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Transfer Students and the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge: A Program Evaluation of an Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training

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Transfer Students and the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge:
A Program Evaluation of an Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training

by

Chandra Davis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
with a concentration in Educational Innovation
Department of Language, Literacy, Ed.D. Exceptional Education, and Physical Education
College of Education
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This dissertation is driven by passion for education, my passion for helping the underdog, the non-traditional, the student with many obstacles, as I was. By society's standards, I was the least likely to succeed! Spawned from an extremely abusive relationship, which would eventually end in tragedy, I had a tragic start. After high school, college was not even an option as my mother was diagnosed with Lupus and became totally disabled, I became her caretaker at 17. A teenage mother, surviving my own abusive marriage, college was nowhere in my future plans; surviving was. In 1998, when my mother passed away at the tender age of 51, I left my abusive relationship, become a single mom, and enrolled at a local community college with the intention of making a better life for myself and my son. I knew I could do this through education. I took some time, but I finished my AA Degree and as luck would have it, in 2002, I got a full-time job with the University of South Florida. After working for a while, I found out that the University offered free tuition to its employees and I was ready to take full advantage of that! I began to educate myself, obtaining my Bachelor's degree in 2006! The desire to learn and grow kept me going, to eventually earn my Master's Degree. Now here I am-- the least likely to succeed-- earning a terminal degree.

There have been many people who have supported me throughout this journey. My family's support has been unwavering and constant. My professors and my dissertation committee, Dr. Marie Byrd, Dr. MaryBeth Corace and Dr. Veselina Lambrev, I am eternally grateful for your support and guidance. A very special thank you to my Committee Chair, Dr.

Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick, thank you for guiding me through this process, there is no way I could have done this without you.

Additionally, I would like to thank my friends, colleagues and students who continue to encourage and support me. Lastly, I would like to thank my husband. This is as much your accomplishment as it is mine, as you have endured and supported me throughout this journey.

As I end this journey, I am reminded of my favorite bible verse: “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

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ABSTRACT

The transfer student population is rising on college campuses in the United States. Consequently, higher education institutions want to better understand how to support this growing and diverse population. Faced with increased demand for accountability, colleges and universities have developed various initiatives to increase college graduation rates. One such initiative is the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge. The Florida state statute, commonly known as the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge, was introduced by legislators in 2009. The Florida legislature incentivizes state university students to graduate promptly and efficiently to avoid a surcharge. However, the legislation affects transfer students in a unique way with potentially, unintended negative outcomes. There is a dearth of information on the effects of this surcharge on transfer students; only a limited number of researchers have examined how the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge affects transfer students.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a program evaluation of an Excess Credit Hour Surcharge training program serving Florida College System Institutions. In this study, the first three levels of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) training model was used to evaluate the training. This training program sought to increase awareness and promote changes in the advising behaviors of Florida college system partnering institutions, by informing participants of the effects of excess credit hour surcharges on transfer students. The training sought to improve knowledge to prepare students, who are transferring to a 4-year institution. Additionally, the training informed participants of ways to avoid the extra surcharge, which could potentially double transfer student's tuition at the transferring institution. The goals of this program

evaluation were to (a) determine the participants' knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge, (b) determine if participants increased their knowledge of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training with a pre- and post-survey evaluation and (c) determine if the training changed how transfer students are advised about excess credit hour surcharges.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions' performance metrics and graduation rates, have become widely discussed policy topics among public officials, educational professionals, and other stakeholders in the United States over the past few decades (Bogue & Dandridge, 2010). Beginning in July 2009, students enrolled state universities in Florida were subject to a surcharge per credit hour once they exceeded the credit limit set by the state statute 1009.286 (Florida Legislature, 2017). The law was intended to encourage state university students to graduate promptly; failure to do this holds the student financially responsible by imposing a fee per credit hour. Because of state appropriations to public post-secondary institutions, Florida residents have the benefit of a subsidized tuition rate. Colleges and universities receive these appropriations directly from the state, not students, which makes such funding invisible to students and their families. Therefore, it has been challenging for them to fully understand the true cost of a college degree (Kane, 1999).

Decreased graduation rates can be attributed to the implementation of the 2009 Excess Credit Hour regulation and subsequent amendments in 2011 and 2012. Decreased graduation rates are also a national concern largely due to the increased need for college-educated individuals to compete in the global economy (Zumeta et al., 2012). Although this legislation was designed to increase graduation rates, transfer students have been impacted differently than first-time-in-college students. Historically, the typical post-secondary education system has been perceived as a unimodal system, grounded on a common perception of relying on a single

institutional affiliation for the education needs of the student (Greenfield et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2018). However, the continuously growing desire for a flexible education system that works for all students and accommodates various student needs and student schedules, rather than the previous higher education system that demanded that students adapt to attend, has resulted in an upward trajectory in the number of transfer students currently enrolled in the higher education system (Sidhu et al., 2016). In the State of Florida, policy makers designed the higher education system around the concept of transfer. Florida has 28 public community colleges, 11 four-year public institutions, and a host of articulation agreements between these institutions. The Florida 2+2 program attempts to make the academic transfer process somewhat seamless (Solodev, n.d.). Articulation is used to describe programs used to promote the seamless movement of students between institutions. The Florida Department of Education (2021, para. 4) defines articulation as, “the means by which schools, colleges, and universities coordinate programs and services to facilitate the movement of students through the educational system.”

The rapid upward trend in the number of transfer students has, over time, triggered the interest of scholars to determine student enrollment and transfer pattern trends. For instance, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) identified more than 2.4 million transitions across 3.6 million students during the six years between 2008 and 2014 (Shapiro et al., 2018). Although the inevitable transfers of two-year public college graduates to four-year institutions accounted for more than 40% of those transfers, the remaining 60% of transfer students illustrates an increased demand in transfer students across four-year institutions (Shapiro et al., 2018).

Given that more than a third of all students transfer to 4-year colleges from 2-year colleges, with 45% of this number transferring more than once, a rise in the assessment of

transfer student experiences has emerged and a diversification of interests within the extant body of literature has arisen (Shapiro et al., 2018). These studies have also defined the variation in experiences between first time in college and transfer students across post-secondary education institutions. Yang et al. (2018) examined the credit differences between incoming transfer and first time in college students, revealing an overall higher number of credits held by those in the former group, though first-year students had a larger number of applicable credits for their most recently entered degree program. The exploration of the student experience has been the trend across evolving studies as researchers try to diversify student interests beyond the inherent differences of culture and geography change.

Because of the ever-increasing number of transfer students in state colleges and universities, particularly in the State of Florida, the importance of evaluating the awareness of the excess hour surcharge policy on transfer students cannot be overstated, especially since the existing literature reveals that approximately 50% of the increased time to degree during the last 30 years can be explained by the rise in college tuition (Denning, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Regardless of the process of transfer, the accumulation of excess credits has been a constant problem for transfer students in the State of Florida. The accumulation of excess credit hours has been linked to delays in credential attainment, extra costs originating from tuition fees, additional costs associated with supplies and textbooks, and even difficulties in transitioning into the workforce (Sidhu et al., 2016). According to Kinne et al. (2013), excess credits are often perceived as indicative of inefficiencies that may later result in personal and system-wide costs. Essentially, excess credits can be viewed as financially detrimental toward a student's future endeavors.

Previous studies have highlighted the impact of excess credits on not only the economic posture of students, but also transfer students perceived educational competence (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016; McCormick, 2003). Two such studies have, for instance, shown inconclusive results. Attewell and Monaghan (2016) revealed that transfer students have a lower probability of completing a bachelor's degree compared to non-transfer students. In contrast, McCormick's (2003) research showed that, despite the evident drawbacks related to excess credit hour surcharges, sufficient evidence does not exist to show a relationship between the number of credits a student held and the potential for an incomplete post-secondary education. The impact of excess credits is indefinite and, as such, affects the educational success of students differently. The evaluation of the impact of excess credits has grown beyond students' scope, thereby garnering more interest from institutions (Sidhu et al., 2016). As a result, institutions have opted to introduce new mitigation policies that limit the number of credits that a student may hold before a surcharge is added to the student's fees, resulting in what has come to be referred to as excessive credits (Sidhu et al., 2016).

One Canadian case study revealed no sufficient evidence to propose a need to increase credit hours among transfer students (Pendleton, 2010). This assertion was based on the fact that a transfer of credit does not imply a transfer student's deviation in total credits from the standard credits for the school's given degree programs (Pendleton, 2010). The researcher suggested that excess credits are not a common problem among transfer students (Pendleton, 2010). By demonstrating preliminary mitigation strategies, Pendleton (2010) illustrated these assertions with the inclusion of a prior requirement for transferred credits to be within global educational policies. Such policies limit the number of eligible candidates for transfer and ensure transfer students are within the desired credit score (Sidhu et al., 2016). Pendleton's (2010) study also

asserted transfer students' increased performance compared to non-transfer students in terms of Grade Point Average (GPA). Although excess credits among transfer students poses an issue, it has not been unequivocally defined within the literature to date.

Purpose

As a mechanism to promote timely degree progression, the State of Florida developed the excess credit hour surcharge policy to prevent students from accumulating excessive credit hours. At the core, excess credit hour policies were designed to incentivize student completion by increasing student costs associated with untimely progress toward a bachelor's degree (Complete College America, 2011). Financial policies such as this, can generate unforeseeable negative consequences for some students with or without achieving the objectives.

