

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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By
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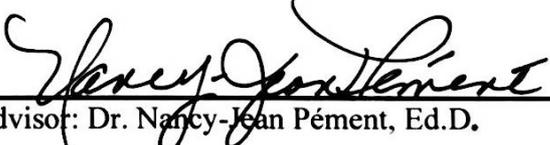
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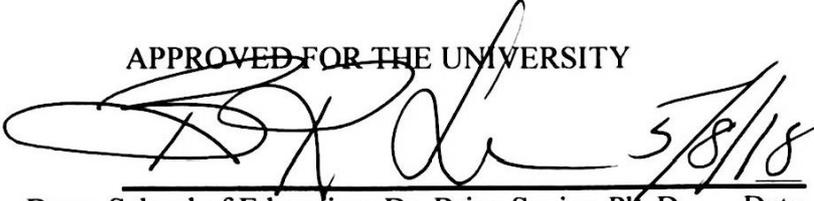


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Abstract

The transfer student population is growing in higher education institutions in the United States (Johnson, 1987). Consequently, institutions of higher education need to better understand and support this rising student population. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter Hispanic-serving institution. This study was guided by Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. Six participants engaged in one-on-one interviews, with four of the participants identifying as female and one as male. The four themes emerged from this study including self-reliance, support services, relationships, and commuter versus living on campus. The four themes mentioned contributed to students lived experiences as transfers. Limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and programs are also addressed.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Ana, Jose, Lizeth, and Karen.

Acknowledgements

I fondly remember being fourteen-years old and seeing my sister Lizeth graduate college. I admired her dedication and passion for education. I wanted to be like her, successful and with that degree in my hands. After earning my baccalaureate of Liberal Studies and realizing just how much I value education, I knew working with students was going to be the path I was going to follow. I have always enjoyed the college environment and applying what I had learned in my classes to help other students. My experiences as a student and as a higher education professional encouraged me to pursue a master of arts degree in education. From the amazing professors I had, and the supportive professionals on campus, they pushed me to follow in their footsteps and become a leader in education.

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Mom and Dad, I have always wanted to make you proud. I know I haven't been the perfect daughter, so thank you for your patience. Thank you for supporting me throughout my

whole educational journey. I love you both with all my heart. Without you, I wouldn't be the woman I am today.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Transfer students in attendance at four-year and two-year institutions may face many challenges when attempting to pursue their college degree. Instilling a sense of community plays an integral role in the transfer experience by encouraging academic and social success (Townley, Katz, Skiles, Schillaci, Timmerman, & Mousseau, 2013). As more transfer students make their way into higher education, it is significant that higher education professionals understand the transfer experience so that they can provide the right tools for transfer students to academically succeed.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of transfer students. This project is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter HSI university, who belong to a transfer student club?
- How might a public, rural, commuter, HSI university ensure the successful transition of transfer students within its community?

I rely on Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) as a framework to better understand the transitional experiences that transfer students may have in higher education. Without doubt, higher education professionals can benefit from understanding the experiences of transfer students in order to not only identify the common challenges transfer students face, but also to promote a successful transfer experience (Marling, 2013).

Historically, the transfer system was created to build a bridge between four-year institutions and community colleges to provide students with greater access to postsecondary education and to ensure academic preparedness for university-level education (Jones & Lee,

1992). Recent research has suggested that higher education leaders such as administrators, advisors and faculty play a key role in helping college transfer students manage this type of transition guiding them with the procedures, expectations, transfer credits, registration appointments, and meeting admission requirements (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). Since graduation rates have become a primary concern for four-year institutions, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of that population consists of transfer students dropping out because of their difficulty in continuing to deal with these transitions alone (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). In a recent study, authors McCormick, Sarraf, BrckaLorenz and Haywood (2009) explained that the majority of the transfer populations are “transfer students tending to have a nontraditional background” (p. 2). In their study, they stated that some of these transfer students tend to be older, live off campus, work full-time and care for family dependents. Because these differential lifestyle factors necessarily come into play, it is important to understand the personal experiences these transitions affect on the individual. If the needs of transfer students are not addressed they may interrupt the transfer student’s comfortable pace toward academic success. Thus, these factors cannot be ignored but must be taken into consideration since they have an influence on the transfer student experience.

Besides academic change, another dynamic that is significant in influencing transfer students’ success involves the integration of social circles. Such a change can play a crucial role in altering the transitional experience for transfer students. Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf and Laanan (2013) explain that although succeeding academically is significant, transfers who do not get involved on campus lose a sense of connection with their institution. In their study, they interviewed transfer students who were not involved in any co-curricular activities. As a result of

no social involvement, Chrystal et al. (2013) conveyed how these transfer students described themselves as “feeling lost because of no social connection” (p. 11). Consistent with Chrystal et al. (2013), Gard, Paton, and Gosselin’s (2012) study also found that difficulty fitting into the new environment negatively influenced transfer student transition due to the lack of social involvement. It is significant to consider that having to step outside of a known environment can be uneasy and confusing, especially for transfer students who identify with their environments, systems, and relationships in known contexts and which they have relied on for some time previously.

It is anticipated that this study will provide higher education professionals, as well as students with an understanding of the experiences of transfer students. This study provides recommendations on how to better serve and meet the needs of transfer students. Students who struggle during their transition from a two-year to a four-year institution may be dealing with various factors such as a lost of social connection with their institution (Christie & Dinham, 1991). I hope that in sharing these stories, higher education professionals will be able to better ensure a supportive and easy transition for transfer students. It is significant that administrators and staff encourage transfer students to engage in support services offered at their institution because it may influence a smooth transition process and also assist in the pursuit of degree completion (Marling, 2013). As one participant in this study, Melissa, stated,

I’ve noticed that other transfers are experiencing the same issues and they are wanting that sense of community and to be engaged, participate in social activities and to learn about resources. However, the only way transfers will feel supported is if administrators helped in connecting transfer students to the right support services offered.

Chapter Two of this study provides a review of the literature to contextualize this investigation. Chapter Three explains the methodology utilized to conduct this study. This chapter also describes the research design used to examine the data collected. In chapter Four, I set out the findings from this study that center on the experiences of those who so graciously spent time with me to tell me their stories. In this chapter, the reader meets the participants and hears directly from them about what it is like to transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution. Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings of this study and considers their implications for policies, programs and services. In addition, in Chapter Five, I also offer recommendations to better address the needs of transfer students.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Chapter one discusses the purpose of this study and identifies the research question.

Specifically, my research questions include the following:

- What are the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter, HSI university, who belong to a transfer student club?
- How might a public, rural, commuter, HSI university ensure the successful transition of transfer students within its community?

In this qualitative narrative study, I share the stories of transfer student experiences at a public, rural, commuter university. The stories encourage a better understanding among higher education professionals to better support and ensure transfer students success. To this end, I rely on Schlossberg's transition theory (1981) as a framework to contextualize the transitional experiences that transfer students may have in higher education.

In this second chapter, I provide a literature review that examines previous studies that investigate the lived experiences of transfer students. Throughout the chapter, I focus on studies examining the implications that the transfer process, adjustment and transfer shock among transfer students. I also examine research findings that support the importance of social and academic integration for student success.

Schlossberg's Theoretical Framework

Patton, Kristen, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016) defined theory as a guide for “ways to make decisions and think about how to interpret individuals, environments, and organizations, not to dictate a single explanation” (p. 5). Patton et al. (2016) explained that theory is a

resourceful tool that may help answer many questions. Thus, theory may be utilized to understand and interpret situations, individuals and the complexities of any social phenomena (Patton et al., 2016). For the purposes of this project, I refer to Schlossberg theory of transition to better understand the nature of the transitions that transfer student's experience. Schlossberg's framework aimed to understand the different forms of transition experienced by students and to illuminate coping strategies given the changes that occur when students navigate from a 2-year to a 4-year institution (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Schlossberg (1981) defined transition as "an event or nonevent that results in change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). For example, a student who decides to transfer to a new institution might result in an event that changes their life, especially when their role as a student is about to completely change as they attempt to adapt to different environments, and/or roles.

Moreover, to have a deeper understanding of transition, there must be an examination of the types of transition that could occur. For instance, let us examine unanticipated, anticipated and nonevent transition. *Unanticipated transition* is an unpredictable event, *anticipated transition* is predictable, and a *nonevent* is when an event is likely to occur, but fails to do so (as cited in Patton et al., 2016). Each of these types of transition could instigate many challenges. However, understanding the meaning behind these types of transitions facilitates our understanding of the coping strategies employed by transfer students. Schlossberg (2011) introduced the "4S's" system model, which included the following: situation, self, support and strategies. Schlossberg (2011) suggested that the "4S's" model explains the "major sets of factors that make a difference in helping with coping with change" (p. 61). Schlossberg (2011) stated that these four factors could help explain why individuals act differently, even though they

experience the same transition. Because transition may be difficult for some individuals, how an individual manages change depends on the resources that are available to the person at that time. Therefore, in order to understand how transfer students cope with change, it is critical to view their educational process through this “4S’s” model lens. When examining the first “S”, an individual's situation, focused on the implications that caused the transition such as, for example, any stresses that could trigger during the time of the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The second “S”, refers to the self, which speaks to a person’s condition during the time of transition and how one's personal, demographic and psychological characteristics affect how an individual views their life (Schlossberg, 2011). For example, if a transfer student is not happy with their current institution it could affect, in the future, their coping with change at their new institution. The third “S”, refers to the functions of support that are accessible during the time of transition, which could consist of relationships, family, friends and communities (Schlossberg, 2011). Lastly, the fourth “S”, represents the coping strategies of the transition, which includes how an individual manages the change of any situation (Schlossberg, 2011).

In addition, Schlossberg (1981) utilized the transition model to understand how it could be helpful to understand students who have experienced transitions in a higher education setting. Because most adult learners have experienced different transitions over time, Schlossberg (1989) highlighted three transitional points: moving into, moving through, and moving on. A student who is transitioning into a new institution must become familiar with the school climate, crowds and procedures that come with a new educational environment (Schlossberg, 1989). As for the student who is moving through a transition, that person may have already become familiar with the changes. However, during the “moving through...it can be a long transition, learners may need help to sustain their energy and commitment” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 16). Experiencing the

moving through stage could result in questions such as, “did I do the right thing [and] can I commit to this transition?” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 16). Schlossberg (1986) would argue that it is vital for students to have assistance during that stage of transition because of the uncertainty that could be provoked. As for students who are going through the “moving out” stage, this phase might be viewed as ending one transition and perhaps starting a new one (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 17). Ultimately, she suggested that students might react differently to their transfer experience whether they are in the moving in, moving through or moving out stages (Schlossberg, 1981). Because different transitions could impact a student positively and/or negatively, Schlossberg (1981) explained that new learning environments could be best supported with quality interactions between learners and higher education professionals. Hence, it is vital that higher education professionals provide the right support and resources when responding to these types of transitions.

Moreover, Schlossberg (1989) described an educational program designed to help meet the needs of learners in higher education who go through various transitions and stages as mentioned above. Schlossberg (1989) explained, “when we create educational programs to help students move in, move through, and move on, the payoff for learners will be impressive” (p. 209). Once a student adapts to different learning environments, the learner must find ways to be supported at their new institution. Utilizing the transition model could help higher education professionals understand the needs of learners through its structured approach by assessing student situations, strategies, support systems and self-identity (Schlossberg, 1989). Furthermore, Schlossberg (1981) posited that without the right guidance learners would feel they are getting the quality and value from their higher education. Hence, it is vital that institutions in higher education provide accessible programs and resources to support students going through changes.

Lastly, Schlossberg (1981, 1995) provided research on the importance of understanding adaptation. Because adaptation could take different forms in an individual's life resulting in growth, resilience and maintenance, it could also force the individual to adopt new roles, understanding and skills (Schlossberg, 1995). How individuals adapt to transition depends also on how they perceive the stability of resources in terms of the changes, their self, and their sense of well-being (Schlossberg, 1981). As Schlossberg (1995) explained adaptation consists of "finding that inner strength to make the change" (p. 54). Thus, adaptation requires letting go of the familiar and accepting the unfamiliar.

