transfers

The universities’ retention efforts that were underway built upon the ongoing work legislated by the Tennessee Complete College Act of 2010 (TCCA) and connected to the Drive to 55. The TCCA legislated articulation and transfer policies addressing transfer pathways, common course numbering for general education core courses, and designated applied science degree courses that were not transferrable to universities. TCAA also included reverse transfer and prior learning assessment. The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) staff followed up in arranging College Completion Academies for the universities during the years between the TCCA and the announcement of Tennessee Promise. Speaking of these efforts in which the universities were still engaged, one university leader stated:

TBR having universities and community [colleges] really fostered an environment where there’s statewide articulation, statewide transfer pathways. Now, I say all that and of course, we just left TBR, but I think the framework is in place for the cooperation. I think you can have all this cooperation and agreements without being in the same system too. Having been in the same system for years and years and years, I think we’re in much better shape than most states in this area.

Speaking of the shift to local university boards, another leader indicated:

If you look at the legislation itself…. the training for those boards has emphasized the commitment that the state has to the Drive to 55. I think that it may be true that over time that some of the strategies will be different. I see in total the common strategies…. I see all of that that had been part of the board's agenda as continuing…. I think that what you're going to see with the local boards is that
while the attention on the Drive to 55 is going to stay there, that there will be in some instances opportunities for some distinct initiatives that may capitalize on the particular geography and so forth of individual campuses.

As the university leaders expanded their universities’ retention efforts to serve all students better based on the TCCA legislation, they also considered additional approaches based on their universities’ missions and locations.

**Student recruitment, retention, and success is everyone’s responsibility.**

University leaders were constant and consistent in communicating to their campus constituents that student recruitment, retention, and success mattered and everyone had a role to play. One leader stated:

> I think the one thing that can be done is from the top, from the president to provost, we make it clear that it’s a priority. It is important to the campus that we make our processes easier to navigate for community college transfer students. And that we do want them here. And that we do want to help them succeed. And most of the time, I’ve seen, if people realize this is important, they will pay attention to it.

A second leader stated, “there is no consideration that once some students are enrolled, they shouldn’t be here.” A third leader pointedly stated, “Retained students are best chance to sustain enrollment until [the named university] gets Tennessee Promise transfer students.” A third leader said:

> We are now creating an entrepreneurial culture within the institution much more aligned with that of a private school where those departments and colleges that grow are going to realize revenue. Those colleges and departments that do not
will realize the associated downturn. We've tried to create a culture in which student success and enrollment growth is everyone's responsibility.

This university also was shifting to a modified resource centered management (RCM) budgeting model to support this cultural change. One of the leaders believed that:

…when faculty start to see that they have the ability to increase travel budgets, maybe increase their salaries, increase operating pools. If they're engaged in this, that policy shift of changing the way that we budget, it's all part of a grand piece that I don't want to say was caused by Promise, but we used Promise as the black hat that allowed us to make the change.

Several universities were engaging faculty in recruitment. As one leader shared:

We have encouraged, and we don't have 100 percent participation yet, but we're encouraging the departments to send people out to the community colleges, both as a recruiting tool, but also as a way to help get them oriented. That's a new initiative….no one has more direct impact on students than interaction with faculty. So we’ve tried to increase the amount of direct correspondence and communication that students and prospective students, both transfer and first-time, receive from our faculty. I think that’s had a major impact.

It was clear during the interviews and through a review of the university documents the leaders were taking steps to ensure that everybody took responsibility for retention and student success. Those who contributed would be rewarded and those who did not contribute could see a reduction in funding. In doing so, the leaders were trying to position their universities to survive and thrive as Tennessee Promise played out in the broader enrollment context.
**Addressing policies, practices, and programs.** In my document review, I noted a number of initiatives designed to support both native students and the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. As the university leaders expanded their universities’ retention efforts to serve all students better, they also intentionally instituted policies, practices, and programs to support the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Below, I highlight the transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs that received the most attention in the storied data that I examined.

Several of the universities were subscribing to the EAB Student Success Collaborative advising software platform. One leader indicated:

That's a software package that allows advisors to track students and has some predictive analytics built in. That's for all students, not just transfer. But transfers certainly benefit from that. That's the big change. All of that, we were doing anyway, regardless of Tennessee Promise.

Nearly all of the universities hired additional professional advisors. One leader indicated that they have:

A decentralized system of advisement here at [the named university]. So each college will do it a little bit differently, but there’s somebody in every college, usually more than one, who specializes in transfer students. So we make sure that when they come, pathway or not, that we take a close look at their record and apply everything we can toward the degrees here.

Another university’s leader said:

We’ve invested quite a bit of resources in the last couple of years in developing our student success centers in each of the colleges and that’s their [student
transfers] primary resources for getting help and making the transition. Those advisors are not only there to help with course selection and course scheduling and things like that, but if they’re having academic problems.

In most cases, these additional advisors hired by the universities were housed in the individual colleges where they were to partner with faculty in helping students succeed.

Several campuses modified existing centers to incorporate student transfers, or the universities added a new center to support student transfers. One leader mentioned:

We have an adult and transfer student office. [The named director] has functioned in that office for years. She has regularly reported to our academic council on what kind of changes in questions, what kind of changes in issues are emerging over that period of time.

Some universities used a more centralized approach to receiving and support student transfers. According one leader:

We’ve hired a transfer coordinator in the student records office….and they work with the community college students who are transferring that maybe are not in the Tennessee Transfer Pathways. And then the transfer coordinator works with all of our department chairs to ensure that the courses are transferring for appropriate course material.

One university used space in the university’s library in preparing to meet student transfers’ need for support. According to that leader, the university “instituted a new university-wide tutoring service in the library.” Additional work addressed administrative process and policy changes, i.e., registration and payment policy changes; modification and development of new academic programs; online and distance education delivery
methods; flexible academic calendars and course scheduling; and certifications as veterans campuses and adult learner campuses.

In addition to supports for future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, the universities engaged in assessments of their policies, practices, and programs. These assessment efforts informed how best the universities could provide transfer receptivity and improve what was already underway.

Assessing Policies, Practices, and Programs

Assessment appeared to be gaining momentum as the university leaders were preparing their universities to receive and support the student transfers. During a shared governance body meeting, a leader reported that data were to be analyzed to determine what had contributed to the recent student retention rate increase at the university. The leader mentioned that data could be used to track students who had lost financial aid and failed to graduate due to attempted versus earned credit hours as well. Another leader indicated that funding formula-related data was being analyzed and interpreted on a regular basis to determine where improvements might be made.