There have been multiple states in addition to Florida which have implemented the excess credit hour surcharge to promote timely graduation. These states include, Arizona, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin. And although these states including Florida, have implemented the excess credit hour surcharge now for over a decade, the effectiveness of the policy has not been explored until recently (Kramer et al., 2017). Effectively, the excess credit hour legislation was designed to promote timely graduation, unfortunately, transfer students have been increasingly impacted.

The excess credit hour legislation requires institutions to add a surcharge to every credit hour taken in excess of the total number of credit hours required to complete the chosen degree (Florida Senate, 2020; Florida State University, 2020). For example, if a student entered the institution for the first time after high school between and including Fall 2009 and Summer 2011, then the student's threshold would be 120% of the hours required for the declared degree program. In turn, the surcharge would be 50% of the matriculation fee (base in-state tuition

amount) for every hour over the threshold. If a student entered between and including Fall 2011 and Summer 2012, then the threshold would reach 115% of the hours required for the declared degree program and the surcharge for this given time would be 100% of the matriculation fee (base in-state tuition amount) for every hour above the threshold. In 2012, the legislature added additional language which states that undergraduate students who break enrollment will be subject to the current thresholds and surcharges in effect for the semester they choose to return to the university (Florida Senate, 2020). For transfer students, depending on the number of credits hours they are transferring to the 4- year institution, they could be impacted by the excess credit hour surcharge in their first or second semester.

According to The Hechinger Report (2016), most undergraduate transfers lose all or some of their credits when they transfer to 4-year institutions, costing extra time and money. The number of transfer students is at record levels. Currently, more than two-thirds of students who earn bachelor's degrees from four-year institutions have changed colleges at least once. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2016), an average of about 342,860 students transfer institutions each year.

According to Community College Daily, transfer students lose a large number of credits when transferring to a four-year institution, this is due in part to poor coordination among the participating colleges and an inability to effectively communicate the transfer process and policies to students (Staff, 2017).

Transfer students moving from public two-year to public four-year institutions which is the most common transfer path and accounts for 26% of all transfer students, lose an estimated 22% of credits upon transferring and unfortunately, most students are not aware of the loss of credits, until they have already transferred to the four-year institution (Staff, 2017). Additionally,

because excess credit hours do not impact transfer students at the community college, they are typically unaware of the effects it may have prior to transferring (Kane, 1999).

To minimize the effects of excess-credit-hour surcharges, particularly for transfer students, an Excess Credit Hour Training program was developed for Florida College System Partner Institutions. This study evaluated the Excess Credit Hour Training program. This evaluation was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the training program affect participants' awareness about the effects of excess credit hour surcharges on transfer students?
2. How have participants' advising behaviors been affected by the excess credit hour training program?

Evaluation Design

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) evaluation model was used to evaluate the excess credit hour training program. There are four stages in the Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) evaluation model: *reaction*, *learning*, *behavior*, and *result* (p. 21). This study focuses on the first three stages, which are described below.

Reaction

In this stage, the researchers measured the level of participants' satisfaction with the training. Participants were given a survey (described below) relating to training.

Learning

Learning can be defined as a change of attitude, improvement of knowledge, and or enhancement of the skills of the participants after the program. Three components were measured in this evaluation: what knowledge has been learned, what attitude has changed, and what skills have been developed or improved.

Behavior

In this evaluation, what the behavior change of the participants was assessed after attending the training. The focus in this level is how the participant applies knowledge that has been obtained from the training.

To address the questions of this program evaluation, the evaluator reviewed mixed-methods data. Many evaluators use mixed methods design, as this provides outcome data as well as an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). The data evaluated in this study included a) secondary data from participants who attended Excess Credit Hour Trainings, b) interviews of a subset of training participants (secondary data and interviews described below), and c) data from participating institutions reflecting transfer student credits prior to the advent of the Excess Credit Hour Training workshops and since. A brief overview of the workshops, participants, and these data sources is provided below.

Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training Workshops and Participants

The Excess Credit Hour Surcharge trainings were designed to (a) determine the participants' knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge, (b) determine if participants increased their knowledge of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training with a pre- and post-survey evaluation and (c) determine how advisors apply understandings of the training workshop in their advisement of transfer students, particularly in their advisement about excess credit hour surcharges.

The individuals who attended Excess Credit Hour trainings were administrators, staff, and academic advisors at Florida College System 2-year institutions. The participants received email invitations and voluntarily attended the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge training. The setting for this training was online via Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams is a persistent chat-based

collaboration platform complete with document sharing, online meetings, and many more extremely useful features for business communications (Microsoft Stories Asia, 2020).

Surveys

Participants completed anonymous Pre and Post training surveys to address demographics, training content related to excess credit hours, and advising practices.

Interviews

A total of three Florida College System Institutions academic advisors were invited to discuss their knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge. The three academic advisors selected have previously attended the Excess Credit Hour training in 2020. Participants were asked to discuss, how they advise transfer students, training they have received regarding transfer students, and how they advise students with excessive credit hours.

Transfer Student Credit Hour Data

The evaluator obtained transfer student credit hour data from the Office of Decision Support at the University of South Florida. The evaluator analyzed the average number of credit hours transfer students transferred with from Florida College System Institutions in Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Fall 2018, Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021 semesters.

Analysis

Surveys were used to determine participants' knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge, pre and post training. Interview data were evaluated to determine if training participants implemented changes in their advising sessions with transfer students. Transfer student credit hour data were compared by transfer year to determine if there was change in the amount of credit hours students transferred with after the excess credit hour training was developed.

Significance of the Study

With the implementation of the state statute in July 2009, very little empirical research has been located to show the success of the policy in increasing 4-year degree completion at Florida public universities. Although there is no evidence of successful outcomes, the excess credit hour policy has been amended twice, in 2011 and 2012. In 2011, the credit threshold was lowered from 120% to 115%. Then lowered again in 2012 to 110%. The amendment also raised the surcharge rate from 50% to 100% of tuition (Online Sunshine, 2021). Given the potential financially punitive nature of the policy to transfer students, it is vitally important that Florida College system administrators, staff, and advisors understand the potential impact of the policy on transfer students.

The excess credit hour policy may have different impacts on college completion based on student demographics as the state universities serve a very diverse student population. For example, transfer students with financial means may be able to afford the surcharge to complete the degree, regardless of how long and how many credits it may take, while students who rely on financial aid such as Pell Grants or Student Loans, have to carefully plan their coursework as failing grades and withdrawals can cause them to lose their financial aid eligibility.

This evaluation examined the effects of an excess credit hour training for Florida College System Institutions. A clear understanding of the impact of the excess credit surcharge is critical for administrators, staff, and advisors at 2-year institutions. This evaluation additionally examined whether there was a change in participants' advising behaviors for transferring students regarding the excess credit hour surcharge after participants attended the training.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many college students begin their studies at a community college with the intent to transfer to a 4-year institution (Jabbar et al., 2020; Jabbar & Edwards, 2020; Xu et al., 2017). In general, community colleges are more affordable and allow students to earn general education credits at a lower cost (Handel, 2011; Jabbar et al., 2020; Jabbar & Edwards, 2020). Community colleges prepare students for their transition to 4-year institutions, familiarizing students with the college environment on a smaller scale while preparing them for the shift toward the larger institution by acclimating them to the collegiate process (Jabbar et al., 2020; Jabbar & Edwards, 2020; Roksa & Calcagno, 2008). While these institutions have historically served to ease the transition to 4-year colleges (Roska & Calcagno, 2008; Xu et al., 2017), students frequently encounter academic difficulties within the first year of transfer, a process that researchers have defined as *transfer shock* (Aulck & West, 2017; Clausen & Wessel, 2019). Research on transfer shock has confirmed that social integration is associated with declined academic performance (Aulck & West, 2017; Clausen & Wessel, 2019). Essentially, social integration facilitated by informal interactions with peers, faculty, and administrative personnel is an important factor in the transfer student success, particularly for persistence and degree completion (Pascarella et al., 1986).

Theoretical Framework: Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure

There are a variety of theoretical frameworks that can be used when discussing transfer student persistence and completion. For this evaluation, the evaluator relied on two theoretical frameworks: Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure and Human Capital Theory. Tinto's (1975) model focuses on students' academic and social integration and has been widely utilized in studies assessing student attrition in higher education. There has been a significant amount of student retention and persistence research conducted utilizing both Tinto's (1975; 1988) model and the revised 1988 model. Studies continue to provide evidence to support the validity of the model, or at least portions of the model, ensuring their reliability in the current application of this theoretical framework (Kreysa, 2006).

The stages of Tinto's (1988) model largely speak to transfer students as they move through the phases of departure from one institution and prepare for the transition and integration to a new institution. The three stages—separation, transition, and integration—are longitudinal and reflect both the personal and intellectual integration of students into their college communities (Tinto, 1988). Transfer students face many challenges as they transition to a new environment of a 4-year institution and Tinto's (1988) model effectively introduces a framework for analyzing transfer students and their outcomes.