When considering the experiences of student transitions in higher education, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory illuminates understanding of the nature of transition in higher education. In addition, understanding Schlossberg (1981) transition theory may also help to better support students whom have a difficult time adapting to new roles in their new institution. As such, the transition model and the conceptual tools Schlossberg offered may help understand the experiences of transfer students.

The Experiences of Transfer Students

In recent years, a national increase in the costs of higher education, has positioned community colleges to become the gateway of higher education access (Lewis, 2013). Transfer students have not only relied on community colleges to academically prepare them for the transition to a four-year institution, but have also assumed that a four-year institution would take on the responsibility to support their academic and personal needs as best as possible (Lewis, 2013). Historically, the role of community colleges has been to provide educational opportunities that deliver a feasible transition to enter a career program, join the workforce, and/or transfer directly to a four-year institution (Ellis, 2013). However, a transfer issue to keep in mind is

whether four-year institutions are positioned to meet the needs of transfer students and to provide them with the right tools to academically and socially succeed in the transitional process. Factors that are correlated with hindering academic success for this group during pre-transfer and post-transfer include failure of institutional coordination, adjustment challenges, lack of social involvement, and unsupportive learning resources (Johnson, 1987).

Institutional coordination is significant for a positive transfer experience because of the concerns and questions a transfer student already has in mind prior to transferring. Grachan (2013) investigated inconsistencies within a four-year institution when managing the transition for transfer students. Grachan (2013) found that institutional policy and practices are highly influential on the experiences of transfer students. Grachan (2013) further found that four-year institution enrollment management models are focused predominantly on incoming freshmen rather than on the transfer population. Grachan (2013) discussed that freshmen are offered more resources such as financial, academic and social guidance, while transfers are expected to transition on their own because of their experience with the higher education setting at a community college. The National Student Clearinghouse indicated that there was little focus on the characteristics of transfer students who are enrolling in four-year institutions and whether the enrollment models are facilitating the right kind of assistance to meet the academic and developmental needs of these students (Grachan, 2013). With that being said, if these enrollment models do not meet the needs for transfer student success, they may result in the further marginalization of transfer students from the beginning of their transfer process.

Grachan (2013) suggested that community colleges should follow a program such as the CCTOP (Community College Transfer Opportunity Program) at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture. This program has an enrollment management model that not only

distinguished all types of transfer students, but also supported students through the “articulation process, advisement process, credit evaluation, scholarship, and continued advisement through graduation” (p. 5). Grachan (2013) utilized a qualitative study methodology to understand the influence an enrollment management model could have on the transfer experience. Grachan (2013) interviewed twelve students from Steinhardt School of Culture who were involved in the CCTOP program. Interviewees were minority, low income, commuter, and non-traditional transfer students. The intent of the interviews was to explore student experiences pre- and post-transfer with the help of the CCTOP program. A profound finding was the positive influence that the enrollment model of an institution may have if it is focused primarily on the transfer student population. The program’s enrollment model supported academic success by providing resources to make the transition a smooth one. Grachan (2013) demonstrated that institutions have depended too long on organic models and that perhaps finding better-controlled enrollment approaches could provide better transfer student experience and success. Better-prepared enrollment models would be influential in not only encouraging an increase of transfer students but also maintaining an environment of high-level transfer student success.

Just as Grachan (2013) explained the importance of understanding different types of supportive enrollment models, it is important to keep in mind that Schlossberg (1981) transitional model could also inform the work of institutions to find a more accurate enrollment model that could best support the transfer student population. As mentioned earlier, Schlossberg’s (1981) theory of transition provides higher education leaders with a better understanding of what transition from a two-year to a four-year institution entails from the perspective of the transfer students themselves.

Transfer Shock

To further explore the understanding of personal and social transitions, it is significant to understand how “transfer shock” influences adjustment for a transfer student (Thompson, 2016). Thompson (2016) found that this type of shock may result in grades dropping and diminished self-perception. Negative self-perception may lead to low self-esteem that, in turn, may be detrimental to one’s academic experience (Thompson, 2016). Low self-esteem may result in transfer students alienating support systems such as faculty, administrators, peers, family members, and academic advisors because change becomes too complex for the student to manage (Thompson, 2016). It is significant to keep in mind that whether transfer students are academically prepared or not, having to adjust to a bigger campus, different policies, expectations, and larger population of students may be hard to navigate for some.

To further explore transfer shock, Thompson (2016) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the perceptions of transfer students’ academic preparedness. The author conducted 33 interviews among transfer students enrolled at the same four-year institution and who had completed 20 credits or more at an urban community college. The majority of participants consisted of minority students who were African American and Latin American, excluding other racial categories. The findings from this study provided an outlook of how demographic changes such as change of institutional policies, and curricula may highly influence a student's perception of fitting in. This study also highlighted the fact that many transfer students are anxious as they become familiar with new policies and environments at a new institution. Thompson (2016) provided suggestions on how higher educational leaders may better facilitate and/or create supportive institutions to help transfer students better cope with changes of all sorts. One recommendation advanced by Thompson (2016) is for community colleges to provide students with the right trade skills and requirements to transfer to a four-year institution. Another

recommendation focused on the significance of departmental support and that institutions should train faculty, administrators and staff to guide students toward academic success (Thompson, 2016).

In addition to noting that academic preparedness is an indicator that affects transfer shock, the study also found that academic adjustment is a main cause of hindering a transfer student's success at a four-year institution (Flaga, 2006). Flaga (2006) used King Beach's (1999) theoretical framework of Consequential Transition to provide an understanding of a student's relationship with new environments. Flaga (2006) interviewed thirty-five transfer students about their experiences with the transition process from a two-year into a four-year institution. Although the students were from the same four-year institution, the sample in Flaga's (2006) study was diverse in terms of the student's ethnicity and gender. Flaga (2006) introduced five dimensions of his study based on the participants' experiences.

The five dimensions of transition were: learning resources, connecting, familiarity, integrating and negotiating. The first dimension relating to learning resources was defined "as tools that students utilized in order to gain information and learn the campus academic system" (p. 6). The second dimension was concerning the development of relationships students had with staff, faculty and academic circles (Flaga, 2006). The third dimension, familiarity, consisted of how comfortable students feel to apply new information they had gathered at their new institution (Flaga, 2006). The fourth dimension, negotiation, consisted of students adjusting their behaviors and roles to new academic and social circles (Flaga, 2006). Finally, the last dimension, integration, consists of learning how to cope with changes and how it could often include a shift in one's own identity (Flaga, 2006). Each of these dimensions that emerged from this study were assessed through three different environments: academic, social and physical (Flaga, 2006).

Flaga (2006) discussed that many of the positive experiences the students shared pointed back to these dimensions as indicators that led to their ultimate success in transferring to the new institution. Because all five dimensions were a main focus by both the four-year and two-year institutions, both institutions were able to help support pre-transfer and post-transfer, with any issues the students had faced when adjusting to a new environment.

Although Flaga's (2006) study concluded that community colleges and four-year institutions could help facilitate students through transition by promoting institutional coordination, the author suggested that future studies might inquire into how identity development shifts during the transitional period in the transfer process. Ultimately, this study captured not only the experiences that students considered influential to adjusting to new environments, but also introduced five dimensions that institutions may evaluate in making supportive approaches for the student transfer population.

Like Flaga's study, Hurtado and Carter (1997) highlighted the importance of focusing on the adjustment process for transfer students. Researchers highlighted that Tinto's model of student persistence (1993) is significant to student development in college. Therefore, those social and academic involvements are precursors to a positive transfer experience. The authors emphasized that social and academic integration may influence the behavior of a student feeling connected to his or her institution. These authors investigated how a sense of belonging may have several consequences on an individual's behavior when experiencing a changed environment. Hurtado and Carter (1997) provided a pathway model that focused on a relationship between transfer students and their memberships in social community organizations. Hurtado and Carter (1997) conducted a study of the changes in attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of 272 students that were and were not socially and academically involved in their

institution. The study consisted of 58 percent female and 41 percent male participants. Hurtado and Carter (1997) analyzed the differences and changes in students' participation in the second and third year of college. One important finding demonstrated how engagement in social and academic activities enhanced the sense of connectedness with the institution. Another finding confirmed that students have a higher sense of belonging at an institution when students engage in relatable activities such as academics with their peers. Ultimately, these studies suggested that student involvement in social organizations might foster a broader sense of group cohesion and enhance a students' identification and affiliation of the college they belong to (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

The Positive Role of Social and Academic Integration

Ose (1997) investigated how student involvement is necessary to having a positive experience in the transfer process. Using a qualitative approach, Ose (1997) examined the difference between transfer students who participate and do not participate in activities at a higher education institution. The study included an interview of 12 former student leaders who had transferred from community colleges to four-year universities. The interview was guided by a list of questions relating to involvement and social success at their institution. During interviews, students complained about not becoming involved because they felt that student organizations and/or extracurricular activities were more focused on recruiting incoming freshmen rather than the transfer-student population. Ose (1997) drew upon Astin's theory of involvement (1984), which provided an understanding of how involvement in higher education can play a positive impact in student persistence. Data analysis further addressed the difference between transfer student participation and non-participants, and the difference in success and satisfaction between the two groups.

This study demonstrated the importance for participants be socially engaged at the institution and that extracurricular activities encourage more motivation in academics than non-participation. Conversely, the students who did not participate in extracurricular activities did not have as much motivation. However, a common experience that these students shared was the feeling of marginalization at their institution because of the difficulty of creating social circles when such circles had already been established during freshman year. Ose (1997) found that both groups had also the mutual concern of “fitting in” their institution during pre-transfer and post-transfer. In conclusion, this study provided an overview of the different experiences transfer students faced in comparison to incoming freshmen. This study suggested that institutions could be more proactive to encourage transfer students involvement with their institutional community to mitigate against feelings of marginalization and discomfort.

Consistent with Ose (1997), Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf and Laanan (2013) investigated the experience of transfer students’ transition from a community college into a four-year institution, with a focus on procedures that make the transition more feasible and accessible. These scholars explored not only the positive and negative experiences transfer students face during the transition, but also the hidden experiences that made the transition easier and more comfortable.

Chrystal et al., (2013) conducted an interview of 22 participants from the same academic institution. The interviews focused on eliciting data regarding personal experiences during the transition process, as well as the strategies students believed were unsuccessful and/or successful during their transfer process. Findings suggested that both academics and social integration play a significant role in the experience of transfer students who decide to continue to pursue a bachelor's degree. The researchers explained that social involvement had affected the personal

development of participants (Chrystal et al., (2013). Social integration became an emerging theme that played a role in how students performed academically and in social circles. The study concluded with a suggestion that institutions must emphasize not only the academic aspect of transition but also the social transition. Therefore, social integration transition is crucial for a transfer student to have a positive experience at university.

Overcoming the Hurdles of Transition

Persistence is critical to transfer student success. Ellis (2013) conducted a qualitative research study to better understand university students who transfer from a community college and successfully complete their college degree. Ellis's (2013) study consisted of focus groups that were made of six to 12 students from eight academic campuses of the University of Texas System (UTS). These focus groups were invited to answer a list of questions regarding the transfer process. A finding was that students identified themselves to be their own self-motivators in succeeding academically. Another finding suggested that students felt that advisors and administrators were unclear with direction when it came to finding the necessary resources for their classes, which resulted in the students self-navigating their way around college. A mutual concern that the UTS focus groups addressed were that both sending and receiving institutions were not helpful or equipped to provide the accurate information needed to have an achievable transfer process. The study explained the importance of communication between two- and four-year institutions. Institutional coordination may help influence persistence among transfer students so that they have the confidence to deal with change and become self-reliant. The authors proposed that further research must address how institutions may encourage self-motivation for incoming transfer students so that academic success is attainable (Ellis, 2013).