One leader whom I interviewed believed university staff should use the data they have. The leader said:

Follow the data. You have more data than you think you have, but you also have a tendency to have more data than you tend to have data that is used. A lot of emphasis frequently is put on getting more data. I tend to think the problem more frequently is not using data you have rather than trying to get more data.

Several leaders indicated they were incorporating assessment of policies, practices, and programs into their efforts to address and provide transfer receptivity. Communicating
with the university community, one leader described at length how advisors were using the EAB Student Success Collaborative predictive analytics features to generate “data to inform decisions that improve the success of students.” During an interview, another university leader indicated:

We are participating in the EAB Student Success Collaborative. If you go back about two and a half years ago, that resulted in really a significant change in really the preparation and the work that advisors will do and I think gives us an opportunity to find out what kinds of challenges are impacting transfer students that may be different from our first time freshmen population. We've historically looked at student success from, as many schools have, we've looked at primary barometers being the first year to the second year. We're now looking more frequently from the second year on, and with our students who come in having completed the associate degree and the kind of success that those students are having.

Another leader stated:

One of the things that the [EAB] Student Success Collaborative provides is a rich database for our native students who are coming here and being advised in their first two years. How do we compensate for that as we move on to the transfer students? How are we sure that we're doing that in a systematic way? As we've looked at our enrollment profile, both transfer and first time freshmen, we've tried to look at what kinds of data need to be brought to the attention of faculty members, department chairs, and deans. We have a good number of one on one sessions that really focus on that.
In addition to assisting first-time freshmen, data analysis and interpretation benefits upper division students, including student transfers, because the practice provides evidence that supports changes in policies and practices, as well as the addition of new or modified programs that better serve all students.

In preparing to provide transfer receptivity, university leaders and their universities committed to receiving the Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. They expanded retention efforts with some of the initiatives specifically geared to supporting student transfers. The leaders also instituted assessments of the policies, practices, and programs for receiving and supporting the student transfers. What follows are the leaders’ future plans for transfer receptivity.

**University Leaders Plan for Future Transfer Receptivity**

In this section, I respond to the third subquestion: How did the presidents and Provosts plan to respond in the future to ensure transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers? The major findings relate to university leaders’ consideration of (a) integration of student transfers into the universities, and (b) sustaining the effort in the future.

In my analysis leading to this section’s findings, I accomplished triangulation of the sources by (a) comparing what I observed and recorded in my field notes with what was said in the interviews that I conducted; and (b) considering the different viewpoints expressed by the presidents and provosts, both within the same university and across universities.

At the end of just over three years of responding to Tennessee Promise and planning to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, I asked the
university leaders about their future transfer receptive plans. They indicated they planned to focus on integrating student transfers into the universities and sustaining efforts in the future. The leaders were aware of the difficulties associated with integrating transfer students into the universities. Several leaders spoke of dual/joint admission as one means the universities were employing to assist community college student transfers in transitioning from the community colleges to the universities. The leaders also were concerned about the ability of the community college student transfers to cover the costs associated with enrolling in upper division courses at the universities. They also recognized that universities will be adjusting to the new financial landscape under the current financial model in which state funding does not distinguish between program costs, but rather is based on student progression and degree completion. In other words, universities receive similar funding dollars for a student majoring in English as they do for a student majoring in a medical field with costly clinical training.

**Integrating Student Transfers into the Universities**

The university leaders wanted Tennessee Promise community student transfers to become integrated into their universities. One leader pointed out:

> The thing that I hope for most is to be sure that the students we receive are integrated into our culture in a seamless way…. [we hope that] they know exactly how to get involved if they want to because we’re interested in that holistic education. But more specifically we want to make sure that they are on track to go into the academic areas that they really want.
The leaders were well aware of the challenges inherent in accomplishing the integration of student transfers. The leaders understood the problem but did not always have a solution. One leader stated:

I know you need to engage them [in] the university, connect them to the university, get them involved in the whole life of the university, but I also know it’s hard, because they don’t have that connection since they were 18 year olds. Some might be coming in at 22, or 25, or 27 and married with a job, so they’ve got other things pulling them. I know it’s a problem, but I don’t know the answer.

Another leader indicated:

My goal is that our transfer students become incorporated into our campus as quickly as possible, that they feel a part of [the named university], that they make some connection with other students, or with faculty, or our student organizations, or going to athletic events. Whatever it is, we want them engaged as soon as possible, because we know they’re more likely to stay and to graduate if that happens, not to mention it gives them a richer experience. It’s a little bit harder when you’re coming here with two years under your belt already and you’re so focused, you the student, focused on graduating, you might think of that stuff as just sort of stuff on the side that I don’t need to deal with. To the degree that we can encourage transfer students to take advantage of that side of campus life, I think that’s really important.

Two leaders pointed to the issue, i.e., student transfers had lost two years that the native students had at their disposal. One leader stated:
It doesn’t matter if you’re a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, where you started. If you’re here taking classes, all students are the same. But that doesn’t mean all students are the same.… The students that you see all the time are those students who got engaged and involved in campus [beginning their freshman year], and I think part of the challenge for transfer students is where do they find those connection points, because they lost two years…. You can’t make up that lost time…. So their ability to have the experience here that a traditional student had…. They’ve lost those two years. They’re never going to get them back.

The second leader asked:

How does that person really [become integrated] in the last two or three years…?

I think that's a challenge when you have less time with the student, especially when the student is a junior or a senior…. I just hope that we would look at the life of the student, and the life of the university, and how can the student benefit from a full university experience even if it might be a different experience.

From these leaders’ perspectives, student transfers were at a disadvantage and it would be difficult for them to integrate into the universities. Another university leader spoke of efforts to integrate students. The leader said:

We've put a great deal of focus on all of the things from a student success perspective that you all have. So we have Degree Works. We have Degree Compass. We do all the same things that you all are doing. Should we try to create more intentional structures for transfer students? Maybe. I would contend that may be a blind spot for us, but we've kind of wanted to see how this fall looked, and then we would react and respond accordingly. We think we've built
intentional mechanisms with joint enrollment. I mean you've got [named community college] students who are playing on flag football teams. So we've tried to address it early so that by their theoretic junior year, the junior year really doesn't look any different than the freshman and sophomore year if they took the initiative to get engaged and involved.