Tinto's (1988) model, which serves as the theoretical framework for this evaluation, focuses on the following elements: a) pre-entry characteristics, b) students' goals/commitment, c) institutional experiences, d) integration, e) students' intentions and external commitments, and f) students' outcome regarding the decision to depart, graduate, transfer, or drop out (Metz, 2004).

While this evaluation cannot conceptualize all these elements, it will assist in providing information on the excess credit hour surcharge to Florida College System Institutions, to bring awareness of the effects of the surcharge on students and assist transfer students with the knowledge and information that could potentially prevent them from taking credits and courses at their Florida College System institution that will not transfer or apply to their major. It offers an alternative approach to avoiding the excess credit hour surcharge.

Human Capital Theory

Although most students enjoy multiple benefits from postsecondary education, the primary goal for most is the attainment of a higher income after graduation.

Developed in the 1960s by Schultz and Becker, human capital theory regards education as an investment (Tan, 2014). Human capital theory rests on the assumption that formal education is instrumental and, in some instances necessary, to improve the productive capacity of a population. In short, human capital theorists argue that an educated population is a productive population. Human capital theory emphasizes that education increases workers' productivity and efficiency by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human capability—a product of human beings' innate abilities and investment. The provision of formal education is seen as an investment in human capital and proponents of the theory have considered this equally or even more worthwhile than physical capital (Woodhall & Psacharopoulos, 1997).

Additional education cost because of the excess hour surcharge policy possibly affects almost certainly alters students' outcomes. Transfer students typically learn about the policy when they matriculate in a Florida state college or university. Because of this, the cost-benefit assessment at that point does not involve college application decisions but rather academic major

and course selection decisions. Advocates of the human capital theory typically argue that students who attempt to maximize the return of their investment in education and make cost-benefit assessments to minimize the cost at the same time increase or retain future benefits. The excess hour surcharge, then, causes students to commit to a program of study early on at the two-year institution and take no more courses than necessary for graduation. A change from their intended academic major would most likely result in the surcharge. Commitment to their intended major and taking only courses that apply to that intended major allows the student to attain a 4-year degree with the least amount of money and time and join the workforce to start enjoying the main benefit of postsecondary education.

Organization of the Literature Review

This program evaluation focuses specifically on the transfer process in the state of Florida and the economic impacts of transferring from a two-year institution to a 4-year institution. Additionally, this evaluation focuses on the impact of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge and its effects on transfer students and the transfer process. The evaluator examined multiple sources to provide adequate and fact-based information and research in the completion of this literature review. This literature review provides an exploration of the transfer student process, the reasons students may choose to transfer, the challenges that students face before, during, and after transfer and the University of South Florida's Fuse Program, which was designed to address excess credit hours for transfer students. The literature review was organized into the following sections: Transfer Process, Challenges, Reasons for Transferring, State of Florida Transfer Process, Financial Factors Involved with Transferring, The Effects of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge, and the University of South Florida's Fuse Program

Transfer Process

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the number of students attending more than one institution before graduation has increased (Shapiro et al., 2017). Fauria (2015) noted that almost 60% of students have attended multiple institutions, transferred, or co-enrolled before actual graduation; by 2019, these numbers had risen to 61% of students at public institutions, 63% of students at private non-profit institutions, and 41% at private for-profit institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Scholars have referred to this phenomenon as student swirling and observed that it is becoming the norm in higher education (Fauria, 2015). In general, students transfer from community colleges to 4-year institutions for affordability and to seek out better degrees (Handel, 2011). In many cases, students plan to take core courses at community colleges before enrolling in 4-year institutions (Thompson, 2016). Furthermore, transfer students who earn credits at an associate degree-granting institution then transfer to a 4-year institution could have the earned credit evaluated by the two-year college for a possible degree through a process known as a reverse transfer (Fauria, 2015).

According to Thompson (2016), students who opt to transfer from one higher education institutions to another have been shown to experience psychological, academic, and environmental changes, depending on the type of transfer occurring. Overall, transferring from one school to another offers both benefits and challenges to students. While transferring allows students to be in a new environment where they can meet new people, students may find themselves faced with harder and more demanding courses (Thompson, 2016).

Reasons for Transferring

Students have provided a variety of reasons for their decisions to transfer. The most common reason is to complete a bachelor's degree (Handel, 2011). For these students, referred to

as vertical transfers, transferring is a step for them to achieve their academic goals (Zhang et al., 2018). In contrast, horizontal transfers, sometimes referred to as lateral transfers, have more varied reasons for transferring (McCormick, 2009; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). Some of the reasons that have driven horizontal transfers include unsatisfactory academic performance; dissatisfaction in personal, social, or school-related circumstances; financial difficulty; changes to availability, i.e., switching to a school that affords greater flexibility in scheduling; the need to shift to a specific learning environment, i.e., shifting from in-person to online courses or vice versa; the offering of new degree programs not previously available that are more in alignment with student desires; and other courses that are not available at the current or previous institution, among other considerations (McCormick, 2009; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018).

Maslow (1954) synthesized a large body of research related to human motivation. Maslow (1954) posited a hierarchy of human needs based on two groupings: (1) deficiency needs and (2) growth needs. Within the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving to the next higher level. Once each of these needs has been satisfied, if at a future time a deficiency is detected, individuals will act to remove the deficiency (Huitt, 2007). Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs contains four main levels:

- 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts.
- 2) Safety/security.
- 3) Belongingness and love: affiliate with others, be accepted.
- 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval, and recognition.

The lower part of Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs addresses the physiological and safety needs of the individual. Physiological needs refer to the need to satisfy hunger and thirst,

while the safety needs are concerned with the need to feel that the world is organized and predictable, otherwise known as a person's need to feel safe in their environment (Maslow, 1954).

Grais (2011) suggested that horizontal transfers are linked to an individual problem with the lower part of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Essentially, the reasons students transfer based on this theory are job loss of parents; relocation; parents' occupations and lifestyle; migrants; economic adversities; safety; overcrowding; homelessness; and natural disasters, among others. Aside from external factors that are often related to their parents, students' personal problems also contribute to the decision to transfer. Some of the personal circumstances that have been reported are academic abilities, disabilities, attitude and behavior, motivation, and socialization skills, though these are far from the only motivators associated with a student's decision to transfer (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Previous studies on the reasons that students transfer from one institution to another have been qualitative in nature or a combination of qualitative and quantitative designs (Grais, 2011; Taylor & Jain, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). Researchers who have used a qualitative design have chosen this approach since it allowed for a thorough examination of the specific reason's students provided for transferring (Grais, 2011); however, both approaches have their merits.

Challenges for Transfer Students

Martínez (2016) reported that the emotional and social impacts of transferring are additional challenges that students face. For example, students who transfer from community colleges may face problems with credit evaluation and course placement difficulties. Generally, finding universities that credit courses from previous colleges is particularly challenging (Martínez, 2016). Further, students have expressed disappointment when universities did not

give credit for courses taken at previous institutions and reported feeling like they had wasted time and money pursuing those courses (Matthews, 2015).

Another significant challenge for transfer students is creating relationships within the new university environment. Matthews (2015) found that transfer students experience feelings of dissatisfaction with the campus climate, including their relationships with colleagues, peers, and even faculty members. This suggests that some transfer students may need to overcome their inhibitions about the new environment. Additionally, Zurlo (2017) reported that transfer students face challenges with perceiving themselves as invisible for at least the first few weeks while attending the new university. As a result, these students typically experience feelings of isolation (Martínez, 2016). These students also commonly encounter academic challenges that can be compounded by feelings of inadequacy, lack of acceptance, anxiety, and other mental health statuses associated with a change environment (Martínez, 2016).

In summary, the challenges that students commonly face in transferring include emotional and social distress, denial of courses and credits, difficulties creating new relationships, and the struggle for visibility for at least the first few weeks of attendance. Overall, these factors suggest that the transfer process can be challenging for some transfer students. While transfer students may encounter difficulty adjusting to their new environment, they often have their own ways to survive and face the challenges. Martínez (2016) identified six major coping strategies including identifying other transfer students, embracing the school's climate, choosing their own housing arrangements, leveraging work experiences, engaging in classroom leadership, and using the university resources and opportunities as much as possible. As students engage in these practices, they become better adjusted to the new environment (Martínez, 2016).

State of Florida Transfer Process

The state of Florida is known for its strong reputation for commitment to community college transfer (Wellman, 2002). Its community colleges have traditionally been the main access point to a public post-secondary education (Wellman, 2002). According to The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2002), nearly 85% of Florida's undergraduate enrollments are in public institutions, 55% in 28 community colleges, and almost 30% in 11 of the state's 4-year institutions. Fundamentally, some of the issues that students who choose to transfer from community colleges to universities have faced include financial factors involved in transferring in addition to the credit hour surcharge (Florida State University, 2020). This study focuses on the various reasons for transferring and aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of how students face these situations to determine possible solutions for how these issues can be resolved.

The state of Florida has also been known for maintaining the professed 2+2 policy for post-secondary education, in which students start their college education in a community college before transferring to a 4-year university or institution (Wellman, 2002). In 1957, Florida passed legislation to create a community college system. The state also exacted a strong articulation between two- and 4-year institutions (Florida State University, 2020). Accordingly, several institutions that started as upper-division campuses are now permitted to offer 4-year programs (Wellman, 2002).

