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Understanding the Transition Experience of Community College Transfer Students to a 4-Year University: Incorporating Schlossberg's Transition Theory into Higher Education

Tony A. Lazarowicz

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNITY

COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS TO A 4-YEAR UNIVERSITY:

INCORPORATING SCHLOSSBERG'S TRANSITION THEORY INTO HIGHER

EDUCATION

by

Tony Lazarowicz

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Tony Lazarowicz, Ph.D.

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Adviser: Brent Cejda

Abstract: With over 60% of college graduates attending multiple institutions (United

States Department of Education, 2006), many starting at community colleges, the

importance of understanding community college transfer students' stories is critical to

retention and graduation agendas at colleges and universities nationwide. Schlossberg's

Transition Theory has recently been introduced into higher education literature as a

conceptual framework for working with various student populations such as student

veterans (Wheeler, 2012; Rumann, 2010); student athletes (Henderson, 2013); and

students on academic probation (Tovar & Simon, 2006) among others. Minimal work

has incorporated Schlossberg's Transition Theory into studies of community college

transfer students; thus this study was developed to help fill that gap of understanding their

transition through that lens. The central question to the study was "how do community

college transfer students perceive their transition into a large research, land-grant

institution." This phenomenological qualitative study incorporated journaling and

interviews with 12 full-time community college transfer students (21-41 years old) at

three points during their first semester (fall 2014) at a large Midwestern research

institution. Using open, axial, and selective coding, the following five themes emerged:

funding the college experience; transition takes time; support is critical; maturity; and personal responsibility. These participants transition experience, as indicated by the emergent themes, fit well within the context of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Overall, these participants' transition meant an opportunity to move forward, start a new chapter, and expand one's opportunities. Consistent with other studies that have used Schlossberg's Transition Theory, there is value in considering this theoretical framework when working with community college transfer students. When universities create policies and procedures that are geared toward increasing student's assets in Schlossberg's 4-S coping resources and are mindful of the full transition (moving in, moving through, and moving out), administrators, staff, and policy makers can assist in the transition for community college transfer students and provide support to a growing portion of the student population in higher education.

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There is no greater feeling in the world than recognizing that what you do in higher education greatly impacts in the lives of others. This dissertation has served for me the opportunity to learn about a group of students who need to be embraced within higher education. I could not have completed this work without the support of so many people.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The obvious advantage in admitting transfer students is that you obtain

representation of students from different communities who have different life

experiences. I think one of the goals of higher education is to prepare students to

compete and perform well in the real world — to be able to change that world in

ways that matter. Having students come from a variety of areas — whether it is

geographic, cultural, ethnic, age —is a critical factor in that preparation. (The

College Board, 2011, p. 9).

Transfer students are an increasing proportion of college students today, and they

must be provided the services needed to be successful both at their first institution as well

as each institution they attend afterwards. According to the United States Department of

Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2009), 55.1% of students

who graduated with a baccalaureate degree in 2008 had attended multiple institutions.

Since 2002, the transfer rates of students who had started at public 4-year institutions had

risen nearly 8%. For students who started at private 4-year institutions, the transfer rates

had increased nearly 6% (Poisel & Joseph, 2011a; United States Department of

Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). These rates continue to show

the increasing trend of students choosing to transfer between institutions.

While transfer students often experience challenges as highlighted in many

studies that will be discussed later, they need to know they can be successful at their new

institution with the proper resources, support, and strategies to navigate their new

systems. This begins with the institutions making transfer students an institutional

priority. Poisel and Joseph (2011b) stressed that campuses must review policies and

procedures for impact on transfer student success and work to ensure the overall success

of transfer students. While all students in higher education are important to the success

of each institution, as seen above, there are growing numbers of students transferring

between institutions. However, there is still much less research on transfer students than

their native peers who stay at one institution the duration of their college career. Thus,

this dissertation is meant to add to the body of research geared toward understanding

community college transfer students and ensuring that students who choose to transfer to

another institution, particularly those who start from community colleges, will have the

same opportunities for success as their native peers.