Since previous studies have mentioned the importance of understanding the transfer

student experience, it is also significant to understand staff roles during the transfer process. University staffers are the first to interact with transfer students to share their concerns, questions, and to seek guidance during the transition between institutions. It has been suggested by recent researchers that institutional staff play a significant role that affects transfer student completion and retention (Poisel & Stinard, 2005). Understanding the transfer process based on transfer student experiences is crucial to explore the gaps that make it challenging for students. McGowan and Gawley (2006) discussed the importance of having knowledgeable staff at institutions, who may direct and guide transfer students with the right tools to succeed. They conducted in-depth interviews with a small sample of employees from a single academic institution on their experiences with transfer students and the complexities of the transfer procedures (McGowan and Gawley, 2006). Based on the interviews, emerging themes were proposed including transfer credit confusion, expectations, decision-making, and internal and external transition of university environment (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). A finding was the importance of transfer support services during pre- and post-transfer. McGowan and Gawley (2006) suggested that developing strong college-university liaisons would best support and provide positive guidance to the transfer student population.

Moreover, the interviews conducted offered insight into the observations and experiences of university staff with transfer students. McGowan & Gawley (2006) found that institutions adopting a system that organizes and categorizes transfer credits could help students navigate and better understand the transfer process. Another finding was that the complexities of the transfer procedure may result in transfer students feeling confused and hopeless, which could become a hindrance in achieving academic success. For future studies, it was suggested that there be a comparative study between four-year and two-year institutions' staff employees to

advance a thorough understanding of the challenges presented at both type of institutions (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). Again, it is vital to create strong college-university liaisons that may help facilitate and support any administrative concerns for transfer college students.

Conclusion

All combined this literature review contains studies that suggested that transfer students exhibit a range of challenges and needs when transferring from one institution to another. Transitioning and adjusting to a four-year institution is not easy and the process may highly influence a student's perception of themselves, as well as the academic and social circles they end up creating. The studies examined provided a clear understanding of the role that transition, persistence, and social and academic involvement had on a student's perception during the transfer process. Schlossberg 's framework of transition theory may help higher education administrators better understand the experiences, challenges, and factors that not only influence, but may also hinder a transfer student's academic success. Although there is a variety of research done on the importance of social and academic integration, there is much that needs to be studied on the complexities of the transfer process experience. Current and future leaders, along with other higher education professionals striving to advance transfer student success may benefit from this review. Most importantly, this literature review will support both research questions, which are the following: 1) What are the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter HSI University who belong to a transfer student club? And, 2) How might a public, rural, commuter, HSL university ensure the successful transition of transfer students within its community?

The next chapter presents an overview of the methodology for this study. It will provide

information pertaining to the research design, participants and setting, data-collection, and data analysis.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) who belong to a transfer student club. Chapter one described the purpose of the study and the complexities of the transition process for transfer students. I also set out the research questions that guide this study. They are as follows:

- What are the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter, HSI university, who belong to a transfer student club?
- How might a public, rural, commuter, HSI university ensure the successful transition of transfer students within its community?

Chapter Two provided a review of the literature that supported the research questions. Specifically, I explored literature that addressed various problems contributing to the challenges faced by transfer students. The literature revealed that there are various contributing factors that play a role in influencing transfer student's academic experience (Ose, 1997). According to Schlossberg (2011), the process of transitioning from a two-year to a four-year institution takes time and may be perceived by students as a period of crisis or a developmental adjustment, which can lead to unique transition challenges.

Chapter three outlines the research design I utilized to answer my research questions. I also provided detailed information regarding the participants, setting, data collection procedures, and data analysis utilized for this study. These components are essential to the design of my study because it will form a coherent method rather than fragmented one (Creswell & Poth,

2017). Participant confidentiality was taken into consideration and various strategies were utilized to protect the privacy of participants as discussed below. In addition, a narrative research design was used to capture the stories of the participants to advance understanding of the experiences of transfer students.

Research Design

This qualitative narrative study focused on the stories of transfer student's experiences at a public, rural, commuter, HSI university. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) define narrative "as a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience" (p. 2). I also sought to understand how a public, rural, commuter, HSI university seeks to ensure a successful transition for transfer students. Creswell (2012) explains that when individuals tell their own personal stories to researchers not only do the stories offer specific insights, but also makes the participants feel that their stories are valuable and that they are being heard. Furthermore, Maxwell (2012) posits that the "methods one uses must enable you to answer the research questions... the research question is the main component of the study that connects with all the other components" (p. 5).

Therefore, consistent with a narrative study methodology, it was deemed necessary to utilize an interview question technique to gather data that answers the research questions (Conyne, 2010).

Moreover, this narrative research design provided transfer students the opportunity to share their personal experiences at a public, rural, commuter, HSI university. Creswell (2012) posits that the stories will guide the research to look for key elements and emerging themes that could help understand the individual's experience. By utilizing a narrative design, I sought to find, understand and listen to transfer students' experiences, so that higher education professionals like myself, can find ways to ensure academic success for the transfer student population

Understandably, the stories provided vary on the transfer student's experiences within a public, rural, commuter, university. It is necessary that higher education professionals understand the challenges a transfer student faces when transitioning into a public, rural, commuter, HSI university. It is significant that higher education professionals are aware of the challenges of transfer students face, so that institutions are made aware of the needs of the transfer student population.

Theoretical Framework

The epistemological framework from which this study is viewed is the transition theory established by Schlossberg (1981). Schlossberg (1989) supported the idea that understanding transitional events may help higher education professionals assess student situations, behaviors and the larger environment in which they live. Transition theory provides a framework that not only helps promotes a better understanding of transitional experiences among transfer students, but also explains transfer student success and their peculiar academic struggles (Schlossberg, 1981). Moreover, transfer students may react differently to different changes since individuals respond differently when adapting to change (Schlossberg, 1981). Therefore, the idea that most transfer students have to formulate new educational plans and goals in their transition from a two-year to a four-year institution may contribute to their transfer experience (Schlossberg, 1975).

Participants/Settings

Participants in this study included students who belong to a transfer student club at a public, rural, commuter HSI University. The recruitment procedures centered on inviting enrolled transfer students, who belong to a transfer student club at a public, rural, commuter HSI

University. Purposeful and snowball sampling were utilized to identify the participants at the site of the study so that the researcher would develop a detailed understanding of the research question (Creswell, 2012). I essentially relied on the help of a colleague, who is connected to the transfer student club in the recruitment of participants. The institution is considered to be a commuter campus; even though there is residential housing offered to all students. With the high enrollment of transfer students, it is significant that higher education professionals are well prepared to support and ensure transfer student success.

Six transfer students participated in this study. Consent and safeguarding were assured using a consent letter (Appendix A) signed by study participants before conducting a one-to-one interview. The consent forms reiterated the purpose of the study and explained how the researcher would use the information provided by the participants. The consent forms also stated that a pseudonym would be assigned to the participants and would be utilized with the data collected ensuring that no personal identifiers would be used in the reporting of the findings of this study. Indeed, potential harm to the participants was minimized when every effort was made to protect their identities to ensure the confidentiality of their stories (Creswell, 2012).

Data-Collection Procedures

The first step in conducting this study was the submission of the IRB application at the institution where the study was going to be conducted. Creswell (2012) states that all proposed studies must be reviewed by IRB, so that the research protects the rights of the participants. In addition, Creswell (2012) mentioned that it is significant that the study “gives back to those being studied” (p. 475). In return, it is anticipated that this study will not only benefit the transfer student population, but also contribute to helping institutions understand the transfer student experience (Schlossberg, 1989).

Informed consent. Once students were identified, an email (Appendix B) was sent to them along with the consent letter (Appendix A) and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). In addition, the email (Appendix B) mentioned that this study would benefit future strategies and practices to improve transfer student experience. The informed consent letter explained that participation was voluntary and that they could choose to excuse themselves from participating at any time without repercussions. Most importantly, I also mentioned that all information shared would remain confidential by assigning pseudonyms, removing all identifiers from the text and by storing their interviews under lock-and-key and in password-protected files. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, I sent out an additional email to meet at a time and location at their best convenience.

Interview preparation. As I prepared for the interview, it was important for me to ensure that participants be comfortable when sharing their personal experiences. According to Creswell (2012) an interview location must be “free from distractions...setting that lends it to audiotaping” (p. 221). In an effort to make the participants feel comfortable, interviews were conducted in a study room in the library on campus. The study rooms provided a quiet location and ensured privacy between the participant and myself.

To make the participants feel at ease and to establish trust between them and myself, I followed Matteson and Lincoln’s (2009) suggestions on qualitative inquiry. I began the interview by sharing with them the purpose of the study and my aspirations that this study would benefit transfer students on campus. In addition, I made sure to present myself in a professional manner and shared with the participants my position on campus. It was also significant for myself to assure the participants that the experiences they shared would be utilized to help other transfer students who struggle during their transfer experience.

Semi-Structured Interviews. Data were collected in this study through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, which lasted, between 30-45 minutes. The interview protocol (Appendix D) consisted of four warm-up questions and five core questions. The demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) was completed before the beginning of the interview. I made sure that the five questions I would ask during the interview were open-ended. Powell (1998) explained that questions that are open-ended give the participants the opportunity to “express their own thoughts, [despite requiring] more effort in terms of their responses” (p. 6). The interviews were recorded by a voice recorder application on a password-protected iphone. I also had a back-up tape recorder just in case there was a malfunction with the iphone recording device application. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes depending on how much the participants were willing to share when answering the questions. During the interviews I also utilized probing questions such as the following, “tell me more about that, please explain, could you elaborate more on that, and how did that make you feel?”. According to Creswell (2012), probe questions can help the researcher obtain additional information and expand on ideas. Once I was done with the interviews all recordings were transferred to my computer. Once transferred to my computer, I erased all data collected on my iphone and the back-up tape recorder. My computer requires a passcode to access its contents and thus the interview voice recordings are available only to me.

Interview Protocol. As mentioned above, while conducting this interview, it was important to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and at ease. Creswell (2012) states, “the presence of the researcher may affect how the interviewee responds” (p. 249). Along with mentioning to the participants my role as a researcher and student, I also informed the participants the purpose of the study and what I hope to accomplish with the data collected.

As previously mentioned, this study involves transfer student experiences at a public, rural, commuter, HSI university. To have a better understanding of the participants transfer experience, I specifically asked participants about their adjustment, and influence of support systems to their transfer experience. I also asked the participants what was helpful for their transfer experience and what advice they would give to other transfer students. The questions developed for the interview derived from the academic and research literature on transfer student experiences and were presented to gain additional knowledge about the transfer student population. It is not only critical that we understand transition, so that we can understand how it can affect an individual, but also bring awareness to higher education professionals that various types of transitions affect transfers (Schlossberg, 1989).

During the interviews, I understood that each individual participant would not only have different answers but may also have similarities as a whole. Maxwell (2005) states that shared individual experiences are the heart of a narrative research design. During each individual interview, I documented in writing any significant responses of the participants. Before concluding the interviews, I asked each participant if they had any questions, recommendations or anything else they would want to add to the record. I thanked them again and expressed appreciation for their contribution to this study. Some of the participants also thanked me for listening to their experiences and stories.

Demographic Questionnaire. As mentioned above, before the beginning of the interview, I had the participants complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The demographic questionnaire purpose was to not only collect detailed data from the participants, but also served to get better acquainted with the participants (Creswell, 2012). Specifically, I asked in the questionnaire about their gender, age, and ethnicity. The demographic questionnaire

can be found in Appendix C. The construction of the demographic questionnaire was short with questions that the respondents could easily answer (Creswell, 2012). Before the interview was conducted, I let the participants know via email, that they could bring the questionnaire along with the consent form filled out already before the interview or fill it out right before the interview.