Florida has maintained a clear unit requirement for degrees, for which 120 units are required for the baccalaureate and 60 units for the associate degree, of which 36 units are required to be in a general education core (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). The general education core's framework is common to both two-year and

four-year institutions and most private colleges in the state have winningly adopted it (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002). Core courses differ between various institutions but carry a common pre-requisite list for every degree program that comprises courses that count toward the degree (Florida Senate, 2020).

According to the state laws of Florida, any student who receives an associate degree will be guaranteed admission into a public university degree program, except for high-demand programs or programs with special requirements (Florida Senate, 2020). Additionally, any units from primary courses will transfer as a block to the institution. This is beneficial for students, as the receiving institution handles all the individual course-level transfers. While students are not assured admission in high-demand programs or programs with special requirements, the law obliges that transfer students be treated the same way as native students regarding admission to the identified programs (Florida Senate, 2020). Moreover, students who believe they have been treated unfavorably can carry their complaints before the Articulation Committee (Florida Senate, 2020).

Florida has an incentive- and performance-based budgeting process for its community colleges, though this process has not been implemented in the 4-year institutions (Wellman, 2002). The performance-based funding program differs from the current accountability reporting system as there are two distinct funds: one is for A.A degrees and the other is for the A.S/A.A.S. degrees, adult vocational programs, certificate programs, and continuing education programs (Wellman, 2002). The A.A. performance-based funding for community colleges offers approximately 1% of base funding for rewards for four types of performance that include:

- (1) the number of students completing the A.A. degree;
- (2) the number of students who complete the A.A. degree by taking less than 72 units;

- (3) the number of completers from targeted populations; and
- (4) the number of completers who transfer to a state university or get a job (Wellman, 2002, para. 6).

Additional Financial Factors Involved in the Transfer Process

In 2009, the Florida Legislature enacted Section 1009.286, which specifically encouraged students to complete their baccalaureate degree as competently as possible (Florida Senate, 2020). This legislation also established the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge, which required institutions to add a surcharge to every credit hour taken in excess of the total number of credit hours required to complete the chosen degree (Florida Senate, 2020; Florida State University, 2020). Accordingly, this excess is calculated based on a percentage that ranges from 110 to 120% (Florida Senate, 2020).

Specifically, the surcharge is a percentage of the amount charged for one credit hour and is evaluated in addition to the fees and tuition (Florida State University, 2020). The surcharge percentage and the threshold are then calculated based on the time of initial enrollment at the institution (Florida State University, 2020). For example, if a student entered the institution for the first time after high school between and including Fall 2009 and Summer 2011, then the student's threshold would be 120% of the hours required for the declared degree program. In turn, the surcharge would be 50% of the matriculation fee (base in-state tuition amount) for every hour over the threshold. If a student entered between and including Fall 2011 and Summer 2012, then the threshold would reach 115% of the hours required for the declared degree program and the surcharge for this given time would be 100% of the matriculation fee (base in-state tuition amount) for every hour above the threshold. In 2012, the legislature added additional language which states that undergraduate students who break enrollment will be subject to the current

thresholds and surcharges in effect for the semester they choose to return to the university (Florida Senate, 2020).

The Impact of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge

The increasing number of Florida university students who pay double tuition has become a problem for many students. During the Fall 2015 semester, specifically at the University of Central Florida (UCF), Florida State, University of Florida, and South Florida University, approximately 3,770 students were charged roughly \$2.35 million in excess credit hour surcharges whereas in 2014, about 1,760 students paid approximately \$851,120 in penalties at the identified institutions (Russon, 2016). These fees were paid most frequently by students who dropped classes or changed majors (Smith, 2015). Furthermore, students who earn excess credits while pursuing double majors are obliged to pay the fee upfront and then have it reimbursed after graduation (Russon, 2016). Russon (2016) stated that university officials have made students aware of the surcharge and have advised them of ways to avoid the fees.

Universities are required by law to provide students with flexibility. For instance, if a bachelor's degree requires 120 credits to complete, students will be permitted to take up to 132 credits without facing any penalties (Russon, 2016; Smith, 2015). However, students who enrolled in fall 2011 or later were charged an excess credit hour surcharge that is double the tuition rate after the identified 132 credit threshold (Russon, 2016; Smith, 2015). This was specifically observed at The University of Central Florida (UCF) during the 2015–16 academic year when tuition was reportedly \$105.07 per credit hour; under the identified penalty, the cost ballooned to \$210.14 (Russon, 2016; Smith, 2015). UCF is considered the largest school in the state of Florida, thus representing the largest possible example of this issue. Based on school

records, 1,912 UCF students were charged \$1.25 million in surcharges in fall 2015, illustrating an average of approximately \$654 per student (Smith, 2015).

Students have consistently addressed the issue of transfer surcharges during student government elections and through campus forums (Smith, 2015). These findings suggest that there is an obvious need for concern. Yet this is not the only way that these conditions impact students; in contrast, some students are not affected by the surcharges. For instance, students who come into institutions with Advanced Placement credit or dual enrollment from high school have been found to gain more flexibility, considering that the hours do not count against the limit (Russon, 2016; Smith, 2015).

Fuse Program

In an effort to address excess credit hour surcharges for transfer students, in 2017, the University of South Florida launched the Fuse program. Fuse is a transfer program between the University of South Florida and eight Florida State Colleges (Florida, U. of S., 2021). This partnership provides seamless academic pathways for students to complete their associate degree, and guarantees admission into specific majors at the University of South Florida in an effort to promote timely graduation and avoid excess credit hour surcharges (Florida, U. of S., 2021).

The participating institutions included Hillsborough Community College, Polk State College, St. Petersburg College, Pasco Hernando State College, State College of Florida, College of Central Florida, South Florida State College and Santa Fe College (Florida, U. of S., 2021).

Students can enter the fuse program at one of the participating institutions, and these students are expected to:

1. Have the intention of transferring to the University of South Florida.

2. Complete an Associates of Arts degree within 3 years and maintain a minimum cumulative 2.0 GPA. By meeting these requirements, students will be guaranteed admission to USF.
3. Students seeking admission to limited or restrictive access programs will also have to meet additional specific prerequisites such as a higher GPA or test scores. These can be found in strategically designed Graduation Paths (see Appendix A).
4. Meet regularly with advising at the State or Community College and a University of South Florida campus.

Students admitted to the fuse program are placed on an academic graduation path (Appendix A) which provides a seamless transition from Florida College System (FCS) partner schools to USF. This allows for timely completion of both the A.A. and Bachelor's degrees.

Students on a defined academic path will be advised on course pre-requisites, GPA requirements, test scores and any other additional criteria necessary for admission into limited access or restrictive majors. Academic advisors at all partner schools will monitor the student's progress on that degree pathway to ensure that the student meets the necessary requirements to enroll. The University of South Florida, will also offer advising on site at the Florida College System campuses to assist students in fuse. Additionally, Fuse students will have access to University of South Florida facilities, events, and activities. This includes a specially designed orientation session at the outset of the program. The goal is to make sure that all fuse students feel that they are part of the larger university family while they are pursuing an Associates' degree at his/her home FCS institution (Florida, 2021).

According to the Fuse Annual Report, the Fuse program has over 1500 students in the program with an average GPA of 2.92 and with 60% of students enrolled in five specific majors, Biomedical Sciences, Marketing, Accounting, Psychology and Criminology (Florida, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate an Excess Credit Hour training program that serves Florida College System Institutions. This chapter is dedicated to discussing the methodology and details of the program trainings participants, training, timeline, and other pertinent details. The evaluator will provide detailed information about the training program and potentially demonstrate the effectiveness of information sharing between educational institutions. This chapter also describes the design and procedures that were used to achieve the identified goals of this program evaluation.

The training in this evaluation focused on an excess credit hour training session for administrators, staff, and advisors at Florida College System's two-year institutions. The purpose of this training program is to improve knowledge and outcomes for transfer students, allowing them to better prepare for the transition process. Participants were provided detailed information on the excess credit hour surcharge and its potential effects on students transferring to 4-year institutions.

Transfer Students in the State of Florida have increasingly been affected by the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge (Smith, 2015; Russon, 2016) and excess credit hours has been identified as a growing problem among transfer students. Typically, transfer students are not aware of the effects of the surcharge before transferring to four-year institutions and as a result, the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training Program was developed to address this, by providing

information on the effects of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge to Florida College System Institutions.

Choice of Method: Evaluation

Evaluation is defined as the systematic application of scientific methods to assess a program's design, implementation, improvement, or outcomes (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Short et al., 1996). The term *program* may refer to any organized action including, but not limited to, media campaigns, service provision, educational services, public policies, and research projects, etc. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1992). Evaluation should be incorporated during the initial stages of program development (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Short et al., 1996). An initial step of the evaluation process is to describe the program in detail (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Short et al., 1996). This activity can create an understanding of the program, the evaluation process, and program and evaluation terminology (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Short et al., 1996). Developing a program description also helps to ensure that program activities and objectives are clearly defined and the objectives are measurable (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Short et al., 1996). In general, the evaluation should be feasible, useful, culturally competent, ethical, and accurate (CDC, 1992).

