ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	"WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE?" STEM IDENTITY NARRATIVES OF WOMEN OF COLOR PURSUING A COMPUTING DEGREE THROUGH VERTICAL TRANSFER
	Mary Jessica Gallagher, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020
Directed By:	Beverly Bickel, Clinical Associate Professor, Language, Literacy, and Culture, Affiliate Associate Professor, Gender, Women and Sexualities Studies
	Sarah Jewett, Director, Innovations in Transfer Research and Practice, Affiliate Assistant Professor, Language, Literacy, and Culture

This dissertation investigates the experiences and narratives of women of color who pursue a computing degree through vertical transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution. The study used a qualitative research design informed by narrative inquiry to understand the lived experiences of six women of color at various stages of transfer between two academic institutions (a community college and public four-year university). Primary data included multiple narrative interviews conducted with each woman during two or more semesters. Secondary data was collected from interviews with seven meaningful others (faculty and staff) and 30 hours of field observations.

All of the women were drawn to computing because of their passion for technology and its potential to solve problems, but those women who had family members in STEM or computing realized their interests and had computing-related

experiences before college. The women enjoyed their community college experience, even though, for most, it was not their first choice. Within their academic institutions, the women talked about the importance of peer relationships to build a strong sense of belonging. They felt affirmed by the diversity of their institutions, although they experienced various challenges related to gender, ethnicity, and latecomer-to-computing status. In order to best support the strengths, growth and persistence of women of color transfer students in computing, this study suggests that institutions consider using more strengths-based conceptual metaphors, create spaces friendly toward 'newcomers,' develop team-based and problem-oriented curriculum, and increase advocacy around transfer options and diversity within computing.