Data Analysis

This study consisted of various steps to interpret the qualitative data collected. For instance, data analysis consists of organizing data, examining and coding the data, formulating themes, and interpreting the findings (Creswell, 2012). Each interview was transcribed verbatim, including the pauses, disruptions, and expressions occurring during the interview. Creswell (2012) states that it is significant to transcribe all words including “pauses because they may provide useful information about times when interviewees cannot or will not respond to a question” (p. 239). I decided to transcribe the data information myself with a computer program (Trint) that allowed me to start and stop tape recordings and play them at a speed that helped me easily follow the recording. Maxwell (2008) explains that it is significant to transcribe the text verbatim, so that as a researcher one is able to understand the data in context. In addition to transcribing the data, I also referenced back to the journal notes I had taken during each interview. The field notes were helpful because they provided documentation of self-reflexive observations that I had made throughout each interview. By transcribing interviews myself, I was able to undertake a preliminary listening for codes, and to begin to consider the possible emergent themes from this study.

Coding. Coding is a process to help analyze the text by dividing and categorizing texts in the data to form descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2012). In this study, coding was a crucial

element in the analysis of the interview data. Careful coding allows the researcher to understand the data and find connections, similarities, differences, and themes amongst the participants in this study (Creswell, 2012). As a novice researcher, I undertook the coding phase of this study the old-fashioned way by using colored pencils that represented different preliminary codes, categories and, ultimately, themes. I made sure to read all of the transcriptions carefully and to jot down in the margins ideas and notes that came to mind. I reviewed the transcriptions six times in total. I decided to review the transcriptions six times so that I could gain a better understanding of the information provided through the interviews, as well as aiming to connect personally with the study.

During the first review of the transcriptions, I focused on highlighting key words and phrases that connected back to my research questions. After doing this, I coded the participant's words, phrases, and statements into family categories because they shared similar characteristics. Saldana (2015) recommended, "you use classification reasoning ... to determine which data look alike and felt alike when grouping them together" (p. 10). This tactic condensed my sub-themes into central themes that guided me throughout my study. Ultimately, the themes I identified that were in response to the research questions included: self-reliance, support services, support systems, and commuter versus living on campus.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness aims to ensure the accuracy of the findings. In order to establish trustworthiness, I relied upon data triangulation. According to Creswell (2012), triangulation is "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes" (p. 259). Consistent with Creswell (2012), I found triangulation obligatory because it advanced the reliability of information stemming from

different sources of information and individuals. Additionally, Maxwell (2012) argued that the use of triangulation “allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (p. 93). Thus, the use of triangulation will help improve the accuracy of my research because triangulation not only helps examine the same phenomenon from multiple viewpoints, but also opens the opportunity to allow for deeper dimensions to come forth (Jick, 1979). The strategies I utilized to ensure trustworthiness included member checking, journaling/note-taking and bracketing.

Member checking. Across all interviews, I utilized member checking to confirm the accuracy of the interview transcriptions and to ensure that I had accurately understood certain stories that participants shared with me. Creswell (2012) states that member checking consists of working closely with the participants and asking them about the aspects of the study. I approached member checking by reaching out to the participants via email and by phone to ask any questions I had regarding any information they had provided to me during the interview. Utilizing member checking not only clarified any interpretations I got from the data collected, but also helped to avoid any assumptions or misconceptions from the transcriptions (Creswell, 2012). Because I am sharing stories that are significant to the participants, I engaged in this method of respondent validation to confirm the accuracy in this study.

Journaling and Note-Taking. Another approach to advancing trustworthiness that I used included note-taking. Note-taking consists of examining a text and writing down ideas that come to mind (Creswell, 2012). Additively, I also took notes during the interviews in case there was an event of an audiotape malfunction. However, I took into consideration that it may be difficult to write down all the notes that came to mind while listening to the answers and asking questions of the interviewees. While note-taking, I made sure to pay close attention to the

interviewee's body language, any disruptions that may occur, and expressions. With these notes, I was able to go back and look back at important results and insights of emerging themes (Creswell, 2012). Ultimately, these reflective field notes allowed me to record personal thoughts, insights and themes that emerged during the study (Creswell, 2012).

Bracketing. The last strategy that I utilized to advance trustworthiness in this study involved the process of bracketing. Reitz (1999) recognized that “interviews were constructed using a bracketing technique that removes much of the researcher’s preconceptions” (p. 143). Consistent with Reitz (1999), Tufford and Newman (2012) explained that bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to reduce the potential of preconceptions that may affect the research process. Bracketing is also a method utilized to protect the researcher from any effects while examining an emotionally challenging material (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Because the interviews consisted of personal stories and experiences regarding transfer student experiences, bracketing allowed me to not only sustain a reflexive stance, but also helped me maintain self-awareness throughout the study (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Ultimately, bracketing aided my role as a researcher to not only maintain focus on the research questions, but also collect emerging interpretation so that I could tackle these later on as I explored my findings.

Role of the Researcher

As a higher education professional working in Student Affairs for the last three years, this study places me as an insider. Because my position consists of working closely with student organizations and clubs, many whom engage transfer students, I had to completely isolate myself from this role. I had to switch from my current professional role into a graduate student and researcher role. Incoming and future students, who have been interested in being involved on campus, are the same individuals who are required to come into the office in which I work. I

made sure to inform the participants that the data collected during our interview meetings would only strictly be for this study. My role in this study allowed me to understand the experiences each individual transfer student faces in their transition from a two-year into a four-year institution.

Limitations

Creswell (2012) explained limitations to be “potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher” (p. 199). Like all studies, this particular study has a few limitations. The first limitation rests with the sample size of participants from a four-year academic institution. The total number of participants for this study consisted of six. Had I interviewed a larger sample, I might have gained further insights into the transfer student experience from the institution. Another limitation is that all the participants interviewed were mostly second-year transfers, rather than a first-year transfer, who had just transitioned into the institution. Had I interviewed both first- and second-year transfer students, I might have obtained more insight of diverse transfer student experiences. Another limitation to note is that most participants were from a transfer student club. Had I interviewed various transfers outside of the club, I might have obtained various experiences of transfers who were not connected to the university. Lastly, was that I had only one male participant in this study. Had I had more male participants, it would have added further comparative analysis of both genders.

Despite these limitations, this study confirms the importance of supporting transfer students. Through the lens of Transition Theory and given the stories of transfer students, the study provided an understanding of the transition experience of a transfer student. The results of this study intended to help administrators and educational leaders in higher education to improve methods in support of the transfer student population.

Chapter Three provided a review of the methodological practices and procedures utilized to collect and analyze data for this study. I also explained my choice of methods and how they supported the research questions. Additionally, this chapter also explained my role as a researcher and the limitations of this study. The findings and results of this study will be discussed in Chapter Four. In this next chapter, I will share the narratives of the participants of this study and attempt to (re)tell their stories of their experiences as a transfer student.

Chapter Four

Findings

“Transfers should feel comfortable to ask questions so I think we need to create a campus climate that supports the needs of all types of transfer students”- Jordan.

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of transfer students. Chapter One described the purpose of the study and the challenges transfer students face when transitioning into a university. The project is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter, HSI university, who belong to a transfer student club?
- How might a public, rural, commuter, HSI university ensure the successful transition of transfer students within its community?

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature to further strengthen and support the legitimacy and validity of this study. Chapter Three describes the qualitative research design that guided this study to understand the complexity of the experiences of transfer students. In this chapter I will present the findings that surfaced in the collection of the data. Four significant themes—self-reliance, support services, relationships, and commuter versus living on campus—were revealed by the stories imparted during the one-to-one interviews. Student Transition Theory established by Schlossberg (1981) guided this study in an effort to better understand the transitional experiences of transfer students experience in higher education. This study was conducted at a public, rural, commuter HSI University. All of the participants involved in this study were transfer students. I attempt to (re)tell their stories carefully and judiciously.

Demographic Data

Age, gender, and ethnicity of participants. In order for participants to partake in this study, they were required to meet the recruitment criteria, in which they had to be transfer

students. Before the one-on-one interviews, each participant was asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The average age of participants in the study was 23 years old, ranging in from 23 years to 27 years. Collectively, there were a total of five female participants and one male participant. Three of the five female participants identified as Caucasian, one identified as Middle Eastern, and one of each, both female and male, identified as multiracial.

Themes Arising from the One-On-One Interviews

Several themes emerged in the coding of the transcribed personal interviews of this study. According to Creswell (2012), coding provides a preliminary level of analysis of data. Preliminary codes are the first created to reflect important issues emergent from interviews with participants. Eventually, preliminary codes are amalgamated into bigger picture themes and descriptions that help to promote greater understanding the central research questions. In an attempt to answer the research questions, regarding their experiences as transfers, four themes emerged within this study; self-reliance, support services, relationships, and commuter versus living on campus. Each theme is described in the words of participants who generously shared their experiences as transfer students with me.

Self-reliance. A recurring theme amongst all six participants was self-reliance. Each participant explained in their own words that they had to rely on themselves when they transitioned from a two-year into a four-year institution. While the experiences of each of these participants varied amongst the six participants there was similarities in how each person felt frustration on how they had to tackle challenges on their own, without the guidance and support from their two-year and four-year institution.

Natalie explained her determination to better understand how to navigate on her own at a four-year university because of her negative experiences at a community college. She explained:

While I was at community college, I was doing all the applications by myself, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and college applications. I also had to figure out on my own all the courses that were transferable to the four-year institution I was hoping to attend. I also had to take the initiative to learn the website because it was not only difficult to understand but it had not been updated. So, because it was the hardest website to navigate ever, I had to google things and just type the name of the school right next to it so it could send me directly to the page I needed rather than just looking for stuff on the school site itself, and that's how I learned everything. Once I would get somewhat of an understanding, I would pick up the phone and call and talk to someone to direct me.

Natalie further explained that when she transferred into a four-year institution, self- navigation still played a major role in her transition. She added:

I never once spoke to a counselor at a community college because they weren't ever helpful, so I decided to utilize that resource at this institution. I went to an academic advisor the first week I was here and they pulled up my academic requirement report that showed all the classes I had taken at my two-year. The academic advisor just sat there reading the report to me and told me the classes I had to take and I was just like wow I am capable of doing that on my own. Which I did for the rest of the year, including this year. This made me feel upset, and continues to upset me; even though, I am more acclimated now, but back then I was so lost and frustrated.

Natalie goes onto to explain that her frustrations led her to know more than the average student because she had to go out and find out what the resources were.

I just think its a shame and I feel upset for other transfer students who don't take that initiative and have no idea on what they are missing and all the resources they have and could utilize. All the money that they are spending on tuition and still feel like they have no idea how to get these resources, especially the commuters and first-generation students.

Like Natalie, Bianca also shared a similar experience, when asked to tell about her experiences as a transfer student. Bianca explained that although the institution she is at now is a little better, the community college she had attended made her “run through hoops”:

The school I am at now is way better than the community college I was at. I had to figure everything out by myself and it was a really big roller coaster. Because of my bad experience there, I felt like I had prepared myself for the school I was transferring into so I wouldn't experience the same thing. For example, I was told to take one course to substitute another course because the course I had to take was full, so then I did. The chair gave me a hard time by saying its was not equivalent. I had to later run in hoops to get it approved because I did not want to stay another semester because their own counselor gave me the wrong information. I was annoyed and stressed because I had to run around and get so many signatures. It was a mess.

Bianca felt that with the constant miscommunication and running around encouraged her to do things her own way, so that she could prepare herself for any future mishaps. Bianca stated, “so when I got to this school, I knew when I was making my second two-year plan, to plan it on my own without the help of a counselor”. Consistent with Natalie, Bianca explained that even though this institution she is at now is not as bad as her community college, she still experiences situations in which she has to rely on herself, like the lack of transparency on the schools

website. Bianca stated, “when I did things by myself, looking through pdfs and files was so confusing, and the catalogs were not even updated, its very discouraging as a transfer student because you would expect your school to make it easier for you to understand”.