Defining who a transfer student is has been a topic of conversation for many

years. Banks (1990) highlighted two ways that people define transfer students including:

(a) those who have completed an associate degree and transfer to a 4-year institution and

(b) those who have taken any number of credits at a community college prior to

transferring to another 4-year institution. Today, there are even more categories of

transfer students that have been identified. For instance, Aiken-Wisniewski (2012)

categorized transfer students into six different categories: vertical, lateral, reverse,

swirler, transfer up, and thwarted transfers. Each presents their own set of challenges,

experiences, and concerns, but the one thing that is true of all of these sub-groups is that

they have attended multiple institutions, or become classified as transfer students.

The United States Department of Education (2006) found that nearly 60% of

students who graduated from college had attended multiple institutions. Despite such a

high percentage of students transferring, Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that these

students typically feel ignored by college personnel in campus retention efforts. Tatum,

Hayward, and Monzon (2006) pointed out that many transfer students believe there is minimal effort in assistance and guidance in the transition process.

> Dr. Dave Spence, President of the Southern Regional Education Board, stated: "There's got to be a transfer path there, a transfer path that enables students to reach the baccalaureate degree if they do the right thing. And right now it's tough to know what the right things are to do and if you do them they have to be credible for obtaining the baccalaureate degree. I don't think the situation is good at all in transfer" (Roach, 2009, p. 15).

Students have been transferring between college and university campuses throughout the past century; and yet today, campuses still struggle to make the process of transferring more seamless and the success of transfer students needs to continue to improve. According to the most recent report released by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2012), 85.2% of full-time students who started at 4-year public institutions completed a degree or were still enrolled. In comparison, only 56.7% of full-time students who started at 2-year public institutions were still enrolled or had graduated.

While there are a multitude of paths that students can take when transferring, such as the six categories referenced above as defined by Aiken-Wisniewski (2012), the above graduation statistics highlight the fact that challenges exist, particularly for vertical (community college to 4-year institution) transfer students that may not be as prevalent amongst the lateral (4-year to 4-year) transfer student. While graduation and retention numbers can provide valuable information, they hardly scratch the surface to help explain why students may not graduate or stay at their new institution. For instance, graduation

rates are traditionally measured through a six-year time-span from the time a student

enters college. Subsequently, graduation rates are typically not compared beyond the six-

year period.

The American Association of Community Colleges (2013a) reports that 59% of

students at community colleges are part-time students. Meanwhile, the National Center

for Education Statistics (2011) indicated that less than 14% of students at 4-year colleges

and universities attend part-time. U.S. Department of Education, NCES (2011) data, as

depicted in table 1, shows a significant graduation rate disparity between part-time and

full-time students.

Table 1

Degree Completion of Any Type After Six Years Among Part-time and Full-time Students Based on Institution Student Started At

Started at 2-year institution		Started at 4-year institution	
Always Part-Time Attendance	Always Full-time Attendance	Always Part-Time Attendance	Always Full-time Attendance
13.9%	44.9%	12.3%	73.7%

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics (2011)

While attending college part-time undoubtedly can prolong graduation and degree

completion rates, the above numbers may imply that part-time attendance, regardless of

where the student attends, may severely decrease a student's opportunity to obtain a

degree at all. Although part-time students at both types of institutions are at risk of this

trend, the concern is drastically higher among community college students. Table 2 uses

a fictional sample of 100 students starting at each institution type to highlight this

phenomenon.

Table 2

Sample Degree Completion of Any Type After Six Years Among Part-time and Full-time Students by Institution Type

Started at 2-year institution		Started at 4-year institution	
Always Part-Time Attendance (N=59)	Always Full-time Attendance (N=41)	Always Part-Time Attendance (N=14)	Always Full-time Attendance (N=86)
8.2 students	18.4 students	1.7 students	63.4 students

Using these figures, at the end of 6 years, only 26.6 community college students would have any type of degree, compared to 65.1 students who started at 4-year institutions. Seeing that so many community college students begin attending college part-time, and continue part-time, there are many challenges that do arise, most importantly graduation rates. This is one measure that must be addressed by universities as community college students transfer to ensure they will be successful in the transition to the completion of their degrees.