Brinkerhoff et al. (1983) identified four primary conditions that must be satisfied for a training program to be considered good:

- (1) Training must be directed toward worthwhile goals (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983).
- (2) Training strategies must be theoretically sound, reflect good practice, be feasible, and make optimum use of available resources (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983).
- (3) Implementation of training must be efficiently managed and responsive to emerging problems and changing conditions (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983).

(4) Recycling decisions (i.e., to terminate, continue, curtail, or expand training) should be based on knowledge of training impacts, the extent to which training outcomes are in use, and the worth of training (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983).

In addition to the aforementioned conditions, decisions made regarding the training program should be responsive to continuing and emerging needs and problems (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983). These criteria are not independent; each is important to another. Training designs must not only be potent but must also be directed toward worthwhile goals; good designs can serve as guides to implementation, and good design facilitates implementation (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983). Ultimately, well-implemented training will most likely have positive outcomes. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of how these criteria are functionally related in a cycle that repeats as training programs grow and develop. The excess credit hour training was developed using Brinkerhoff et al.'s model, meeting the four primary conditions of the model. First, specific goals were developed for the training, with the main goal being to inform participants about the excess credit surcharge and its effects on transfer students. Additionally, the training was designed to be sound, and used all available resources to obtain up to date information regarding transfer students and the excess credit hour surcharge. The excess credit hour surcharge training also includes information related to policy amendments which support the second condition of the Brinkerhoff et al model, by providing information on changing conditions of the excess credit hour surcharge, and the training continues to be expanded as information changes and the needs of the participants expands and grows, which supports the fourth and final condition of the Brinkerhoff et al. (1983) model.

Evaluation activities tie these training functions together (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983).

Different kinds of evaluations are done during each of these training function stages to ensure that the function is carried out as well as possible (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983).

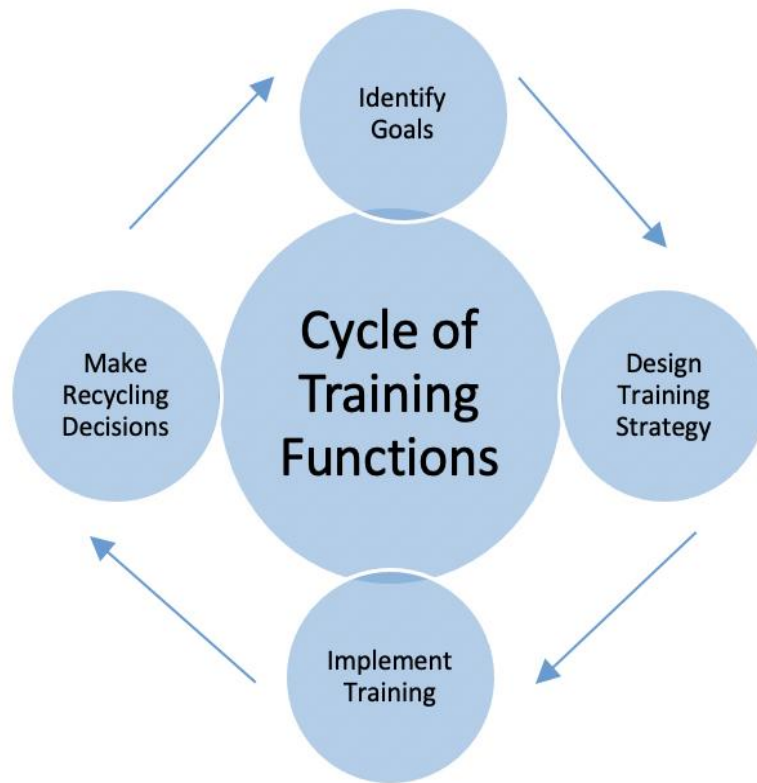


Figure 1. Cycle of Training Functions (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983).

Qualitative Methods

This program evaluation will use quantitative and qualitative methods to elicit answers to pre and post survey and interview questions. Studying a process such as transition is best accomplished using qualitative research methods (Whitt, 1991). Whitt (1991) explained that “studies of process ask how something happens and portray the dynamics of action and change, including the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of people involved in the process” (p.

409). Whitt (1991) further argued that studies of process are not suited to quantitative methods, which predominantly use “pre- and post-measures that only reflect the state of a person or program at the beginning and the end [of the process]” (p. 409). Qualitative studies, by contrast, allow the researcher to understand “what happens between the beginning and the end, [and] how the persons involved in the process perceive and feel about their experiences” (Whitt, 1991, p. 409).

Kuh and Andreas (1991) noted that, while student behavior is represented by numbers in quantitative studies, it is represented by words in qualitative studies, thus presenting a fuller picture of the process in question “than what is produced using questionnaires and surveys” (p. 402). Another benefit of using qualitative methods is that interviews or observations often produce “results [that] challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about student life” (Kuh & Andreas, 1991, p. 402). Although, there are many benefits to Qualitative methods, this evaluation used both Qualitative and Quantitative methods on the pre- and post-surveys, in an effort to gain a clear understanding of the participants’ knowledge of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge. Thus, to strive to improve the understanding of the excess credit hour surcharge, Florida College System community college institution representatives attended a training to determine and increase their knowledge of the excess credit surcharge.

Setting

The purpose of this training program was to provide the participants with information related to the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge. The training was held in an online format using Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams is a persistent chat-based collaboration platform complete with document sharing, online meetings, and many more useful features for business communications (Microsoft Stories Asia, 2020).

Evaluation Questions

This evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. How does the training program affect participants' awareness about the effects of excess credit hour surcharges on transfer students?
2. How have participants' advising behaviors been affected by the excess credit hour training program?

Training Design

The content of the training program was developed by identifying the key elements of the excess credit hour surcharge (see Appendix B).

The training session addresses six key objectives:

1. Define the excess credit hour surcharge.
2. Discuss why the excess credit hour surcharge is important at the Florida College System institution.
3. Discuss the effects the excess credit hour surcharge has on students upon transferring.
4. Discuss the costs associated with the excess credit hour surcharge.
5. Provide cost examples.
6. Discuss legislative changes which have been made to the excess credit hour surcharge policy.

Administrators, staff, and advisors at various Florida College System two-year institutions are the training participants. Qualitative and Quantitative data collection will contribute to the program evaluation assessment through the use of a Qualtrics pre- and post-survey designed to determine participants' knowledge of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge, administered before and after the completion of the training (see Appendix C).

Participants

The participants in this evaluation were recruited via an email invitation from the Office of Transfer Student Success at the University of South Florida. Participants in this evaluation were administrators, staff, and advisors at various Florida College System two-year institutions and voluntarily attended the Excess Credit Hour training. The training was designed to (a) determine the participants' knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge, (b) determine if participants increased their knowledge of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training with a pre- and post-survey evaluation and (c) determine if the training changed how transfer students are advised about the excess credit hour surcharge.

Three excess credit hour trainings were completed in 2020. Table 1 details participant participation by institution and date attended.

Table 1. Number of Training Participants by Date and Instruction.

Participant Institution	2020 Training Dates		
	June 8	July 20	September 21
College of Central Florida	2	2	1
Hillsborough Comm College	11	16	9
Pasco Hernando State College	9	10	10
Polk State College	2	2	1
South Florida State College	1	1	2
State College of Florida	1	1	0
Total Participants	26	32	23

Surveys

Pre and Post surveys were used in this program evaluation. The Pre-Survey was provided to participants upon confirmation of acceptance of the training invitation. Training attendees were informed that a pre and post survey would be requested in the initial training invitation. Attendees were advised the survey was anonymous and voluntary, and they were not required to complete the survey to attend the training. The Post survey was disseminated at the conclusion of

the training. The pre and post survey were the same, the questions did not change, the pre and post survey sought to determine the participants institution represented, role of trainee within the institution and determine trainee's knowledge of the following:

- Financial cost of the excess credit hour surcharge.
- Type of credits counted towards the excess credit hour surcharge.
- Impacts of excess credit hour surcharge for students transferring to 4-year institutions.
- Overall knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge.

Interviews

Interviewing is a qualitative research method using conversation to gather insights and understanding from the participants to answer questions (Roulston, 2010). All participants who attended the Excess Credit Hour trainings, were invited to a 30-minute interview session, to discuss their knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge. Three participants replied and accepted the interview invitation, and then the interview sessions were scheduled. Of the three participants who accepted the interview invitation, two were academic advisors and one was an administrator from the participating Florida College system institutions. The interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams (Software). The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes and the evaluator conducted the interviews (see Appendix D for Interview Protocol). For this evaluation, Semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010) were completed by participants who have previously attended the excess credit hour training session. The interviews consisted of broad open-ended questions to gather an understanding of the insights of the training participants. The interviews were recorded by Microsoft Teams, and transcribed by Tableau, an external company. Verbal informed-consent was obtained prior to starting the interviews. The recordings and transcriptions will remain secured and confidential and will be shared with each

participant. The transcription was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software TABLEAU (software). Participants were asked to discuss, how they advise transfer students, training they have received regarding transfer students, and how they advise students with excessive credit hours.