Bianca further explained that she had to fact checked everything, and triple checked all the requirements all by herself. She explained because she relied on her two-year, it backfired on her. Now she relies on her “make sure attitude”. Bianca realized that having that self-reliant attitude is what really helped her not become those transfer students who stay at a community college for more than four years.

Similarly, Lindsay had a difficult transition, which she attribute to being a first-generation college student because she relied on herself when having to find campus resources and understanding the transfer process. She explained:

At my two-year, I felt that I had to motivate myself to find out about transferable courses, policies, applications, and procedures, when I had decided on a school to transfer to. Of course, I reached out to faculty, counselors, and administrators for guidance; however, I always had a negative experience. It was either they didn't provide me the right information or they would have me running around campus to the wrong people. It was frustrating so I had to take things into my own hands.

Consistent with Lindsay, Jordan was also a first-generation student. Jordan mentioned that in his experience as a transfer student he felt like he had to do things by himself such as understanding how to get into college, filling out applications, and understanding the transfer process. Jordan explained:

I had to find the right counselors, fill out the right forms, it was a journey getting here, but I did it all by myself. I felt so discouraged at times because everyone around me knew

everything and I felt expected to know where all the resources were on campus. My two-year didn't really help much; even though, I was that transfer student that stayed there for three years. I feel like if anything my two-year prepared me to rely on my self when it comes to understanding the procedures that go behind the transfer process. I had to take the wheel on this.

Consistent with the other participants, Madison discussed that her experience as a transfer student as learning experience about her own self-growth in dedication and commitment to her own self. She mentioned:

I didn't trust the counselors, staff and administrators at my community colleges. I had heard so many horrible stories about administrators giving wrong information to transfer students, resulting in them having a delay in their transfer process. I one time made an appointment with a counselor and it wasn't even helpful. I felt it was something I could do all by myself, so I took that chance. I decided to read and research the catalogs, policies, and transfer procedures. I took the initiative to call and fact check everything before I took action. Once I transferred to this school, I stuck to what felt safe and what I knew best, reliance on myself. To be honest, I have only used academic advising once on campus [current institution] and probably will never use it again.

I followed up with Madison by asking her how it made her feel and she responded:

Well, it's frustrating for transfer students. I wish they didn't expect us to feel like we should know everything because we already experience college to some degree. We are still figuring things out as well, and we need as much, if not even more guidance because we're on our way out to the real world. Freshman still have enough time to mess up and

figure out what they want. I clearly don't because I am a transfer student ready to move on quickly with my life with no mistakes.

Nicole much like the other participants in this study felt the struggle and pressure to figure things out on her own. She explained:

I am not really good at asking people for help or going to locations to ask questions and look for resources, so that part was a difficult transition for me as a transfer student. The administrators and staff were not helpful. I never went to the admissions office to ask questions unless a friend came along with me. Honestly, I always felt that administrators and staff weren't always willing to help, not that they were bad people but they always seemed to busy or not even welcoming at some points.

She elaborated her answer by further explaining her feelings about how she was treated by administrators and staff. Nicole explained:

Every time I would ask a question, they seemed annoyed or frustrated. So that environment would just make me more uncomfortable on top of me being an introvert. I was fine with doing things myself, but felt that it's not ok to feel like I would rather figure things out on my own than ask for help. That's not ok whatsoever. I think there needs to be some communication between two-years and four-year institutions to help transfer students get through the transfer process. I feel that if they had better partnerships with clear communication with their counselors and administrators, transfer students would feel more confident in asking help.

All six participants shared compelling experiences regarding the self-reliance and self-direction required to navigate the transfer process, and how these traits played a significant role in their experience as a transfer student. The decisions these students had to make were based on their

own self-direction. In the one-to-one interviews, there was a connection between self-determination and the responsibility of self-navigation the participants had experienced within themselves.

Support Services. Another theme that appeared when analyzing the collected data from the one-to-one interviews was support services. All six participants mentioned the support services offered at their current institution. In discussing the accessibility of support services offered, participants mentioned the role of orientation, events, and a university course offered at the institution. The significance of bringing awareness to events, accessibility, resources offered, and the importance of including transfer students to events on campus emerged in each interview, and in some cases, was a recurring theme throughout the interview process.

Orientation. Moreover, all six participants mentioned that orientation was not a helpful resource in their transition to the four-year institution. Instead the participants felt it was overwhelming.

Um... I think a revamp of the orientation. Maybe, making it a little bit more or at least surveying and trying to find what the actual needs are of the transfer students because it seems like the people that are making decisions of what the transfer student population needs are people that have never been a transfer student or have never experienced the transfer experience.... I've looked for things to see where people are pulling this information from, where is your evidence, what supports your strategy here.

Natalie then vocalized her frustration as she explained how orientation was set up at the university. She explained:

The way it works is that they split us up by majors and sent us off. They had someone tell us what were the core classes we had to take, up to that point that experience was helpful;

however later it just became to overwhelming. For example, they brought all the transfer students into a hall and talked to us for five hours straight not one break!! They just provide us information and had representatives from each department speak, but none of them resonated with anyone because they focused on games, which I didn't found helpful whatsoever. Many of us complained about the orientation not spending enough time on financial aid. They need to prioritize their time. Let's talk about the things we need to talk about.

Natalie goes on to discuss how there was too much information thrown their way in one day, so it becomes stressful because they expect you to remember all the information provided. Natalie expressed her frustration as she mentioned:

I did not retain any information they provided to me. It is mandatory and I understand that, but it does not help. I also asked other transfer students if they got anything from it and many of them looked like deer in headlights and didn't even know what was going on. They didn't spend much time on the important stuff like financial aid, graduation requirements, scholarships, etc. It is beyond frustrating.

Natalie also added that she had found out later that when it came to the orientation for freshman it was more organized and well-done in comparison to transfers. She mentioned:

I later on found out that for freshman orientation they turn on the found on for like two whole days because freshman have an overnight orientation; whereas we have a 8 hour day. They also buy food for the students and parents. That hurt my feelings because it makes me feel that they don't value transfers as much as they do with freshman. I guess it's more like a business thing, which sucks.

Like Natalie, Bianca expressed a similar experience when asked the same question. Bianca addressed that she had only done the orientation half the day due to a personal commitment she had. She explained:

Orientation needs to help us with our transcripts and have that ready by transfer orientation, so that counselors can see what you have already taken and guide you more one to one rather than a bigger group. When I did the orientation for half the day it wasn't helpful. It was introductions, explanations of things I had known already, and the department chairs talking about core classes.

Bianca then discussed how the experience felt more like a scare tactic. She explained:

There were some instances, that the staff would mention you need to buckle down it's going to be much harder than a two-year...it was nothing like what my experience would be in my major or what classes and requirements I needed to take or recommendations and suggestions on financial aid or scholarships.

Along with Natalie, Lindsay discussed the same frustration that orientation for transfers are not prioritized like freshmen. Lindsay explained:

I saw it in orientation that transfers only get a one-day experience with all this overwhelming information; whereas freshman get an overnight and are pretty much treated like the most important. I get it the university feels like transfer students understand college because they went to a community college. However, if we continue to have that mindset it's not going to give transfer students that experience or desire to connect with anyone on campus. You can't just expect us to know everything in one day, we also need guidance.

Similarly, Nicole also experienced an overwhelming feeling during orientation. She suggested:

Orientation was too much information thrown at you one day... they should have a week of explaining all different aspects and resources the campus has to offer and explain and show where they are all located. One day is not enough for transfers; they need to restructure the orientation environment for transfers.

Additionally, Madison also mentioned her dislike of orientation. Madison explained:

I ended up leaving orientation early. I got too stressful with all the information they had provided. I expected more from this institution. I already felt I wasn't guided enough at my two-year community college and just felt frustrated that this school was doing the same. It wasn't a good feeling. It felt as if they wanted to just throw this information on us because it was their job to do so. It felt like they were like here you go now do what you will with this information. No direction whatsoever.

Along with the other participants, Jordan also felt the same frustration. However, Jordan also recommended that the school should go beyond orientation for transfer students, so that transfer students can experience the university to its fullest potential. He added:

We need to utilize orientation as a way to connect transfer students to the resources that they need not just give them all this important information in hopes that they understand it. We need to value their questions and take into consideration that transfers need as much help as freshman's too.

University course. Like orientation played a role in the participants transfer experience, half of the participants mentioned the importance of taking a university course offered to transfer students. The participants mentioned that this course would be helpful for current and future transfer students because it connects them with other transfers and helps them transitioned into the institution smoothly.

Bianca suggested that the university course offered to transfer students should be mandatory and/or a requirement because it helps students connect with important resources on campus. She mentioned that although she had not taken this class, she had many friends who were in the class and spoke positive things about it. She also added:

This course not only fulfills a general education requirement, but also focuses on networking transfer students to any needs they may have. My friends that took this course mentioned to me that it was very helpful because it explains what services they can take advantage of, what services you're not eligible to take and what you can do to maximize your experiences here on campus. I think they should make it a requirement it counts as GE and gives you units to graduate, so they should just make it a required course for you first or second semesters as a junior transfer.

Similarly, Lindsay also recommended that transfer students should take advantage of this course because orientation does not really help or guide transfers. Lindsay also added:

This course will also encourage transfers to be more engaged and ask questions they couldn't get answered at orientation. It can help them get involved and be more connected with the institution. All the roadblocks they will face will no longer be challenging because they will be experiencing the same thing with the students in that class. They can rely on that class to help them get connected with what they need.

Consistent with Bianca and Lindsay, Jordan also had positive things to say about the university course. Jordan expressed that the university course pushed him to experience the university life. He added:

It encouraged me at first to set up an appointment with an academic advisor and write a reflection about my experiences. We learned about the university mission and clubs on campus and the tools we can utilize as transfers.

Like Bianca, Jordan also added some recommendations:

This course should also encourage transfer students to make an appointment with a librarian to learn about the tools they can use for their classes, especially research strategies. Transfers are at a disadvantage because I feel like when we come in we don't have as much experience with research. At a community college they don't really reinforce us to learn more on research tools, so when we get here we're lost. I think the university course should encourage transfers to utilize library tools so they could experience the library to its fullest potential.

By contrast, Natalie, Madison, and Nicole had little to say about the university course because they did not know that this course was offered until their last year as transfers. Madison added:

If I had known about this course, or the university would have required me to take this course my experience would have probably been more positive in a sense I would have felt more acclimated and connected with the university. It would have encouraged me to get to know the campus more and what it has to offer.

Programs and events. Another recurring sub-theme that was significant for the participants included some discussion of the events on campus. One participant expressed how these events were significant in their transfer experience because it encouraged them to connect with other transfer students. Five out of the six participants mentioned that an issue was that the events and programs were more centered on Freshmen than transfer students. Most of the

participants felt that because the events were more marketed towards freshmen, that was the reason why transfer students felt a disconnect with the university.

Nicole mentioned how significant it was to involve and reach out to transfer students about the events on campus because it would create a welcoming environment. In asking Nicole to discuss her transfer experience at the university, she mentioned that the university had a lot of programs and activities for students, which, in turn, provided her with a positive transfer experience. Overall, participants expressed that the events were more freshmen centered and because of that was the reason why transfer students felt a disconnect with the university. She explained:

The good thing is that this school has a lot of activities and programs for students. I ended up making a couple of friends. The professors and the activities helped me so much and made the transition smoother.

I asked Nicole to elaborate more on the programs and activities she engaged in on campus. She mentioned one event in particular that made her experience positive:

For me it was the Whole Welcome Week event before school event started. There was a transfer night where you would come and meet other transfer students. They had a little pow wow and a bingo night where you had to find other transfer students that fit into these categories so it encouraged you to talk to other people. Because I am very shy, it was a uncomfortable but I am glad I did this activity because it brought all of us transfers together. Right after that activity, we had a carnival where all the transfers and freshmen were able to mingle together and do fun activities and games. For Welcome Week, they had free t-shirts, and just giving gifts to all the students. It not only felt welcoming, but it felt like you were embraced and celebrated to join this institution.