This leader then turned to considering those students who forego becoming involved in campus life; they drive to the university campus then leave to go home or to work. The leader stated:

But if they've been at [named community college] for two years, they drive from their car, get to campus, take classes, go back home. They're going to drive here, take classes, and drive back home. It's hard to engage with a student who, as I said to the students this morning at orientation, ‘If all you do is get up in the morning, get in your car, drive to campus, and drive back home, you've missed it.’ College is everything that happens in the in-between. I don't have an answer for you, and maybe if your dissertation can provide one, I'd welcome it. How do we engage with that student whose focus is to come here, go to class, go back home, go to work? This is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

Beyond the integration of student transfers during the time they are attending the university, two leaders spoke about student transfers as alumni. One leader asked:

How does that person really [become integrated] and a loyal member and alumni of that institution upon graduation….one who likes to come back at homecoming, and see his or her fellow graduates, and that student who brings his or her children back to campus to show where mom or dad graduated?
The second leader relayed concerns voiced by the university’s alumni affairs office staff regarding whether student transfers would participate as alumni given their limited time at the university.

In speaking with the leaders, I found they were considering ways to more fully integrate student transfers into their universities. More than one university was trying joint enrollment as a means of involving students in the university as they transitioned out of the community college. Another university was attaching expectations of involvement in high impact practices to transfer scholarships as a means to integrate students into the university. Providing a designated space or official center on campus for student transfers to gather, meet each other, and become involved in activities was yet another means the universities were using to integrate student transfers. The integration of student transfers, particularly student transfers of color, into the universities will definitely be an area that will need additional consideration in the future, as well as sustaining the efforts leaders made in response to Tennessee Promise and preparing to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

**Sustaining the Efforts**

The leaders were upbeat and optimistic about the future. They conveyed confidence in their abilities to respond as needed to the changing higher education landscape. In the words of one leader, “I think we will continue to look at other opportunities to explore. I think we have a history when we see opportunities of trying to pursue them.” The leaders were considering how their universities would sustain efforts into the future. One leader said:

I'm hopeful that we can sustain the momentum. I know that we're a different
institution post-Promise than pre. The ACT score for freshman class is up 1.5 points. We're getting a different freshman class. We've essentially doubled down on the traditional student. We've talked about experiences, destination campus. For a long time, we were a suitcase college and a commuter college. Well, suitcase college and commuter college, I can't convince a parent to spend $9,000 to send their kid to a suitcase college when they could go to [several named community colleges] for free and get the same thing. We have to create destination experiences here. And get them on campus and keep them here. It's really forced us to think about who we are and our mission. I'm hopeful that all this is sustainable.

This leader’s enthusiasm reflected that of all the leaders whom I interviewed.

However, in speaking with the university leaders, I learned that two wondered whether the current education model was financially sustainable. One of the leaders cited the difficulties that student transfers would face in terms of finances, i.e., taking full loads and finishing on time. The leader stated:

It's going to be a longer-term challenge because there isn't any question that universities differ relative to their academic program profile. The [funding] formula treats a graduate as a graduate no matter what the student is majoring in…. If they were getting degrees in English, you'd be getting the same money from the state [as a high cost program such as nursing] because of the formula. Now, the state’s solution to that is to have differential fees at the upper division level. That becomes a challenge for the transfer student. How do you address the fact that we have specialized fees for high cost programs in order to address what
I just described in the formula? That tends to impact transfer students disproportionately.

Another leader spoke about the current financial model and what it would mean for the universities. The leader said:

The entire financial model for public higher education has been built on cross subsidies. For example, English doesn't cost as much to teach as engineering, but we effectively charge the same tuition to all students and we manage those cross subsidies internally. There's also cross subsidies between lower level and upper level instruction. Upper level instruction costs more to deliver. So, if you change your balance of lower level to upper level student credit hour generation, your staffing model has to change and your financial model has to change. It's unlikely that we will be able to no longer maintain as low a tuition sticker price as we have in the past if a large population of freshmen are going to community college first. I don't think any policy maker has really thought of that at all. They're probably not aware that that's an issue, but it will be an issue. We're already seeing it a little bit.

As additional Tennessee Promise students enroll in postsecondary education and the Tennessee Promise community college student transfers move to the universities, the sustainability of the state’s higher education funding model will be interesting to observe.

**Shared Governance**

On a final note, I was particularly interested in how the Tennessee university leaders worked within shared governance as they responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student
transfers. During my interviews with the leaders, I mentioned this to the leaders. One university leader commented at length about shared governance. The leader said:

I think communication on any campus is a challenge. I think that if you looked at shared governance and what aspects of shared governance are at work, I think you would find that whether you’re talking about faculty senate, whether you’re talking about our council chairs, whether you’re talking about direct access of visiting folks and governance by walking around kinds of things, that there’s a real emphasis at this institution placed on that. I think the result of that is that some of the things such as we’re talking about, such as Promise and what not, rather than this just being abstract administrative gibberish, there’s an opportunity to really sit down with people and talk about it and engage in a meaningful dialogue in which we move beyond just rhetoric to communication.

I found that a majority of the university presidents and provosts worked within shared governance to communicate institutional priorities, allocate available resources, and lead institutional change. This was evidenced in the publicly-accessible university documents and local news articles I reviewed, and also in the richly detailed information gathered during my interviews with the university leaders. I was able to triangulate the information across these data sources to establish this evidence.

Summary

The findings of this study indicate university leaders supported Tennessee Promise. The leaders thought it broadened access, increased postsecondary enrollment, and impacted economic development. However, they believed the policy innovation’s impact on degree completion was still unknown. The leaders were concerned that
Tennessee Promise would cause students with academic ability to under match and university students would suffer from the Hope scholarship dollar reduction. They also recognized the enrollment challenges the universities faced. As the leaders were expressing their concerns, they also were considering their responses to offset the policy innovation’s potential impact on their universities and students.

While the full impact of Tennessee Promise was still unknown, the university leaders began leveraging scholarships and extending their universities’ partnerships with community colleges to prepare the way for recruiting student transfers. As they remained focused on student recruitment and enrollment, the leaders also worked to address and provide transfer receptivity for all students, including the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

In preparing to provide transfer receptivity, university leaders and their universities committed to receiving and supporting the Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. They expanded retention efforts with some additional initiatives specifically geared to supporting student transfers. The leaders also instituted assessments of the policies, practices, and programs for receiving and supporting the student transfers.