Transfer Student Credit Hour Data

The evaluator obtained transfer student information from the Office of Decision Support at the evaluator's home university. The student data for analysis was grouped into two broad categories: demographics and admission-related. The evaluator analyzed transfer student's data from students who transferred in Fall 2016, Fall 2017, Fall 2018, Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021. The students included in this data are regular transfer students and are not participants in the University of South Florida's Fuse Program, described in Chapter 2. Table 2 below provides details average number of transfer student credit hours by institution and semester.

Table 2. Average Number of Transfer Student Credit Hours by Institution.

Participant Institution	Average Transfer Credit Hours Fall					
	Semesters Prior to Training				Semesters After Training	
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
College of Central Florida	72.58	68.72	68.79	68.44	62.50	62.86
Hillsborough Community College	75.86	72.50	68.50	67.92	65.20	62.82
Pasco Hernando State College	72.58	73.68	79.62	72.65	68.95	65.26
Polk State College	69.72	68.94	64.25	70.25	72.54	68.50
South Florida State College	67.26	63.25	67.23	69.32	68.75	62.89
State College of Florida	72.50	66.82	65.24	68.25	65.76	68.70
Average Total	2446.5	2430.91	2431.63	2435.83	2423.7	2412.03

Analysis

Surveys: Pre/post. The evaluator reviewed participants' responses regarding their knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge before and after the training. The analysis included a quantitative and qualitative review of the results, as pre/posttests included Likert-type items as well as open-ended items. Descriptive results of participants' positions, knowledge levels, and confidence in working with students advising about excess credit surcharges was provided, including means, ranges, and standard deviations. Thematic analysis was presented for open-ended items related to participants' responses related to advisement practices related to excess credit surcharges.

Interviews with participants. At the most basic level, interviews are simply conversations (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) defines qualitative interviews as an "inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 2). Interviews for evaluation purposes often differ in ways from other types of interviews or conversations. Unlike conversations in daily life, which tend to be reciprocal, professional interviews typically have an interviewer or evaluator who oversees developing and directing the interview. Qualitative interviewing can be a powerful tool to determine participants' thoughts and behaviors. For this evaluation, the evaluator reviewed interview transcripts and look for patterns and themes among the participants, for theme development and coding processes. Coding is a method for organizing the text of transcripts and discovering patterns within that organizational structure (Auerbach et al., 2003). Once coded, words can be sorted into categories and then organized into themes which emerge from the interviews. Themes and selected quotations were presented to illustrate participants' sentiments. The transcription was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software

TABLEAU (software). Through thematic analysis, themes were identified relevant to the program evaluation.

USF transfer student data from 2016–2021. Excess Credit Hour Surcharge trainings were offered at USF to known individuals from Florida College System institutions. The evaluator reviewed transfer student annual excess credit hour surcharge totals and compared the data before and after training attendance. The evaluator looked for trends and changes in the amount of excess credit hours students accumulate before and after the excess credit hour surcharge training was completed. Analysis included descriptive information related to the range and average number of credits brought by fall classes. This data assisted the evaluator in determining if the number of credit hours transfers student transferred with increased or decreased after participants attended the excess credit hour surcharge training.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research methods that was used in this program evaluation. Several data sources were collected in order to evaluate this excess credit hour surcharge training, which is based on the first three levels of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) training evaluation model. Although much of the data was qualitatively analyzed, it was enhanced with quantitative data, which will be used to support the findings. The data included surveys, individual interviews, and an analysis of transfer student credit data. Results from the data analysis were used to make recommendations for transfer student transition improvement.

CHAPTER FOUR:

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this program evaluation. The results of the program evaluation are presented below and organized by each data source. The analyses of the qualitative and quantitative data are presented through Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) training evaluation model. An interpretative analysis of the findings is presented, and the chapter concludes with a summary. The following questions guided this program evaluation:

1. How does the training program affect participants' awareness about the effects of excess credit hour surcharges on transfer students?
2. How have participants' advising behaviors been affected by the excess credit hour training program?

From the participation data shown in Table 1, the demographic features of the participants were recorded. Table 3 below provides the descriptive statistics. From the mean scores for the three programs, the evaluation established that the participation of the attendees on 20th July recorded the best attendance for the training program with an average of 5.33 participants across the colleges as compared to the 8th June ($n=4.33$) and 21st September ($n=3.83$). Standard deviation indicated that the data spread among the three periods indicated a similar trend to the mean score with values of 4.46, 6.25, and 4.45 for the three periods 8th June, 20th July, and 21st September, respectively.

Table 3. Participant Descriptive Statistics.

	June 8	July 20	September 21
Mean	4.33	5.33	3.83
Standard Error	1.81	2.55	1.81
Median	2.00	2.00	1.50
Mode	2.00	2.00	1.00
Standard Deviation	4.45	6.25	4.44
Sample Variance	19.8	39.0	19.7
Range	10	15	10
Minimum	1.00	1.00	0
Maximum	11	16	10
Sum	26	32	23
End	6	6	6
Confidence Level (95.0%)	4.67	6.55	4.66

Further descriptive statistics were established in connection with the data obtained for the average transfers for the 6 colleges considered in the study. The results indicated that there was a general declining trend in the years after the training programs. The least number of credit hour transfers for the students within the state were recorded in 2020 and 2021 as indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Student Credit Hours Transferred from Institutions Participating in Training Program.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Mean	71.7	68.9	68.9	69.4	67.28	65.17
Standard Error	1.19	1.54	2.25	0.72	1.43	1.14
Median	72.54	68.83	67.865	68.88	67.25	64.07
Mode	72.58	#N/A	#N/A	#N/A	#N/A	#N/A
Standard Deviation	2.93	3.79	5.52	1.77	3.52	2.814
End	6	6	6	6	6	6
Confidence Level (95.0%)	3.08	3.98	5.80	1.85	3.69	2.95

Evaluation Question One

Pre- and Post-Survey

To determine participants' awareness of the excess credit hour surcharge, participants were asked to complete pre and post surveys. The pre survey was distributed to registered participants one day prior to date of the excess credit hour training, participants were asked to complete the pre survey, prior to attending the training sessions. The post surveys were distributed to participants immediately following the training, participants were asked to complete the survey at the conclusion of the training and all post surveys were returned when the training session ended. The surveys both pre and post were administered online through Qualtrics.

Survey response. The pre- and post-surveys were sent to all participants. The total number of pre- and post-survey participants was 25 who were divided into pre-program period with 14 participants and the post-program period with 11 participants. From the participation records of the survey, the response rate for the survey was established to be 100%, indicating data obtained was sufficient for the target population for the researcher to conclude to the target population for generalization purposes. Survey responses are presented in Table 3. The response rate includes participants that responded to at least two survey questions.

Survey results. The results of the pre- and post-surveys multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions are presented below. The questions were developed based on Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) Training Evaluation model. The impact this training had on advising behaviors were assessed. On the post-survey, as illustrated in Table 2, the question gauging participants' understanding of the impacts of the excess credit hour surcharge for students transferring to 4 years institutions yielded the highest mean score of 3.42 out of 5 ($SD =$

0.50). Additionally, on the post-survey, the question gauging participants' awareness of the types of credits counting toward the excess credit hour surcharge resulted in the lowest mean score of 3.33 out of 4 ($SD = 0.39$). On the post-survey, the overall mean score for all four questions was 3.39 out of 4 ($SD = 0.50$) indicating that participants had an overall knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge. With an 80% response rate on the post-survey, training participants showed an increase in overall knowledge after attending the training, as noted above. While there are limitations to pre and post surveys, a strength of the evaluation design is the evaluator disseminated the pre and post surveys to three different groups and supplemented the surveys with individual interviews with selected participants.

Table 5. Pre and Post Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training Survey Responses.

Survey Questions	Pre- Training Survey			Post- Training Survey		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Financial cost of the excess credit hoursurcharge.	14	2.67	0.79	11	3.42	0.49
2. Type of credits counted towards the excess credit hour surcharge.	14	2.27	0.93	11	3.33	0.39
3. Impacts of the excess credit hour surcharge for students transferring to four-year institutions	14	2.73	0.85	11	3.50	0.50
4. Overall knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge.	14	2.40	0.80	11	3.33	0.62
Average Mean Scores		2.51			3.39	

Evaluation Question Two

Question two, which also aligns with Level 2 of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006)'s training evaluation model, is focused on learning or the degree to which participants acquired new skills and/or knowledge based on attending the excess credit hour surcharge training.

Participant learning was measured through pre and post surveys mentioned previously and semi-structured interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Three Florida College System academic advisors were invited to discuss their knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge. The three academic advisors selected previously attended the Excess Credit Hour training in 2020. The participants were invited via email to participate in an interview and were provided the context of the topic. All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and were recorded. The complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

After analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data, the evaluator reviewed the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and used constant comparative analysis to group similar and different pieces from the open-ended questions and interview transcripts. After three complete readings of the data, open coding was used to create 12 initial categories. After an additional review, axial coding was used to combine categories and create three main themes: 1) Advising support, 2) Partnerships and, 3) Academic Course Planning. Table 4 shows the themes generated.

Table 6. Participants' Perception Themes.