As she considered her experiences as an entering transfer students, she added:

I also feel like the most activities on this campus are more focused on the freshman than transfer students. It makes sense because freshmen are transitioning from high school to college; whereas, transfers have already experienced college. However, the university needs to take into consideration that transfer students come from different colleges with different expectations, teachers and different backgrounds. So there is that expectation that we should what were doing, but that's not the case for some. You can't assume that transfer students know what they are doing. Right now at this university it is geared more towards freshmen. I even noticed that in the freshmen dorm that they do more activities. For example, there is this one activity that if you get a good grade point average you get free gear. However, if you are a junior or senior you cannot participate. It doesn't make sense to me. A lot of transfers are different and they all have different needs and again we cannot assume that transfers know what this four-year is about.

Lindsay had a more concerning reaction to the events on campus. She expressed that administrators and staff need to also take into consideration that a lot of the transfer students are commuters, like herself. Lindsay expressed:

I do get the emails on events but there should be more events for the transfer students or more of an inclination to be engaged for transfer students and commuters as well because for myself like I said it was something at difficult at first. I wasn't able to have that contacted point. For example, I wish I would've been able to go to the Pizza Pie event last semester, but I couldn't because it was on a day I wasn't on campus. I feel like if there was more communication about those kinds of events that would be great. Timing within the transfer commuter students scheduling is something I would like to highlight.

Scheduling something is difficult because a lot of transfer commuters just go to class and leave because some have to incorporate going back to work and driving back home. I would suggest maybe try to figure out the times for other and more students for those kinds of events would be beneficial for the transfer commuter community.

When asked what the university could do to assist transfer students in their transitions, Lindsay responded further:

I feel like the school needs to start hosting events that are more centered around transfer students or at least make it equal with transfers and freshmen. I think a lot has to do with centering everything on freshmen, but transfer students need that encouragement to get involved and feel included in these events. I didn't think I was going to get to that university level and when I didn't know what to do. I feel like there needs to be more fun engagement events for transfer students to get to know other transfer students. Yes, there is the transfer student club, but sometimes I feel like this school itself could do so much more by creating bigger events beyond orientation. I feel like we need events that advocate to support the transfer student population.

I followed up with asking Lindsay if there was anything else she wanted to add. Adamantly, Lindsay added:

If we continue to have the mindset that transfer students know everything because they had already experience community college, it is not going to allow other individuals to think outside of the box or outside of their own perspective and will be this one narrow look down the path. It should be more of a spectrum. Being able to incorporate transfer students is possible.

Similarly, Natalie also addressed the concern that everything is focused on freshmen. She mentioned:

I believe that because freshmen are going to be around for four years; whereas, transfer students its only two, which is why freshmen are a focal point. Obviously, they bring in more money for the school, so I assume that is what they see as the best investment. The school built all these new buildings for housing for freshmen. For example, in some of the buildings where freshmen reside, the transfer students aren't allowed to utilize their study rooms. However, the buildings where transfer students live have to share their common spaces like the study rooms, kitchens, and pool with the freshmen. It doesn't make sense to me.

Bianca shared an experience of her confusion that some programs at other universities included transfer students, but when she transferred to this school, she wasn't able to apply to this program. Bianca explained:

I was involved in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at my community college. This program gave you a stipend for books, priority registration, mentors, and a guidance counselor for support. So when I transferred to this school, I immediately decided to apply for the EOP program, but the staff had told me I wasn't eligible as a transfer student. I don't know why it was limited to only freshmen. I found that to be weird because freshmen already have a specific program for that type of support. It was frustrating because the other schools I had been accepted to offered that support service to transfer students.

Jordan expressed frustration that transfer students were not taken into consideration when it came to student voice on campus. Jordan shared:

I feel like transfers aren't valued. For example, like student elections, I feel that often transfers are not often tapped into. Why not get them involved? I always felt that the transfer voice was never as valued as much it could have been. The university says they value everyone's voice but I feel that transfers were not given enough resources to connect with other students on campus. Their voice is as important as freshman's. We need more events that bring transfers together to express their needs.

Like Jordan, Madison expressed her concern with the lack of student voice for transfers and the importance of also including commuter transfer students in events. Madison addressed:

I think if this school did a better job of reaching out to commuter transfers, there would not only be more engagement on campus, but also a better transfer experience. We need to have events that resonate with the transfer community. I think a lot of the time a lot of transfer students don't attend these events because the school already gives off that vibe that everything they do is for the freshmen. I had read an article at some university in Minnesota that they had freshmen and transfer students in a committee that planned social events, coffee hours, and activities for both populations. I feel like if we did that here we could not only give transfer students a voice, but also a chance to gain relationships with other students and feel included in all the activities on campus. With having transfer student voice, the school can learn more about the needs of the transfer student population.

Relationships. Besides, the significance of events and programs, external factors such as peers, family, and club involvement may have influenced their transfer experience. Participants in this study shared with me enriched narratives about how their relationships with family, peers

and club involvement impacted their experience as transfers when transitioning into a four-year commuter, rural HSI University.

Jordan shared with me that other transfers helped him out in his transition to this school. He explained how when he first transferred to this school he was the typical transfer that went to class and went home. He added:

I didn't spend any time really trying to get involved with any clubs even though I had initially said I would. I felt that all the students had started from their freshman year and knew everything and I didn't know anything. It was just very hard to feel comfortable being a part of a club or organization.

Even though, in the beginning of the first semester as a transfer Jordan felt uneasy to get involved, he later on got involved in two clubs. He explained:

The clubs I had joined were my biggest support systems in transition into a four-year. I felt not only great about myself because I had surrounded myself with people who had similar interests like me but these clubs led me to be aware of the resources the campus had to offer.

Jordan also added how his relationships with peers made his experience at the university more positive. He shared:

I also felt I relied on transfer students and freshmen. I relied on freshmen because they had been here longer, so they were able to connect me to the right resources quicker. Transfer students in my major played another role in that experience. They were the closest to my major so we were all taking the same classes so we would let each other know what courses to take, recommendations on professors to take and avoid. With

transfers it was easier because we were all going through the same journey, so it was easier to connect with them.

In discussing his relationships with staff and faculty, he shared:

As a transfer student it is difficult to develop relationships on campus with your peers and faculty. For instance, for myself my relationships didn't start developing until my last year as a transfer. I had already felt a little more comfortable getting involved with clubs, but the relationships I developed with my professors and the staff was the most profound for my experience. I work with a faculty member at the library and, whom I met at an open forum. I had been so critical with questions and he had encouraged me to set up a meeting with him. Months had passed, and he saw me in the hallways and recognized my name and then I was pretty much pushed to schedule a meeting with the club I was a part of and that's how he and I developed a bond. What I realized from that experience that it is ok to be critical with things your passionate about. So after that experience I tried to build bridges with staff rather than burn them. I also had another mentor in the student outreach department on campus. She provided me a lot of opportunities; one of them was giving me a job on campus.

Like Jordan, Nicole had also developed relationships with faculty. She goes onto explain that her relationships with faculty encouraged her to get more involved on campus. Nicole shared:

I made friends with a professor I had the first semester here and he helped the process go smoother and helped me get use to this campus... Another professor that made this transition easier was my psychology professor. He was the one who got me involved into student organizations and clubs on campus. He's the one that kind of told me what was going on here so that was kind of nice having somebody that could help me integrate

further because as a transfer student you realized everyone else knows everything and everybody, but you don't. You feel like the oddball out. Having him show me the different places on campus and connecting me to the student organizations and clubs on campus was a huge help. I feel like the professors and the activities here helped me so much. It was different because I have lived in the same town for twenty years so I was kind of shocked into the transition.

Nicole also shared an experience in which she felt lucky to have certain administrators by her side through a difficult time she had experience during her first year as a transfer. Nicole explained:

There was one department specifically that helped me out during a hardship in my life. For example, I had an emergency with housing last semester, and one of the staff employees who run the student programs on campus was very helpful. She took time out of her busy day to walk to different places on campus that I didn't even know existed. She walked me through everything and just kept in touch with me to make sure I was fine. This was very stressful for me, but I was fortunate enough to have them as support. I don't think I would have survived this whole situation without them.

Natalie shared a different experience in comparison to Nicole and Jordan. She discussed that because of her experience at a community college was very disengaging, she was persistent to find ways to connect with people on campus. Natalie shared:

I remember at my community college I didn't take becoming involved so seriously. I would go to class and then go home. I regretted that, so I promised myself it would be different here at this university. Unfortunately, it seemed to me when I got here that it was going to be the same experience I had at my community college. I had decided to

take matters into my own hands and make the most of it. I was looking for resources like a transfer club or a resource center. I couldn't find anything. Therefore, I decided to create one myself.

Natalie continued to share that this was important because she had noticed from other transfers that they too wanted the same thing as her, which was to be connected and engaged with the university. Natalie expressed:

I started a club because of my experiences. I just kept asking myself why am I here? I get it I am getting an education but all my friends who went to a four-year created lasting friendships, lived on campus, and I am here just driving to campus and going to class and going home. I did not feel like I was getting the experience I desired. So I've noticed that other people were disengaged as I was and wanted that sense of community and to participate in social activities and learn about resources and that what primarily what this club does.

Like Jordan, Natalie responded that other transfer students were her support systems. She explained:

Other transfers were my rock. I definitely had bonded with other transfer students. We bonded because we were able to go through this journey together and offer each other suggestions and recommendations on classes. I feel like when I started my club I started to have more people trickle in it... I feel like with the start of this club I am helping some people; however sometimes it's discouraging too. Some transfers just want to go home and not be engaged and that's ok. I think the biggest issue is the shift of mentality. Other than the club, there aren't really any support systems here at the university.

Natalie then goes onto explain her relationships with faculty and staff. She added:

My relationship with faculty and staff has stayed the same. Ever since I transferred faculty has never reached out to me. When I started this club, we were able to find an advisor to support us. She is very passionate about socializing professional growth of transfer students. She's one of those people that dove in and said I am here come into my office and ask as many questions as you want. She was the only people I felt that support the club, and me but most professors are not that way, especially if you are taking the requirement classes for upper division. This is a class of over 150 students, and these professors will not ever know your name, unless you go out of your way to talk to them.

I asked Natalie, if there was anything else she would like to add. She added:

I feel like if you're that type of transfer student who has initiative and is a extrovert you won't have trouble connecting and developing those relationships that may benefit you in the long run. However, we need to keep in mind that not everyone is like that. So if you don't have that drive or are not that outgoing, then you will definitely not have that full college experience.

Consistent with Natalie, Lindsay's involvement with clubs was the support system she needed to feel connected with the university. Because she was a commuter transfer student, she too felt disengaged from the university community and wanted to change that. She shared:

Initially, when I got here I didn't really do anything I would just go into my car and eat and maybe walk around campus. This routine I had going on made me feel left out from the university community and I think a lot had to do with me being a commuter transfer student. I later met a friend who gave me the opportunity to be vice president of the performing arts club that was on campus. This was exciting for me because I am passionate about singing and performing, so I took the chance. I have to say that as soon

as I got involved with this club I feel more engaged and connected with the community and other students. I made so many friends and it opened the door for me to connect with some interesting people on campus.

Lindsay highlighted that commuting played a major role into her transfer experience. She explained that her professors, family and friends were really supportive. She shared that her family lifted the financial stress for her allowing her to focus on her classes. Lindsay also mentioned that she had a professor who supported her through her projects. She shared:

Out of everyone, I felt that my psychology professor was always stable with me. For instance, she helped me figure out what to do for the research I was conducting for one of my classes. I feel that if it wasn't for her helping me out I wouldn't be as interested to come to school and just keep to myself. I am very appreciative of that.