As the university leaders completed just over three years of responding to Tennessee Promise and planning to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers, their future transfer receptivity plans included integrating student transfers into the universities and sustaining efforts in the future. A majority of the leaders provosts worked within shared governance to communicate institutional priorities, allocate available resources, and lead institutional change.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Hampton (2011) demonstrated how Roe’s (1994) narrative policy analysis is useful for engagement in policy development and implementation at a university. The six Tennessee public universities' 12 presidents and provosts engaged in narrative policy analysis as they led institutional change in response to Tennessee Promise and preparing their universities to provide transfer receptivity. While their universities’ constituencies shared counter narratives in response to the dominant narrative of Tennessee Promise, these university leaders began developing metanarratives from the counter narratives and the dominant narrative they used in leading the university’s decision-making processes. A majority of the leaders used metanarratives in working within shared governance to communicate policy decisions regarding institutional priorities and the allocation of resources in response to Tennessee Promise and in support of the transfer receptivity offered to future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

The purpose of this narrative policy analysis based on Roe’s (1994) four-step process was to document and describe how presidents and provosts at six Tennessee public universities responded to the Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Of interest were the leaders’ narrative stories about this policy innovation and how the innovation contributed to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Employing the theoretical lens of policy innovation and diffusion, I engaged with the university leaders’ storied interviews, local news articles, and publicly-accessible documents and other information found on the universities’ websites.
This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter IV. Implications for further study are outlined. Recommendations for ensuring transfer receptivity are provided. Recommendations for university leadership practice are included as well. The chapter concludes with the summary.

**Discussion of Findings**

Jain et al.’s (2011) five transfer receptive elements dovetailed well with the leadership competencies that were targeted in this research study. The five transfer receptive elements included:

- establishing transfer of nontraditional students as a high institutional priority;
- providing outreach and resources that focus on the specific and unique needs of transfer students;
- offering financial and academic support;
- acknowledging the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family; and
- creating an appropriate framework of assessment and evaluation that can lead to future scholarship on transfer students.

(Jain et al., 2016, p. 1014; Jain et al., 2011, p. 258)

The targeted leadership competencies included working within shared governance, communicating institutional priorities, administering available resources, and leading institutional change (AASCU, 2016). Along with these leadership competencies, the five transfer receptive elements were used to consider how the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee public universities responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity.
The findings in Chapter IV were arranged by the three research subquestions including: How did the university presidents and provosts respond to Tennessee Promise? How did the university leaders prepare to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers? How did the presidents and provosts plan to ensure future transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college transfers? This same order is followed in discussing the findings.

**How Did the University Presidents and Provosts Respond to Tennessee Promise?**

Considering Jain et al.’s (2011) five elements of a transfer receptive culture, I concluded that the university leaders’ responses to Tennessee Promise included student transfers. The leaders specifically addressed the first, second, and third bulleted transfer receptive elements. They prioritized the transfer of nontraditional students (element one); provided outreach and resources targeting student transfers (element two); and offered financial support (element three).

As soon as Tennessee Promise was announced in Spring 2014, the university leaders responded with support for the scholarship and mentoring program. They recognized the benefits of the policy innovation for Tennessee and its citizens. However, they had concerns about students and institutional fit. They worried about those students who lost financial aid due to the HOPE scholarship dollar reduction. The leaders also recognized their universities would face enrollment challenges because of Tennessee Promise.

Their universities’ student loss due to Tennessee Promise would exacerbate an already difficult enrollment context in which the overall headcount at the universities had decreased by 7.5% (7,203 students) between Fall 2011 and Fall 2014. The revenue
needed to continue university business was dependent on tuition dollars, as well as state funding that was based on outcomes primarily measured by student progression and degree completion. Given the circumstances, university leaders needed to carefully establish and communicate institutional priorities, allocate available resources to meet those priorities, and lead institutional change.

Tennessee Promise fostered renewed interest in recruiting student transfers, which university leaders made an institutional priority (transfer receptive element one). The leaders extended their universities’ partnerships with community college, focusing on new initiatives, transfer pathways, reverse transfer, additional scholarships, embedded advisors, joint enrollment, and more (transfer receptive element two). The university leaders decided to modify and add scholarships to (a) attract the Tennessee Promise students who had expressed interest in attending the universities; (b) cover the HOPE scholarship dollar reduction experienced by the universities’ students in their first two years at the university; and (c) provide financial support through transfer scholarships (transfer receptive element three). As a result, the university leaders positioned their institutions to be able to receive and support the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers better.

**How Did the University Leaders Prepare to Provide Transfer Receptivity?**

Using Jain et al.’s (2011) five elements of a transfer receptive culture, I examined the transfer receptivity the university leaders prepared to provide to the Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. The leaders specifically addressed the first, second, third, and fifth bulleted transfer receptive elements above. They prioritized the transfer of nontraditional students (element one). They provided outreach and
resources in preparing to receive and support student transfers (element two). They offered academic support through the expansion of retention efforts to include student transfers, and they provided financial support to student transfers as well (element three). Finally, the leaders instituted the assessment and evaluation of transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs (transfer receptive element five).

Preparing to provide transfer receptivity, the university leaders showed their commitment to receiving and supporting the additional student transfers in a number of ways. First, the leaders acknowledged their universities’ traditions of receiving community college student transfers and repeatedly indicated their universities were anticipating the arrival of Tennessee Promise community college student transfers beginning in Fall 2017. Second, the leaders continued to support their universities’ involvement in the articulation and transfer work that was legislated by the Tennessee Complete College Act of 2010. Finally, they crafted a number of strategies to receive and support the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

The university leaders also expanded retention efforts to include student transfers. The leaders had already committed time and resources to expand retention efforts for all students. They first set the tone by indicating that student recruitment, retention, and success are everyone’s responsibility. They then addressed their universities’ transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs. On the one hand, I found similar patterns in how universities and their leaders responded to Tennessee Promise and prepared to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. On the other, I found unique approaches employed by the individual universities, as well as approaches that were similar across one or more of the six universities. University
mission and location were among the major influences contributing to how each university approached Tennessee Promise and providing transfer receptivity.

The approaches the universities took in preparing to provide transfer receptivity were varied. They included (a) subscribing to the EAB Student Success Collaborative advising platform; (b) hiring additional professional advisors; (c) modifying or adding an office or center for student transfers to gather and seek information; (d) adding transfer coordinators in the records office; (e) instituting university-wide tutoring; (f) addressing administrative process and policy changes; (g) modifying and developing new academic programs; (h) enhancing online and distance education delivery methods; (i) adding flexible academic calendars and course schedules; and (j) obtaining veterans and adult learner campus designations and certifications. Finally, the leaders instituted assessment and evaluation of the transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs to improve what was being done.