Advising support	Attending 30 minute advising sessions	Career planning	Planning for transition
Partnerships	Student support	Cost	Directing students' academic path
Academic Course Planning	Courses that don't apply to major	Recognizing potential excess credit hours	Connecting with students

Academic course planning was a significant focus, when participants discussed how they advise their students. "Advising support and Academic course planning" includes advising students with course registration, as well as the major selection and career planning. Most participants specifically mentioned advising students to select majors and courses that would

allow them to transfer to 4-year institutions without the threat of incurring excess credit hours. Participants also mentioned that they found the excess credit hour training to be “beneficial, helpful, and informational.

Transfer Student Credit Hour Data

USF Transfer student data from 2016-2021 was retrieved. Excess Credit Hour Surcharge trainings were offered at USF to known individuals from Florida College System institutions. The evaluator reviewed transfer student annual excess credit hour surcharge totals and compared the institutional data prior to and following training attendance. The evaluator looked for trends and changes in the amount of excess credit hours students accumulated before and after the excess credit hour surcharge training was completed.

As shown in Table 4 and analyzed in Figure 2 below, the highest average number of transfer student credit hours for transfer students for 2016 is 75.86 for students who transferred from Hillsborough Community College. Students transferring from Pasco Hernando College had the highest average number of transfer credit hours in 2017 (72.50), 2018 (79.62), and 2019 (72.65). In 2020 and 2021, after representatives from these institutions attended the excess credit hour training session, the average number of transfer student credit hours decreased significantly at Hillsborough Community College and Pasco Hernando College.

Between 2016 and 2021, the average number of transfer student credit hours was reduced from 75.86 (2016) to 62.82 (2021). For Pasco Hernando College there was also a reduction in the average number of transfer student credit hours from 72.58 in 2016 to 65.26 in 2021. Overall, the average number of transfer credit hours decreased from each institution with participants in the excess surcharge training sessions.

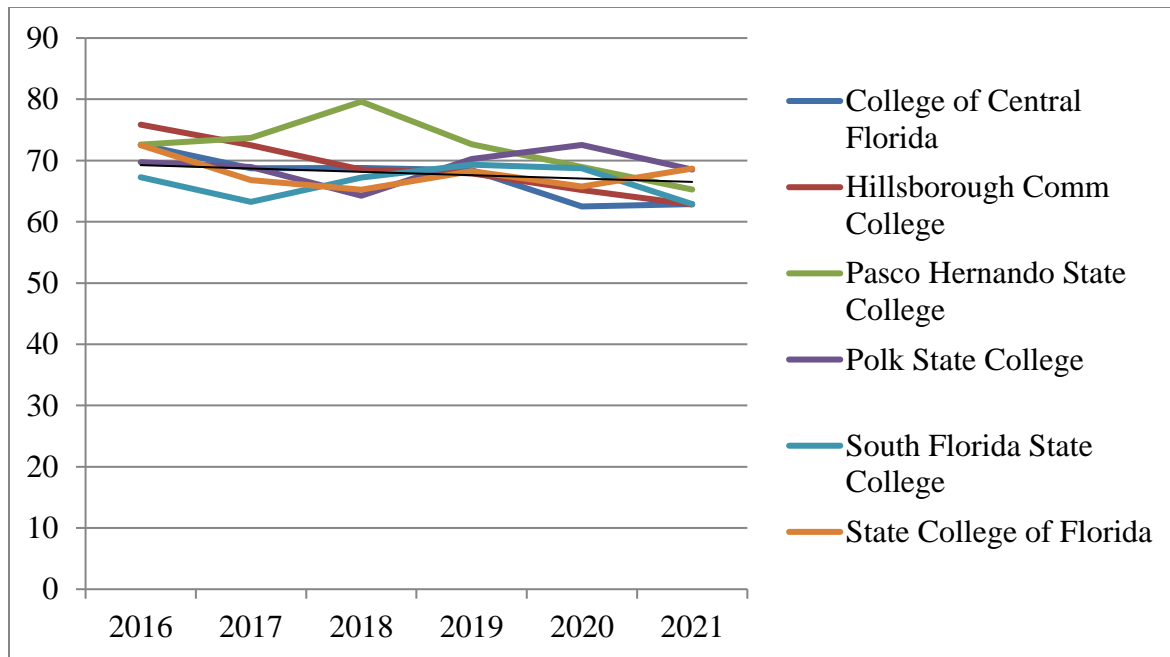


Figure 2. Average Number of Transfer Student Credit Hours by Institution.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the training evaluation. Qualitative and quantitative data revealed how training participants increased their knowledge of the financial cost of the excess credit hour surcharge, increased knowledge on the types of credits counted towards the excess credit hour surcharge, increased awareness of the impacts of the excess credit hour surcharge for students transferring to 4-year institution and increased their overall knowledge of the excess credit hour surcharge. The findings are organized within the framework of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) training evaluation model.

CHAPTER FIVE:

FINDINGS

Introduction

This section of the program evaluation provides a brief discussion of the evaluation findings. This section will specifically review a discussion of the evaluation findings, recommendations for practice, limitations of the evaluation, and recommendations for future studies.

Discussion of the Evaluation Findings

From the descriptive statistics on the participation in the training program, the optimal number of training participants was established in the second program ($n=32$) with a decline recorded in the third training ($n=23$). The major concern for the evaluator was to increase the level of awareness on the excess credit hours surcharge on transfer students. From the descriptive statistics, it was clear that on average, the mean number of transfer credits from students across all the schools declined after representatives from these schools attended the training program.

The trend could be an indication that the students have been equipped with full knowledge regarding the excess credit hour surcharge at the transferring institution. Initially, transfer students may not have known about the excess credit hour surcharge prior to transferring; however, understanding the implications of such a cost before making the move to transfer may be the factor causing the declining trend for the credit transfers or in other words limiting the students to avoid taking courses which may not apply to their majors at all costs.

The analysis of the Likert scale survey on the impact of the training connected the three aspects of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) training evaluation model: reaction, learning, and knowledge. Findings indicated that participants gained an understanding of the excess credit hour surcharge as indicated by the increase in scores on level of understanding on the post-training survey compared to the pre-training survey. Additional findings include open ended responses to question five of the pre and post survey. When asked to describe how the Excess Surcharge impacts students on the pre and post survey, some responses were "It will be more expensive to complete courses and can cause delay or inability to receive some financial aid," "surcharge added to hours over 110% of program," "students are charged additional tuition fees if they complete credits beyond 120% of what is required for the degree and certain types of credits do not apply, including college credits completed during high school," and "surcharge added after certain percentage of program (depends on when they started) is reached." The responses were similar on both the pre and post surveys, indicating that the participants were able, to some degree, to describe the excess credit hour surcharge before and after attending the excess credit hour training session.

Two theoretical frameworks were used to guide this evaluation: Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (1988) and Human Capital Theory. The stages of Tinto's (1988) model largely speak to transfer students as they move through the phases of departure from one institution and prepare for the transition and integration to a new institution. The three stages—separation, transition, and integration—are longitudinal and reflect both the personal and intellectual integration of students into their college communities (Tinto, 1988). Transfer students face many challenges as they transition to a new environment of a 4-year institution and

Tinto's (1988) model effectively introduces a framework for analyzing transfer students and their outcomes.

This evaluation speaks to Tinto's (1988) model, as transfer students are faced with many challenges as they prepare for their transition and typically experience all three stages of Tinto's model, separation, transition, and integration. Human capital theory rests on the assumption that formal education is instrumental and, in some instances necessary, to improve the productive capacity of a population (Woodhall & Psacharopoulos, 1997).

In short, human capital theorists argue that an educated population is a productive population. In this evaluation, the evaluator suggests that although transfer students are faced with many challenges and obstacle's to transferring to 4-year institutions, they are resilient and determined to complete their education.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the gains realized from pre to post-test following the training sessions, having knowledge of the Excess Credit Hour surcharge prior to transferring will benefit transfer students. Most administrators and academic advisors, specifically within the transfer student population, are possibly not aware of the impacts of the excess credit hour surcharge. As a result, the evaluator recommends trainings to increase knowledge as well as dedicated and intentional information sharing between institutions, on the impacts of the excess credit hour surcharge with Florida College System Institutions, 4-Year Institutions, and perhaps even at the high school level. This level of information sharing from administrators to academic advisors should then trickle down to the transfer student. Through increased training and information sharing, a greater awareness and understanding of the underlying effects and the impacts of the excess credit hour surcharge could occur. Creating such awareness, by increasing knowledge at various

stakeholder levels, may minimize the number of transfer students burdened with the excess credit hours.

The evaluator reviewed the University of South Florida's enhanced 2+2 program FUSE. FUSE provides guaranteed admission to a selected major, when the student follows the guided graduation pathway (University of South Florida, 2021). The evaluator suggests that the creation of similar programs at other 4-year institutions will perhaps influence the number of credit hours students will transfer to a year institution with, causing a decrease in the likely hood of students incurring excess credit hours charges. By providing the student a guided pathway, these programs assist students with avoiding taking courses that will not transfer, apply to the major and put them at risk to incur excess credit hours. Such guided programs, could offer students a seamless path to completing their education.

The evaluator also recommends a reconsideration by the State of Florida policymakers of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge policies, particularly the impact of the policy specifically on transfer students. Although the policy was not meant to be punitive but rather an incentive for timely graduation, the policy has had unintended effects on transfer students. The impact of a policy of this nature should be viewed from all points of view and all students should be considered. Transfer students start their 4-year college experiences at an immediate deficit because the excess credit hour counter started prior to their transfer.