Lindsay then mentioned how taking a leadership role at the university changed her whole experience as a transfer student. Lindsay explained:

I had never had any experience with a leadership role, so when I participated as a orientation leader that really changed my life in so many ways. I had never met staff and when I had taken this role during the summer that's when I started meeting new people, students and working one to one with supervisors. I was able to meet the Vice President of Student Affairs and other amazing leaders on campus. I felt like volunteering for this position was eye opening for me and it wouldn't of made me the person I am today. I had never gone to my personal orientation, but when I had been exposed to it I never realized how essential it was.

In addition, Lindsay wanted to highlight the following regarding building relationships with professors on campus and the importance of getting involved with clubs and organizations.

Given her experiences as a transfer student, she stated:

I would highly emphasize to step outside of your comfort zone and get to know your professors. I think really just immersing yourself in the experience is significant. Myself, joining a club was the best thing that happened to me as a transfer student. I think giving yourself the opportunity for growth in that way and just stepping outside of who you usually are and identify. I know that was something I had to learn on my own. Once I started feeling comfortable, I would put myself out there as a transfer student and pushed me more to get involved on campus.

Madison expressed that being a commuter student definitely got in the way of her becoming more involved on campus. She shared:

I think because I was so caught up in this routine of coming to class and going home right away so that I wasn't stuck in rush hour traffic took over my life as a student. I knew there were clubs on campus; I just never really looked into it. I guess I always felt that most of these clubs were for freshmen, rather than transfer students. I couldn't identify with any of the organizations. It wasn't until I found the transfer student club that I became a little bit more engaged. I utilized that connection to learn more about the resources offered on campus and just connect with other transfer students. I felt like that was the only club that I felt embraced in because we were all on the same boat and could just relate to each other.

Moreover, the development of relationships influenced the transfer experience for all six participants. Through the relationships with peers, faculty, staff, and family members, most

participants were not only able to find their place at the university, but also learned the importance of connecting with their campus community.

Commuter Versus Living on Campus. Participants not only discussed the impact of their relationships with family, faculty, and peers had on their transfer experience, but also mentioned the differences of being a transfer student who lives on campus versus a transfer student who commutes. From the six participants, four are commuters and two live on campus. All six participants work on campus, which also influenced their experience as transfer students.

Living on campus. Bianca mentioned how living and working on campus gave her the transfer experience she had hoped for. Bianca is a resident advisor for the dormitories on campus. She explained that living on campus was the main social support system she experienced because it helped her branch out to meet new people and connect with professionals through her job. Bianca shared:

I feel like as a resident advisor (R.A.) that helped me out through my transition because when you become an R.A. you have to move in a month early before the students for training purposes. When you train you have to learn about housing, housing resources, campus resources, and where the departments are located around campus. During these trainings we have campus representatives from different departments to come speak to us about what they provide for students. We had to know all the resources provided on campus because whenever a resident needs anything we have to be able to disseminate information. I was able to familiarize myself before school started and where classes were. So by the time the start of the semester came along I was pretty familiar where everything was. If I had not lived on campus or been an R.A. I would have to figure everything out like everyone else.

Like Bianca, Natalie also lives on campus as a transfer student. However, at the start of her first year as a transfer she was a commuter. She shared that her experience as a commuter transfer student was not that positive at first. Natalie explained that parking was horrible and that she was getting the same disengaging experience she had at a community college. Her second year as a transfer student she became a resident advisor for the transfer student floor in housing. Natalie stated:

In housing its like its own little island, the transfer floor is more engaged then those who do not live in housing or are commuter. There are always activities and social events for transfers. Now that I am a resident advisor and I live in housing I am able to see transfer students have more access to information and resources then those who are just floating around and commuting. These transfer students who live in the dorms are more willing to interact with other students and be a part of something bigger on campus. As a transfer student who came into this as a commuter, you can see the difference.

Commuter. Unlike Natalie and Bianca, Lindsay did not live on campus. Lindsay shared that she live two hours away from the campus and commuted three times a week. She also shared that now that she is part of a student organization she pretty much commutes almost everyday if needed. Lindsay explained, “as a commuter you don't get that same experience as those who live on campus. I didn't have that connection with the school because I was too focused on classes and getting home.”

Similar to Lindsay, Jordan also commuted. Jordan shared a different experience. He mentioned that he didn't want to live on campus because he did not only live twenty minutes away, but also did not want it to be a financial burden for his parents. Even though, Jordan did not live on

campus, he did mention that he because he was so close in proximity that it was easier for him to get involved on campus than those who commute much farther. Jordan shared:

I know if I had lived on campus it would've been a positive experience for me; however, my parents were already paying my tuition. I didn't receive any money from the financial aid office, so I had to commute.

Similarly, Madison shared the same experience as Jordan. She mentioned:

As a commuter transfer student, there were many times I had wished I lived on campus for various reasons. I wanted to be able to go to some of the events that were hosted by the university. I wanted to meet with teachers during their office hours, hang out with my peers, and be involved in a club, but I had to schedule everything around commuting because I lived very far. I also didn't receive any financial help so I didn't want to spend thousands of dollars to live on campus when I could just drive for an hour to get home.

Along with Bianca, Natalie, Madison, and Lindsay, Nicole shared the same frustrations of not living on campus. Although Nicole did not live on campus, she did not have to commute that far because she shared an apartment with a peer. She shared that the reason she had decided not to live on campus was because her grandma lived nearby. Her experience as a commuter was positive. Nicole shared:

I moved out of my home all by myself when I got here. Neither my fiancé nor my mom came with me so it was interesting. The good thing is that this school has a lot of activities and programs for students. As someone who did not live on campus, I feel like I took advantage of all the events and resources offered as my first year as a transfer. I think that it was easier for me because I am really not commuting far, but when I think about those students that drive farther than 15 minutes away, I can see how and why they

have a difficult time being engaged with other students or events on campus. I think the university needs to keep that in mind when creating activities, programs, and/or events.

Conclusions

This chapter provided an overview of the narratives of transfer students. The six participants provided insights of their personal and academic experiences that many do not get to hear. I (re)told their stories in an effort to have their stories heard by higher education professionals and students who have had similar experiences. Four themes that were identified in the analysis of the data included self-reliance, support services, relationships, and commuter versus living on campus. This study highlighted the lived experiences of the participants as they entered into new academic and non-academic environments, the relationships they built, and their attempts to navigate the cultures at their new institution. Captivating findings were recognized when participants shared recommendations and advice they would give to others who have a difficult time transitioning into their new school. All participants shared the importance of being involved and finding one's interests when starting a new school. The next chapter will present further discussion and conclusions to this study. I will also provide future recommendations to current and future higher education professionals to help support and meet the needs of transfer students.

Chapter Five

Discussions and Conclusions

The previous chapter provided stories of the experiences of six transfer students at a public, rural, commuter, HSI University. Analysis of the data collected through one-to-one interviews with the participants revealed four themes: self-reliance, support services, relationships, and commuter versus living on campus. Each theme was described and disclosed through the shared stories of the participants. In addition, the similarities and differences of the experiences of the participant's stories were discussed.

This qualitative study was conducted at a four-year public institution in Southern California. The research questions that guided this study included:

- What are the experiences of transfer students at a public, rural, commuter, HSI University who belong to a transfer student club?
- How might a public, rural, commuter, HSI university ensure the successful transition of transfer students within its community?

In Chapter five, I discuss the findings of this study to understand and interpret the implications of the experiences transfer students face during the completion of their college degree. Additionally, this chapter will include a review of the theoretical framework, and the method and research design used to collect the data. The discussion included here addresses the need for events targeted specifically to meeting the needs of transfer students, the importance of transfer involvement, and the significance of the university's role in the transfer experience. This chapter concludes with recommendations for the future.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens that guided this study was Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984). Schlossberg (1984) examined not only the various types of transitions that individuals experience throughout their lives, but also the factors that influence transition. Additionally, Schlossberg (1984) introduced the transitional model, which includes the 4S concepts: situation, self, support, and strategies. No matter what type of transition may occur this model may be utilized as a coping resource for the individual (Schlossberg, 1984). The theme, self-reliance highlighted many situations that all six participants had experienced a significant transition when transferring from a two-year into a four-year institution. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011) defined transition as "any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 39). Schlossberg (1995) explained that a transition is not so much the change, but how the individual perceives or acts on that change. Goodman et al. (2011) suggested that when an individual is moving through a type of transition, it requires one to let go of their own self, let go of relationships, and understanding to adapt to new roles and environments. All six participants in this study experienced the transition of not only adapting to a new role as a student, but also developing supportive relationships with peers and faculty.

As mentioned earlier, Schlossberg (2011) explained that there are anticipated and unanticipated transitions that an individual may experience. An anticipated event is a major life event, such as graduation and marriage (Schlossberg, 1995). An unanticipated event is an event that happens unexpectedly, such as illness or an accident (Schlossberg, 1995). As mentioned earlier in Chapter Four, one of the participants, Lindsay, reinforced this notion of an unanticipated transition in her first semester as a transfer student at this university. Lindsay added:

My first semester at this school, I was diagnosed with breast cancer stage two and it was something I never expected to happen. It had never happened in my family so I was curious to see what was going on especially because I was young and that was something that was never supposed to happen. It was crazy because I was starting a new school as a transfer student, so learning how to self-navigate and tackling this life changing situation was challenging.

Like Lindsay, there are many students that experienced unanticipated and anticipated events in their life. Later in her development of theory, Schlossberg (1995) introduced a nonevent transition, which refers to the expected events that fail to occur. Natalie reinforced this notion of a nonevent transition in her first semester as a transfer. Natalie explained:

I expected to be homesick as a transfer because I had never been away from home. Don't get me wrong, I missed my parents and family, but I think because I got so determined to be engaged on campus that being homesick wasn't even an option.

The transitions mentioned above may alter an individual's life because it not only changes the relationships of the individuals, but may also disrupt the individual's routine (Schlossberg, 1995). Finally, Schlossberg (1989) addressed that when an individual experiencing transitions, they experience different phases such as "moving in, moving through, and moving out" (p. 163). The participants for this study experienced each transitional phase mentioned above. For instance, each participant experienced the (moving in stage) during the admission process. Each participant has also encountered some sort of self-navigation as they got acclimated to the university (moving through stage). As for the (moving out stage) each participant, continues working towards graduating. Ultimately, all participants had to rely on themselves and their support systems to help them through some of the challenges they faced through the transitions.

Method and Data Analysis

Chapter Three discussed and outlined the methodology utilized to conduct this study. I used a qualitative narrative design to understand the experiences of transfer students. Creswell (2012) explained that narrative researchers gather stories from the participant to understand their experiences. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) it is significant in a narrative inquiry “that the researcher listens first to the practitioner’s story and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her first story” (p. 4). Even though the narrative process is collaborative, I wanted to make sure my participants felt that they specifically had a voice and that with their experiences they could help future and current transfer students. One-on-one interviews has allowed the researcher to best learn and understand the participants views and to help answer the research questions that guide the study (Creswell, 2012). By asking these questions, I was better able to understand the experiences of transfer students, the support systems necessary to confront transitions, and the obstacles they were challenged with when attempting to complete their undergraduate degree at a four-year institution.

Limitations of the Study

Every study will have its limitations. Limitations are possible problems or weaknesses of the study identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). This study draws upon the experiences of participants all of whom transferred to the same university. This is a limitation because it constraints the discussion of the experiences of other transfers at other universities. Another limitation was the small sample size of the participants. Had I interviewed a larger sample, I might have gained further insights into the transfer student experience from the institution. Another limitation was that most participants were involved in a transfer student club. Had I interviewed transfers that weren’t connected to the university, I might have obtained more

diverse transfer experiences. Furthermore, all the participants interviewed were mostly second-year transfers, rather than a first-year transfer, who had just transitioned into the institution. Had I interviewed both first- and second-year transfers, I might have gained more of an understanding of various transfer student experiences.