**How Did the University Leaders Plan to Ensure Future Transfer Receptivity?**

My interviews with the university leaders provided richly detailed information about the leaders’ plans to ensure future transfer receptivity. They wanted to make sure that the student transfers became integrated into their universities. They began work to make this happen by including the addition of embedded advisors at community colleges and the presence of dedicated transfer advisors and admissions counselors on university campuses. They also instituted joint admission policies and procedures that allowed community college student transfers to begin participating in activities such as marching band and intramurals, as well as attending athletic and cultural events while still attending community college.
While the leaders hoped to sustain efforts, they were concerned the education model for both the universities and the students may be hard to sustain financially into the future. The institutional revenue strain was shared by both the community colleges that absorbed the additional Tennessee Promise students who shifted there to attend college and the universities that received the same funding dollars per student regardless of whether the student majored in lower-cost humanities disciplines or more expensive disciplines such as engineering or the medical sciences. Moreover, the community college student transfers were faced with paying additional fees for certain majors’ upper division courses.

**Implications for Further Study**

Bahr et al. (2013) indicated there was interest among multiple audiences regarding how to help community college student transfers successfully transition, persist, and complete university degrees. These authors pointed to a research gap about processes to assist community college student transfers who enter universities, and the limited number of publications that gauge how policies, practices, and programs affect student transfers’ degree completion. They indicated that more multi-institution studies are needed.

My study examined how the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee public universities worked within shared governance to prioritize and resource transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs for community college student transfers in response to Tennessee Promise. It contributes to understanding what occurred with respect to transfer receptivity during the years that Tennessee Promise was staged and implemented, and it will inform how universities can better assist student transfers. It also informs
future qualitative and quantitative research studies, as well as the transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs provided by universities in Tennessee and beyond.

Based on my review of the transfer receptivity literature, there are few studies in which university leaders are the participants. Therefore, more qualitative studies that examine the role played by university leaders in providing transfer receptivity are needed. Qualitative studies that examine the role played by mid-level administrators and directors who plan and carry out transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs also are of interest. Additional qualitative and quantitative studies that examine how transfer receptivity contributes to community college student transfers’ persistence to degree completion also are needed. Finally, studies that focus on the specific elements of a transfer receptive culture are required in order to understand the phenomenon of transfer receptivity better.

Finally, looking ahead, additional research questions will need to be explored. Will the narrative change with respect to the number of students who enroll in college and complete college degrees in Tennessee and the United States? Will Tennessee Promise community college student transfers contribute toward baccalaureate degree completion numbers to a greater degree than previous community college student transfers? Will universities provide additional transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs to serve student transfers better? Will the community colleges and universities be able to sustain these efforts financially? Additional research studies will be needed in the future to address these questions.
Recommendations for Ensuring Future Transfer Receptivity

Given the need to recruit, retain, and graduate additional community college student transfers to meet Tennessee’s Drive to 55 by 2025 program, the public university leaders must become even more intentional in developing transfer receptivity at their institutions. Addressing the transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs that enable the universities to receive and support the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers is crucial to these students successfully completing degrees.

First, it is important for university leaders to prioritize the recruitment of community college student transfers (Jain et al., 2011). The Tennessee public university leaders who participated in this study have put time and effort into prioritizing the recruitment of these student transfers as evidenced by the inclusion of student transfers in university strategic recruitment and enrollment plans. The reporting of student transfer numbers was evidenced in the regular university enrollment updates as well. During the staging and implementation of Tennessee Promise, the Tennessee public university leaders worked to extend their universities’ community college partnerships, which included policies and practices that enabled the universities to receive student transfers better. In addition to the ongoing articulation and transfer work in response to the Tennessee Complete College Act of 2010, the leaders focused additional attention on dual/joint admission, which appears to be a promising initiative for receiving and integrating student transfers more rapidly into the universities. The leaders themselves also made additional concerted efforts to visit the community colleges to share information and recruit the student transfers. Advisors also were being embedded at community colleges.
In the future, university leaders need to continue paying attention to policies and practices cited in the literature as important in assisting community college student transfers to successfully transition to the universities (Bahr et al., 2013; Handel, 2011, 2012, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009; Wang et al., 2017). Such policies and practices address articulation agreements, transfer partnerships, reverse credit transfer, curriculum alignment, applied baccalaureate degrees, communication during outreach and recruitment efforts, and more.

Second, university leaders need to allocate the necessary resources to receive and support, both academically and financially, future community college student transfers (Jain et al., 2011). During the staging and implementation of Tennessee Promise, the Tennessee public university leaders worked to modify and add scholarships for the future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. They also hired a large number of additional advisors to provide individualized attention to the student transfers and centralized their universities’ tutoring services. Several of the university leaders obtained the EAB Student Success Collaborative platform for their advisors to use in tracking students’ progress. Finally, they reviewed, modified, and added academic programs, as well as the online and distance program delivery methods, and flexible academic calendars and course scheduling to meet students’ needs better.

In the future, university leaders need to continue to pay attention to practices and programs cited in the literature as being important in assisting community college student transfers to transition to universities successfully (Cabrera et al., 2012; Handel, 2011, 2012; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009). Practices that assist
student transfers include financial aid, advising, tracking systems, combating assumptions about student transfers, individualized attention, and more.

Third, university leaders need to make sure their institutions are carrying out assessment and evaluation of the transfer receptive policies, practices, and programs (Jain et al., 2011). Such assessment will inform research about student transfers as suggested by Jain et al. (2011), as well as lead to improvements and ensure that limited dollars are spent wisely. During the staging and implementation of Tennessee Promise, several of the Tennessee public university leaders focused additional efforts on examining the data their universities collected. They also instituted reviews of their institutions’ administrative processes to overcome obstacles impeding student progress. Additional assessment and the establishment of predictive models to track student behaviors are needed in the future.

Finally, university leaders need to provide additional social support mechanisms through which to “acknowledge[e] the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family,” that Jain et al. (2011) reflected as an element of a transfer receptive culture. This will be particularly crucial given the diverse populations from which the future student transfers will be drawn. During the staging and implementation of Tennessee Promise, the Tennessee public university leaders were beginning to consider this aspect of transfer receptivity. Several leaders had added or modified existing centers or spaces where student transfers might go for information and to spend time. Extending dual/joint admission to students was another means to begin providing social support.
In the future, university leaders need to continue to pay attention to practices and programs cited in the literature as being important in assisting community college student transfers to integrate into the universities (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Handel, 2011, 2012; Jain et al., 2016; Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2017; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006, 2009). Practices and programs that assist student transfers include orientation; transfer centers; peer support; study groups; academic clubs; and undergraduate research; enrichment programs; and more.