Limitations of the Evaluation

Several limitations have been considered in this evaluation. First, no demographic information was collected from training participants. By collecting demographic information, the evaluator would have been able to determine the level of experience and understanding of the

training participants. This information would have been helpful for targeting specific groups for future training opportunities.

Secondly, while there was a robust number of training participants, there was not a robust amount of pre and survey completions. Having more pre and post survey completed would have provided greater insight into the effectiveness of the training. Additionally, the pre and post surveys were not connected to a specific participant, they were completed randomly and the evaluator had no way to track who completed the survey pre or post.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Additional research should be considered when policy makers are looking to develop such aggressive policies. Obtaining input from various stakeholders at various institutions, will help to ensure well-informed decisions to be made. A review of the engagement of the stakeholders in the industry in such regulations should be, therefore, an area of focus.

Also, collecting demographic information of training participants will assist in identifying additional participants for future training based on their level of experience and understanding. Additionally, tracking the participants who complete the pre and post survey, will allow participants to be connected to determine more specific knowledge and outcomes.

Based on the limitations, this evaluation did not focus on the other variables that may be influencing transfer students, such as student performance. Future studies should focus on more inclusive research on the impacts of such policies to fully understand whether the change recorded in the current evaluation was influenced by awareness or other underlying conditions.

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APPENDIX A:

FUSE GRADUATION PATHWAY



COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES BACHELOR OF SCIENCE: BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

YEAR 1 FALL

ENC 1101
MAC 2311*
CHM X045 with Lab*
State Core Humanities

3
4-5
4
3

YEAR 1 SPRING

CHM X046 with Lab
MAC 2312 or STA 2023
State Core Social Science
General Education/Elective

4
3-5
3
3

TOTAL: 14-15

TOTAL: 13-15

YEAR 2 FALL

CHM X210 with Lab
BSC X010 with Lab
General Education/Elective
General Education/Elective
General Education/Elective

4-5
4
3
3
3

YEAR 2 SPRING

CHM X211 with Lab
BSC X011 with Lab
General Education/Elective
General Education/Elective
General Education/Elective

4-5
4
3
3
3

TOTAL: 17-18

TOTAL: 17-18

*These classes may have prerequisites that must be taken before. Check with your Academic Advisor.

YEAR 3 FALL USE

BOH 3053 General Biochemistry
PHY 2053/L General Physics I with Lab**
Upper Level Elective
Upper Level Elective

3
4
3
3

YEAR 3 SPRING USE

PCB 3063 Genetics**
PCB 3063L Genetics Lab**
PHY 2054/L General Physics II with Lab**
Upper Level Elective
Upper Level Elective

3
1
4
3
3

TOTAL: 13

TOTAL: 14

YEAR 4 FALL USE

PCB 3712 Physiology
CHM 3120C Elementary Analytical Chemistry
Upper Level Elective
Upper Level Elective
Upper Level Elective

3
4
3
3
3

YEAR 4 SPRING USE

BOT 3850 Medical Botany
PHZ 4702 Applications of Physics to Bio and Med I
General Elective
General Elective
General Elective

3
4
3
3
3

TOTAL: 16

TOTAL: 16

**Other course options may be possible. Consult a USF Academic Advisor to determine the most suitable option for student specific goals.

The following is additional information for the Biomedical Sciences major:

- If all pre-requisite courses outlined in the first two years are not completed before transferring to USF students may not meet [admissions criteria](#) to be eligible for admission in the major.
- Biomedical Science is available at the Tampa campus only
- This major is a great option for those students who want to pursue a health profession school after graduation such as medical school, veterinary school, dental school, physical therapy school, physician assistant, etc.
- Students should not take MCB2000/L or MAC2233 at the state college institution.
- Classes for this major are only offered in person and mostly during the afternoon.
- Students who accumulate 3 D and/or F grades in applicable USF science and math coursework for their major will be required to change their major to a major more appropriate to their goals and academic performance, and to a major that is not conferred by the Department of Chemistry, Department of Integrative Biology or Department of Cell Biology, Microbiology, and Molecular Biology. Grade Forgiveness will NOT apply to the mandated requirement of changing majors. If a student is in violation of the D/F policy, regardless of major, they will no longer be able to take any courses offered by the Department of Chemistry, Department of Integrative Biology or Department of Cell Biology, Microbiology, and Molecular Biology.
- Major GPA of 2.0 required for graduation.
- Foreign language entrance requirement (FLENT)- must come in with 2 years of consecutive language from high school or 2 semesters of language taken with AA or a language will need to be added to the above plan.

Career Opportunity Links:

[Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) | [O*NET](#) | [Major Possibilities](#)

For more information about transferring into a science major at USF students can contact SciFYE@usf.edu

For general transfer advising inquiries please contact transfer-advising@usf.edu



College of Arts & Sciences | University of South Florida
4202 East Fowler Avenue | Tampa, FL 33620 | Phone: 813.974.3290



APPENDIX B:

EXCESS CREDIT HOUR TRAINING

Slide 1

Transfer Students and the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge Training

STOP PAYING
MORE FOR YOUR DEGREE
AVOID EXCESS HOURS

USF UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Chandra Davis, MPA
chandradavis@usf.edu

Slide 2

Agenda

- ▼ What is it?
- ▼ Effects on Transfer Students
- ▼ Impact
- ▼ Survey
- ▼ Training Development
- ▼ What is next?

USF STUDENT AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Slide 3

Excess Hours

What is it??

In 2009, the Florida Legislature implemented the law to encourage students to complete their baccalaureate degrees as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The bill requires universities to add a surcharge to each credit hour taken in excess of the total number of credit hours required to complete your degree.

STOP PAYING
MORE FOR YOUR DEGREE
AVOID EXCESS HOURS

USF STUDENT AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Slide 4

Excess Hours Continued...

- ▼ **How much extra will I have to pay?**
- ▼ The surcharge percentage is determined by your start date. If you started between and including Fall 2009 and Summer 2011, the surcharge is 50% of the current tuition rate in addition to what you are already assessed.
- ▼ If you started in Fall 2011 or later, the surcharge is 100% of the current tuition rate in addition to what you are already assessed.

USF STUDENT AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Slide 5

Slide 6

Excess Hours Continued...

▼ **What is counted?**
Essentially, all college credit hours count!




COURSES

USF STUDENT AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Slide 7

Excess Hours Continued

▼ **Some Exceptions....What is not counted?**



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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Slide 8

▼ **Some Exceptions....What is not counted?**



International Baccalaureate

USF STUDENT AFFAIRS & STUDENT SUCCESS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Slide 9

Why Transfer Students?????



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Why Transfer Students?????

FTIC – First Time in College- Counter generally starts at zero

Transfer Students – Counter started at previous institution!

Transfer Students come in with a minimum of 60 Credits.

Majority – 80 plus credits...starting

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144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!
144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!
144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!
144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!	144 CREDIT HOURS!!!

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Why Transfer Students?????

No Major Exploration!




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Why Transfer Students?????

Increased Debt!




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Why Transfer Students?????


Stress!



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Why Transfer Students?????




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Survey Results

Surveyed 32 Transfer Students in Their First Term at USF.




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Survey Results

100 % - No Knowledge PRIOR to Transferring Institution

100% -No Clear Understanding



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Progress.....


Developed Training for Florida College System (FCS) Partner Schools
 Delivered First (Trail) Training Event (SCF)



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Next Steps

Collaborate with Florida College System Institutions
 Advising Behaviors
 Interviews



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APPENDIX C:
PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

Excess Credit Hour Training Survey

Introduction

Thank you for registering to attend the Excess Credit Hours Training Session! Please complete this survey before and after attending the scheduled training. Please answer each question.

1. Please identify your position within your institution.

- ☐ Administrator
- ☐ Staff
- ☐ Academic Advisor
- ☐ Other _____

2. Please provide the name of the institution at which you are representing.

- ☐ Institution Name _____

Knowledge Test

3. Please use the scale below to rate your knowledge of the specified aspects of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge.

	Poor (No Knowledge) (1)	Fair (2)	Good (3)	Excellent (Very Knowledgeable) (4)
a. The financial cost of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge for students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. The type of credits that are counted towards the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. The impacts of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge for students transferring to four-year institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Overall knowledge of the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. How confident would you feel speaking with a student about the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge?

- ☐ Not Confident
- ☐ Slightly Confident
- ☐ Moderately Confident
- ☐ Very Confident

5. To the best of your ability, please describe how the Excess Credit Hour Surcharge impacts students in 1–2 sentences. If you have absolutely no knowledge, please put “N/A.”

APPENDIX D:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. List how you typically allocate your 30-minute advising time with each student by noting beside the 5-minute time blocks below the topics you address with students during these increments.

- 0-5 minutes:
- 5-10 minutes:
- 10-15 minutes:
- 15-20 minutes:

2. “Tell me about the training you have received about supporting students who will transfer to 4-year institutions.”

3. “Tell me how you advise students who want to transfer to 4-year institutions who have excessive credits.”

4. What was the most beneficial aspect of the excess credit hour surcharge training that helped you learn?

5. What was the least beneficial aspect of the excess credit hour surcharge training in helping you learn?