Significant to note is my role as an insider as a higher education professional at the university where this research was conducted. I was both a graduate student and a professional employee at the time that I conducted this study. One of the participants I had encountered knew of me through a previous event I had planned for the department where I worked. Although all participants knew that I was a graduate student and an employee at the university, I made sure to reassure the participants before the interviews that, during this study, I am a graduate student only. Finally, the last limitation was that I had only one male participant from this study. Had I had more male participants, it would have added further comparative examination between both genders.

Trustworthiness

Because of my role at the institution as an employee, I adopted a self-reflexive stance to avoid biases in this study. I ensured to all six participants that I was approaching this study as a graduate student. Besides engaging in self-reflexive strategies, I also relied on triangulation, which consisted primarily of member checking with the participants to confirm the accuracy of the interviews. With that being said, I emailed participants to clear up any assumptions I may have made during the interview transcriptions. Other strategies I utilized to ensure trustworthiness included journaling and note-taking. During the interviews I also took notes that I referred to in addition to the transcribed interviewees that I analyzed in tandem during coding. Lastly, I utilized bracketing as another form of self-reflexivity. According to Tufford and

Newman (2012), bracketing is “a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process” (p. 80). Any feelings that I experienced during the interviews were written down in my research journal, so that I could continually reflect on my interests in this study and to participate who were sharing their experiences with me- some of which I may have experienced as well in my educational career.

Findings and Discussions

When entering a new set of roles, environments, and relationships, we cannot assume that all transfer students are able to self-navigate the university system. As mentioned, I utilized Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1994) as a theoretical lens to guide me through the collection of data, coding, and analysis of the findings. This study focused on the stories and voices of each participant. I wanted to make sure that each voice of the participant was heard. I was aware that each participant would have a different experience; therefore, each participant would contribute to my findings differently. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis were enlightening and intriguing and included self-reliance, support services, relationships, and commuter versus living on campus. Each theme addressed not only the different aspects of each participant’s life, but also each participant’s journey to complete their degrees at a four-year university.

Targeted Programs and Events for Transfer Students. A gap found in the literature regarding transfer students was how transfers make use of institutional support services during pre- and post-transfer. Adheron (2009) found that transfer students lacked exposure to the services offered by the institution. Similarly, I found this to be consistent with the findings of this study because most participants were not aware of classes and programs offered to help transfer students get acclimated to the university. Programs and events that center on transfer students

may help connect transfers to other transfers so that they may find support with other students within the campus community. As mentioned earlier, a concern for all participants was the university's prime attention being placed on incoming and current freshmen rather than on transfer students. Indeed, all of the participants I interviewed had mixed feelings about whether they felt supported at the university. If institutions engage in strategies to make their campus environment more inclusive and to find ways to keep transfer students engaged on campus, then perhaps transfer students might feel empowered and included in the campus community.

While reviewing the transcriptions, all six participants mentioned their struggles and challenges during their transfer experience. As mentioned above a primary concern for all participants was that the institution support services were focused more towards freshman, rather than transfer students. Transfer students at the university where the study was conducted found themselves frustrated that events such as orientation were not well planned to help guide and meet the needs of transfer students as well. Participants mentioned that self-reliance influenced their transfer experience. Most participants stated that they thought events like orientation would have been helpful in assisting them to understand the resources and systems of the university. It is significant to consider that institutional support and communication is key to ensure success for transfers.

Transfer student involvement. All participants expressed the importance of transfer student involvement at the university. Involvement in the campus community helps transfer students not only feel connected, but also valued as part of the student population (Ose, 1997). Each participant also spoke about their experiences with their support systems whether that included family, staff, peers, and/or faculty, and how they played a significant role throughout their transfer experience. A noteworthy factor that arose through the interview process was the

feeling of marginalization at the university. Each participant felt uncomfortable developing relationships with their peers, when many social circles had been established in freshmen year. Because transfer students struggle with connecting with other students, due to their assumption that everyone has already made friends, it is significant that universities help assist these students in finding others with common interests and goals (Marling, 2013). In the absence of making friends on campus, most of the participants in this study claimed that their prime support system was comprised largely of, family members and of friends as they took on a new role at a different school. As they expressed this lived experience among participants in this study is consistent with the work of Ose (1997).

University role of the transfer process. The bombardment of information pertaining to the pre- and post- transfer process can be discouraging for some transfer students. As mentioned prior, each participant felt overwhelmed with the information provided to him or her during orientation. Most participants felt that staff was not helpful in addressing transfer student concerns or issues. McGowan and Gawley (2006) found in a qualitative study that universities should adopt a system that helps transfer students navigate and better understand the transfer process. Because university staffers are the first to interact with transfer students, it is necessary that university personnel assist with transfer questions, concerns, and guidance during their transition to a new university (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). Since during pre- and post-transfer, students tend to depend on staff within the university, it is significant that university personnel is familiar with the transfer process, so that they can help facilitate and support any concerns or questions that transfers may ask.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that all participants in this study wanted to highlight the importance that, although transfers have experienced college to some degree, it is important to

take into consideration that much like freshmen they are learning to navigate systems and find their place within the campus community. It is crucial that institutional support services learn to get to know this student population, so that they can better meet the needs of transfers.

Recommendations

It is important to consider that attempting to navigate a new university system may not be easy for most students. The findings in this study clearly suggest that transfer students feel disengaged from their university, and they find little support during pre- and post-transfer. One recommendation would be to encourage more institutional communication between community colleges and universities. In addition, perhaps developing a mentoring program between two-year and four-year institutions would promote greater transparency and better communication of the transfer process. This program could have transfer advisors assisting transfers in navigating the university and understanding policies and procedures. Having some sort of mentor may help transfer students feel more engaged with their campus, expand the role of institutional communication, and connect transfer to the campus resources (Aheron, 2009). Many of the participants of this study explained how the university assumed that transfers know everything because they experience college beforehand. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and many transfers end up relying on themselves to navigate the higher education system. In order to assist all transfer students, higher education professionals need to educate themselves about the unique needs of the transfer student population.

Another recommendation would be to provide proper orientation services to transfer students. Findings in this study clearly suggest that bombarding transfers with too much information at once not only overwhelms them but leaves them in disarray. Creating an orientation that imparts a sense of the university's valuing of the transfer student, making

students feel important and welcome, and sharing information about campus resources will encourage transfers to be engaged and involved with their campus community. Providing these proper services will create an inclusive and positive campus climate for those transfers that have had a negative experience at other schools. Because this population continues to grow, universities cannot continue operate under the assumptions that transfers are supported through the same programs that they offer to freshmen. Creating programs and events that connect with the diverse transfer student population will not only assist in whatever challenges transfers may face, but also create a campus climate that embraces the transfer student voice.

Conclusion

Overall, my aim with this study was to (re)-tell the stories and experiences of transfer students. The participants in this study shared many similar experiences as well as their nuanced individual differences. Four themes emerged from coding and analysis of transcribed interview data, which not only brought clarification and awareness of the challenges faced by transfer students, but also revealed their particular needs. The findings from this study further explain how significant it is not to disregard and forget the transfer student population.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Caroline Fernandez. I am a graduate student in the Masters of Arts, Educational Leadership program at California State University, Channel Islands. For my Master's thesis study, you have been invited to take part in a research study about transfer student experience. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of transfer students at a public rural commuter university.

I would like to ask your permission to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary and the responses that you provide are neither right nor wrong. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Should you decide not to participate in this study, your decision will not prejudice your current or future relationship with CSU Channel Islands. The data that will be collected during the interview process will be kept confidential. Your name will not be associated in any way with this study and only the researcher will know the identity of the participants. You will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your identity.

Should you agree to a one-on-one interview, I will reach out to you to arrange a mutually convenient time and location to meet. It is anticipated that the interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio recorded. The recordings will be transcribed verbatim for accuracy and validity. Also, if you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it and go to the next question without any negative consequences. All records collected will remain confidential in this study and will be stored in a secure and locked cabinet or on a password-protected computer file. All records will be retained for at least 3 years after the completion of the study.

It is anticipated that participants will experience minimal risks from this study. Different people react differently to stimuli, and it is possible that some may react negatively to the interview questions. If you experience any discomfort, you can terminate the process at any time. Furthermore, you have access to Primary Investigator, Caroline Fernandez, as well as the Primary Investigator's Thesis Advisor, Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément should any issues arise.

Participation in this study may assist professionals working in higher education to better understand the student transfer experience. Please do not hesitate to ask my thesis advisor, Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément, or myself any questions you may have about this study either beforehand, during or after the data collection process. Findings from this study may help the transfer student population in their transfer experience. Moreover, I will be happy to share the findings from the study with you after the research is completed.

For questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject, please feel free to contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 805-437-8496 or via email at irb@csuci.edu.

I have read the information provided above. I understand that by agreeing to be interviewed, I am agreeing to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this form to keep.

By selecting this box, I agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

By selecting this box, I do not agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

Signature _____

Date _____

Contact details:

Caroline Fernandez, Graduate Student and Primary Investigator

Email address: caroline.fernandez361@myci.csuci.edu

Phone number: (818) 987-1303

Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément, Thesis Advisor

Email address: nancy-jean.pement@csuci.edu

Phone number: (805) 298-2645

Appendix B

Sample Recruitment Email

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for your interest in my study on the experiences of transfer students. I will be conducting one-on-one interviews that will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I am available to meet any day of the week at your convenience.

The consent form is attached for your review and signature. The form acknowledges that your participation is voluntary, that you are 18 years or older, and that your identity will be protected throughout the study. I will also provide copies of the consent form available for signature at the interview. One copy will be for your own records and the other I will keep in my files.

In addition, if you are willing, please fill out the attached demographic questionnaire and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you. Let me know if you have any questions or concerns. I can be reached at (818) 987-1303 or by email caroline.fernandez361@myci.csuci.edu

I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Caroline Fernandez

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

1) Gender (circle one): Male Female

2) Age: _____

3) Ethnicity (circle one):

- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Black/African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Other: _____

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Introduction:

Thank you for meeting with me. As you know, the purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of transfer students who belong to a transfer student club at CSUCI. Your participation is voluntary and your anonymity will be protected throughout this study. As I mentioned, this interview will be tape recorded, and I may take handwritten notes as we speak. Please feel free to leave the interview or request a break at any time. Are you ready to begin?

Warm-Up Question(s) (one to be chosen dependent on the flow of initial conversation):

- How is your semester going?
- What is your major, and why did you choose it?
- Where are you from?
- What brought you to CI?

Core Questions (the same at each interview):

- 1) So, tell me about your experiences as a transfer student at CI. What's it been like for you?
- 2) What social support systems helped you as a transfer student?
- 3) Talk with me about the relationships you have with staff and faculty on campus.
- 4) What has been the most helpful to you in your transition from a two-year to a four-year institution?

Cool Down Question:

- 5) What, in your view, could CI do to assist transfer students in their transition to the university?

Sub-Questions or Probe Questions to help participants explain their narrative further:

- 1) Please explain...
- 2) Tell me more about that...

- 3) Could you elaborate more on that?
- 4) How did that make you feel?

Closing Statement:

Thank you for participating in this study. Your contribution to this study will provide higher education professionals, as well as students an understanding of the transfer student experience. Should you have any questions or comments about this study feel free to contact me the Primary Investigator, Caroline Fernandez as well as the Primary Investigator's Thesis Advisor, Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément.

Appendix E

Recruitment Poster

Research Study

Understanding the Transfer Student Experience

Seeking participants for a qualitative study on the transfer student experience at a rural Hispanic-serving (HSI), public university.

I would like to speak with you about your experience as a transfer student.

Confidential, semi-structured interviews will last between 45 to 60 minutes.

To learn more about this study, please call or write:

Caroline Fernandez, Graduate Student

(818) 987-1303

caroline.fernandez361@myci.csuci.edu