Paying further attention to transfer receptivity in the form of policies, practices, and programs that address the academic, social, and financial support leading to success for all students (Tinto, 2012) is crucial for future student transfer success. It also is necessary for universities to survive and thrive in their current enrollment context.

**Recommendations for University Leadership Practice**

Based on this research study’s findings, three recommendations are offered to university leaders. My recommendations to presidents and provosts include (a) working within shared governance to maintain transparent decision-making and follow strategic direction; (b) using narrative policy analysis in decision-making that involves policy innovation and diffusion; and (c) addressing the five elements of transfer receptivity espoused by Jain et al. (2016, 2011).

First, university presidents and provosts should work within shared governance to communicate institutional priorities, administer available resources, and lead institutional change. While shared governance and communication take time and effort, and require buy-in by all participants, they enable everyone to work together for the common good. Doing so will ensure that decisions are transparent and strategic direction is followed in
an evolving higher education environment characterized by contradictions surrounding
the funding provided by the state and the diverse student populations manifesting
different needs.

Second, university leaders should use narrative policy analysis in decision-making
that involves policy innovations. They should use the counter narratives to the dominant
narrative espoused by campus constituencies to create metanarratives for use in decision-
making and communicating decisions that involve policy innovation and diffusion. By
examining and using various narratives, presidents and provosts can stay ahead, i.e.,
remain innovators, early adopters, and the early majority, in responding to policy
innovations such as Tennessee Promise and the diffusion of initiatives that follow.

Third, university presidents and provosts should address the five elements of a
transfer receptive culture as they seek to integrate student transfers and sustain the efforts
financially. In particular, Jain et al.’s (2011) fourth transfer receptive element,
“acknowledging the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality
between community and family,” need to be heavily scrutinized and used to determine
how best to integrate the diverse student transfers who make their way to the universities.
Attention needs to go beyond leaving this work to student affairs division professionals
who manage student fees to provide social support and locations for student transfers to
gather. Instead, attention to Jain et al.’s student experiences and intersectionality
concerns need to permeate throughout the entire university, including academics, and
mirror the serious efforts being made to address diversity.

In conclusion, the three recommendations offered to university leaders are
directly related to how leaders work to carry out their universities’ missions. When
leaders stay true to their universities’ missions, they remain focused on serving both
native students and student transfers as they roll out initiatives in response to higher
education policy innovations such as Tennessee Promise. As a result, universities
continue to contribute toward degree completion rates which are needed for the
individual states and the United States to achieve their college completion agendas.

Summary

The Tennessee Promise scholarship and mentoring program broadened access and
affordability to postsecondary education in Tennessee. This policy innovation increased
the number of students seeking to engage in postsecondary education. It also shifted
some of the state’s students to the more affordable community colleges and colleges of
applied technology for their first two years of college. Equally important, Tennessee
Promise incentivized the presidents and provosts of the six public universities under
review to expand existing transfer receptivity efforts further as their universities prepared
to receive and support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

The university leaders under review in this study simultaneously sought to offset
Tennessee Promise’s impact on enrollment while moving their universities’ enrollment
growth agendas forward. They did so while working within a difficult enrollment
context, i.e., declining university headcounts since Fall 2011; declining numbers of high
school graduates; lifting of University of Tennessee’s enrollment cap; and shifting from
the use of a performance-based funding model targeting enrollment to the use of an
outcomes-based model that primarily rewards student progression and degree completion.

Responding to Tennessee Promise, a majority of the university leaders worked
within shared governance to communicate institutional priorities, administer available
resources, and lead institutional change, all of which resulted in the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. They responded by revising scholarships; extending community college partnerships; committing to receive student transfers; expanding retention efforts to include student transfers; and assessing policies, practices, and programs. The leaders’ future plans include integrating student transfers into the universities and sustaining the efforts.

This research study recommended that university leaders work within shared governance to communicate institutional priorities, allocate available resources, and lead institutional change. Doing so will ensure that decisions are transparent and strategic direction is followed in an evolving higher education environment characterized by contradictions surrounding the funding provided by the state and the diverse student populations manifesting different needs. As the leaders engage in decision-making and communicating their decisions, they also should use narrative policy analysis. By examining and using various narratives in their decision-making and communications, presidents and provosts are able to stay ahead, i.e., remain innovators, early adopters, and the early majority, in responding to policy innovations such as Tennessee Promise and the diffusion of initiatives that follow. Finally, university presidents and provosts should address the five elements of a transfer receptive culture as they seek to integrate student transfers and sustain the efforts financially.

Based on this research study’s findings, the three recommendations offered to university leaders are directly related to how leaders work to carry out their universities’ missions. When leaders stay true to their universities’ missions, they remain focused on serving both native students and student transfers as they roll out initiatives in response to
higher education policy innovations such as Tennessee Promise. As a result, universities continue to contribute toward degree completion rates, which are needed for the individual states and the United States to achieve their college completion agendas.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1080/09518390902736512


doi:10.3102/0013189X031007028


172


Townsend, B. K., & Wilson, K. B. (2009). The academic and social integration of persisting community college transfer students. *Journal of College Student Retention, 10*, 405-423. doi: 10.2190/CS.10.4.a

U.S. Const. amend. X.


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: A Narrative Policy Analysis of Tennessee Public Universities’ Initial Responses to Tennessee Promise

Investigator: Lori Buchanan, Western Kentucky University Educational Leadership Doctoral Student, Contact: by phone, 931.206.5444 and by email, lori.buchanan736@topper.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this narrative policy analysis is to document and describe how six Tennessee public four-year universities and their leaders planned for Tennessee Promise and how it may contribute to the diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

2. **Explanation of Procedures:** University leaders will be interviewed about the Tennessee Promise free college policy innovation, and how it may contribute to the diffusion of transfer receptivity, i.e., how universities receive and support student transfers. Approximately one hour of your time is requested for this interview which will be digitally transcribed. You will be emailed the interview transcript. Please check it for accuracy.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** No discomfort or risks relating to participation are anticipated.

4. **Benefits:** New knowledge about transfer receptivity is anticipated, as well as contributing to information on university policies, practice, and programs on which student transfers rely as they persist toward successful completion of baccalaureate degrees.

5. **Confidentiality:** Strict confidentiality will be maintained by the principal investigator. The unpublished dissertation and any written publication or oral presentation will not contain identifiable comments. Study data will be stored securely.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

_________________________________________  ___________________________
Signature of Participant                        Date

_________________________________________  ___________________________
Witness                                           Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. *(Initial here)*

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

WKU IRB# 17-462
Approval - 6/1/2017
End Date - 12/31/2017
Expedited
Original - 6/1/2017
APPENDIX B

Tennessee Promise and Transfer Receptivity

Tennessee’s “Drive to 55” by 2025 Initiative

Presidents & Provosts
work within shared governance, communicate institutional priorities, administer available resources, and lead institutional change. (AASCU, 2016)

Policies, Practices, and Programs
help students overcome academic, financial, and social challenges. (Tinto, 2012; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006 and 2009)

Baccalaureate Degree Completion

Diffusion of Innovations
(Rogers, 2003)

Innovators
Early Adopters
Early Majority
Late Majority
Laggards

Figure 1. Tennessee Promise Policy Innovation and Transfer Receptivity Diffusion Conceptual Framework
## APPENDIX C

Table 1  

*Purposeful Sampling*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>Used to indicate that all cases, i.e., the six designated universities and their leaders, were being examined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Used to indicate that I sought to interview the universities’ presidents and provosts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowball</td>
<td>Available for use in the event that any president or provost designated another person/s to interview.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX D

Table 2

*Types of Information Needed Mapped to Research Method*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Information</th>
<th>What the Researcher Will Require</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>The Carnegie classification and enrollment context of each university.</td>
<td>Document Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td>Information about each university leaders including longevity in their current positions, most recent higher education experience, gender, and ethnicity.</td>
<td>Document Review, Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual</td>
<td>Leaders’ stories of their personal experiences with Tennessee Promise and transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.</td>
<td>Interviews, Field Notes, Document review, Local News Sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

Table 3

Data Sources Mapped to the Central Research Question and Three Subquestions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>CRQ</th>
<th>SQ1</th>
<th>SQ2</th>
<th>SQ3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Review</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local News Sources</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Central Research Question (CRQ): How did the presidents and provosts of six Tennessee public four-year universities respond to Tennessee Promise and prepare to provide transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers who seek to persist and complete degrees?

Subquestion one (SQ1): How did the presidents and provosts respond to the Tennessee Promise policy innovation?

Subquestion two (SQ2): How did the university leaders prepare to provide transfer receptivity to Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

Subquestion three (SQ3): How did the presidents and provosts plan to ensure future transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?
APPENDIX F

Original Interview Protocol

Introduce myself; express appreciation for their time. Inform them about the study’s purpose: examining what ways university leaders are responding to Tennessee Promise and preparing for community college student transfers during the first three years of staging and implementing of the policy innovation, e.g., Tennessee Promise.

I am interested in your stories - please share your impressions of Tennessee Promise.

*Follow up as needed:* How do you think Tennessee Promise is working with regard to increasing enrolling and degree completion in Tennessee?

*Follow up as needed:* Why do you think Tennessee Promise is working or not working?

*Follow up as needed:* What impact has Tennessee Promise had on your institution?

*Follow up as needed:* What impact has Tennessee Promise had on other institutions?

What has your institution done and what is it doing to prepare for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

*Follow up as needed:* What policies have changed, been added or deleted, in preparation for Tennessee Promise transfers?

*Follow up as needed:* What practices have changed in preparation for Tennessee Promise transfers?

*Follow up as needed:* What programs have changed, been added or deleted, in preparation for Tennessee Promise transfers?

Are there institutions that are better positioned than your institution to receive Tennessee Promise student transfers?

*Follow up as needed:* If so, who are they?

*Follow up as needed:* If so, why are they better positioned?

*Follow up as needed:* If so, in what ways are they better positioned?

Is there anything else you wish to add regarding Tennessee Promise or how your university will receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?
APPENDIX G

Revised Semi-Structured Protocol Used for Second through Eighth Interviews

This study’s purpose is to examine how university presidents and provosts think about and plan for Tennessee Promise, as well as how this policy innovation contributes to diffusion of transfer receptivity for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers.

University leaders such as yourself shape campus culture, establish institutional priorities, and allocate available resources. Of interest are your stories about providing leadership during Tennessee Promise, as well as how you think and plan ahead with respect to receiving and supporting Tennessee Promise student transfers.

1. What are your overall impressions of Tennessee Promise?

2. How do you think Tennessee Promise is working with regard to increasing enrollment and degree completion in Tennessee?

3. Why do you think Tennessee Promise is working or not working?

4. What impact has Tennessee Promise had on your institution?

I appreciate hearing your perspective as a university leader. The next five questions concern Tennessee Promise student transfers who are now ready to move to university.

5. How have you been preparing your institution to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

6. What additional future plans do you have for receiving Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

7. How do you plan to support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers once they arrive on campus?

8. What do you as a `<President or Provost>` wish to see happen as the people whom you direct get into the details of both receiving and later supporting Tennessee Promise student transfers?

9. How do you see your university and Tennessee Promise student transfers engaging in a mutually beneficial relationship in which the university is enriched by the presence of these student transfers?

Vincent Tinto pointed out that all students need financial, social, and academic supports in order to succeed. Tennessee Promise student transfers will need support that is
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provided through policies, practices, and programs offered by universities. The next
three questions address how you lead your staff with respect to these policies, practices,
and programs which provide supports for Tennessee Promise student transfers.

10. In the past, the Tennessee Board of Regents provided structure for addressing
policies concerning transfer partnerships, curriculum alignment, and more. Now,
as a result of the FOCUS ACT, each university has its own local board and will
be managing its own policies. Within this new local board structure, how are you
leading your staff in considering policies that enable Tennessee Promise
community college student transfers to enter and succeed to degree completion at
your institution?

11. Campus practices include addressing financial aid, as well as communication
during outreach, recruitment, and orientation efforts. Additionally, efforts to
combat assumptions about student transfers are a part of establishing practices
that assist students to succeed. As a leader, how do you motivate your staff to
examine and adjust practices that enable your university to serve Tennessee
Promise community college student transfers better?

12. Campus programs include transfer centers, advising, study groups, academic
clubs, undergraduate research and more. How do you lead your staff in
establishing programs that provide needed support for Tennessee Promise
community college student transfers?

I appreciate your stories about how you are leading your institution in preparing for
Tennessee Promise community college student transfers. Four final questions pertain to
how your institution is preparing to receive Tennessee Promise student transfers.

13. Please share how well you believe your institution is positioned or prepared to
receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

14. What do you believe will be the most successful strategy or strategies that prepare
your institution to receive Tennessee Promise community college student
transfers better?

15. What additional ideas are you considering in order to prepare your institution
better for receiving Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?

16. Is there anything else you wish to add regarding Tennessee Promise or how your
university is receiving and supporting Tennessee Promise community college
student transfers?

Thank you for the time you have given to this interview process.
## APPENDIX H

Table 4

*Interview Questions Mapped to Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>CQ</th>
<th>SQ1</th>
<th>SQ2</th>
<th>SQ3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IQ1: What are your overall impressions of Tennessee Promise?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ2: How do you think Tennessee Promise is working with regard to increasing enrollment and degree completion in Tennessee?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ3: Why do you think Tennessee Promise is working or not working?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ4: What impact has Tennessee Promise had on your institution?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ5: How have you been preparing your institution to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ6: What additional future plans do you have for receiving Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ7: How do you plan to support Tennessee Promise community college student transfers once they arrive on campus?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ8: What do you as a leader wish to see happen as the people whom you direct get into the details of both receiving and later supporting Tennessee Promise student transfers?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>CQ</th>
<th>SQ1</th>
<th>SQ2</th>
<th>SQ3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IQ9: How do you see your university and Tennessee Promise student transfers engaging in a mutually beneficial relationship in which the university is enriched by the presence of these student transfers?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ10: In the past, the Tennessee Board of Regents provided structure for addressing policies concerning transfer partnerships, curriculum alignment, and more. Now, as a result of the FOCUS ACT, each university has its own local board and will be managing its own policies. Within this new local board structure, how are you leading your staff in considering policies that enable Tennessee Promise community college student transfers to enter and succeed to degree completion at your institution?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ11: Campus practices include addressing financial aid, as well as communication during outreach, recruitment, and orientation efforts. Additionally, efforts to combat assumptions about student transfers are a part of establishing practices that assist students to succeed. As a leader, how do you motivate your staff to examine and adjust practices that enable your university to serve Tennessee Promise community college student transfers better?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ12: Campus programs include transfer centers, advising, study groups, academic clubs, undergraduate research and more. How do you lead your staff in establishing programs that provide needed support for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ13: Please share how well you believe your institution is positioned or prepared to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ14: What do you believe will be the most successful strategy or strategies that prepare your institution to receive Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ15: What additional ideas are you considering in order to prepare your institution better for receiving Tennessee Promise community college student transfers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ16: Is there anything else you wish to add regarding Tennessee Promise or how your university is receiving and supporting Tennessee Promise community college student transfers?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX I

Table 5

*Code Mapping Strategy for Tennessee Promise Responses and the Diffusion of Transfer Receptivity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SQ1: Support, but concern about impact</th>
<th>SQ2: Treat every enrolled student well</th>
<th>SQ3: Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of transfers</td>
<td>Committing to receive student transfers</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify and add scholarships</td>
<td>Expanding retention efforts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extend community college partnership</td>
<td>Assessing policies, practices, programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(THIRD ITERATION: APPLICATION TO DATA SET)

Leaders supported Tennessee Promise but were concerned about its impact. They responded by modifying and adding scholarships; extending community college partnerships; expanding retention efforts to include student transfers; assessing policies, practices, and programs; considering the integration of future Tennessee Promise community college student transfers; and sustaining the efforts.

(SECOND ITERATION: PATTERNED THEMES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SQ1: Support</th>
<th>SQ2: Student focus</th>
<th>SQ3: Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>Advising and tutoring</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>Student transfers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Administrative processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Academic programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>Course/calendar flexibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Online and distance programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(FIRST ITERATION: INITIAL CODES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SQ1: Support</th>
<th>SQ2: Student focus</th>
<th>SQ3: Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>Advising and tutoring</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>Student transfers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Administrative processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Academic programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>Course/calendar flexibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Online and distance programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Matrix of Findings and Sources for Data Triangulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Findings</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Field Notes</th>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>News Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 1: Tennessee Promise Responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Promise, while concerned over impact</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying and adding scholarships</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extending community college partnerships</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 2: Prepare to Provide Transfer Receptivity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing to receive and support student transfers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding retention efforts to include student transfers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing policies, practices, and programs</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 3: Future Plans</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating student transfers into the universities</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining the efforts</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX K

Audit Trail Excerpt: Interview Protocol Changes

June 14, 2017

During the first leader interview, I realized that the level of information being shared was not what I had anticipated and I needed more richly detailed information. Within my field notes, I wrote that “it became apparent to me that I was asking for specific details about which [the named leader] would not, as a [named position], be aware.” At that point in the interview, I acknowledged this to the leader and adjusted two or three questions on the fly. The leader stated, “That, I can answer. I think that’s a good turn on your part.” I had allowed for this possibility to occur. In my Chapter III: Methodology, I wrote

The process of developing and refining the interview questions was guided by Agee’s (2009) reflective process, as well as Yow’s (2005) strategies for questioning. I remained open to further interview question refinement during the document review process. Based on my experiences with the interview process itself, I also was open to adjusting questions.

Immediately after the first interview, I decided that I needed to revise the questions prior to my second interview. I discussed this with my dissertation committee chairperson who concurred. I followed up in sharing the revised interview protocol with my chairperson and she indicated approval. I began using the revised protocol during the second interview. On my chairperson’s recommendation, I retained my steps as outlined below. This was helpful in writing Chapter III.

I decided to adjust my interview protocol’s unstructured questions into more semi-structured questions. I converted the broader unstructured questions with the
additional embedded follow up questions into targeted questions that included additional context. In comparing my revised protocol with the original protocol, the content of the semi-structured questions remained essentially unchanged. I simply expanded the questions to include contextual information in order to prompt the leaders to share based on their knowledge and roles in the policy innovation and diffusion. For example, rather than asking:

What has your institution done and what is it doing to prepare for Tennessee Promise community college student transfers? *Follow up as needed:* What practices have changed in preparation for Tennessee Promise transfers?

I first provided contextual information:

Campus practices include addressing financial aid, as well as communication during outreach, recruitment, and orientation efforts. Additionally, efforts to combat assumptions about student transfers are a part of establishing practices that assist students to succeed.

and I asked the question:

As a leader, how do you motivate your staff to examine and adjust practices that enable your university to serve Tennessee Promise community college student transfers better?

The question revision proved to be effective in elicited more richly detailed responses.

I decided to change the question format for two reasons. First, several questions requested specific details about policies, practices, and programs about which a university president or provost might not know all the details. These leaders were focused on the broader issues, so I thought it best to adjust the questions to focus more
broadly on the leaders’ roles with relation to communicating institutional priorities, allocating available resources and leading change. Second, during the first interview, the responses to the unstructured interview questions did not yield the richly detailed information I envisioned in interviews that I had planned to last approximately one hour each.
APPENDIX L

List of Publicly-Accessible Documents and Sources Consulted,
Arranged by University and Chronologically

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