As noted throughout this paper, much literature and research does exist about transfer students as a whole. Much is quantitative in nature looking at "transfer shock" and GPA (Cejda & Kaylor, 1997; Cejda, Kaylor, & Rewey,1998; Ishitani, 2008; Johnson, 2005; Whitfield, 2005), reasons students transfer (Cejda & Kaylor, 2001; Fee, Prolman, & Thomas, 2009), and comparisons of native and transfer students (Conrad Glass, Jr. & Harrington, 2002; Ditchkoff, Laband, & Hanby, 2003; Montondon & Eikner, 1997; Woosley & Johnson, 2006). Meanwhile, statistics cannot answer whether the new institution did not meet their expectations, they had certain life circumstances causing them to stop out, or whether they were unable to afford the new institutional costs and thus had to work full-time, causing academic difficulties. There are many plausible

explanations that could explain some of the differences in graduation and retention rates, but they do not answer the "why" of the problem.

Townsend (2002) pointed out that data collection concerning transfer students is a common problem that exists across the nation. At a broad level, the first problem she noted was defining who are and are not transfer students. Every study can have a varying definition, each institution can define transfer students differently, and yet some distinguish transfer students between those who complete and do not complete an associate's degree first (Townsend, 2002). Some who have transferred multiple times are not included, while others only include community college transfers and not lateral transfer students. Thus, if there is no general consensus on how to define a transfer student, there can be even more significant challenges in comparing studies or using previous studies for specifying direction for future studies.

I reviewed available data concerning transfer students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Based on Townsend's assessment, it is not surprising that I found some difficulties with the available data. For instance, no transfer students were identified as having two or more racial backgrounds, yet nearly 2.0% of the university undergraduate population classifies as two or more races (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2012). Data was not also readily available to distinguish between those who had earned an associate's degree prior to transferring from a community college versus those who had not. Finally, there were inconsistencies among retention columns, as some students who were designated as having graduated were also designated as not being retained. Lastly, over 50% of students transferring from within the university system

were defined as having zero credits at transfer, which could likely be due to not having obtained transcripts from the other institution when data was generated.

Some people may argue that addressing community college transfer students as a whole is too broad. This point was certainly considered. However, after seeing wide discrepancies as highlighted above, particularly with quantitative data, it seemed most appropriate to me to look at the broader group of community college transfer students. Thus, to best understand the transition of community transfer students, a larger group of community college transfer students was used for this study, with future aspirations to then focus in on subgroups.

Studying transfer students is a relatively new area, as the number of research articles and dissertations has grown considerably only in the past 10 years. In a search of dissertations published in the United States on ProQuest using the words "College Transfer Student," 198,607 results emerged between 2000 and 2014, as shown in Table 3. There were 2,562.3 and 6242.7 dissertations on average yearly during the 1980's and 1990's respectively with the same search terms. In total, between 1980 and 2014 there were 286,657 dissertations found using the search, and the 10 years between 2005-2014 accounted for nearly 50% of all dissertations documented on the topic. The data that is available on transfer students is often quantitatively driven and lacks the voice of transfer students in capturing their experience.

Table 3

Number of Dissertations Published in the United States on Proquest using the search parameter "College Transfer Student" between 1980-2014

Year	Number of Dissertations Published
1980-1989	25623
1990-1999	62427
2000	11734
2001	11200
2002	11416
2003	11850
2004	10741
2005	11937
2006	13228
2007	14034
2008	13961
2009	14418
2010	14981
2011	15072
2012	15873
2013	15373
2014	12789

Knowing that transitions are occurring more frequently and being studied much more frequently, it is important to understand theories on how transitions work. How do students view their transition? What types of experiences occur for community college transfer students as they transition between institutions? What types of resources do students use? Simply asking questions is not enough. As McEwen (2003) pointed out "theory not only helps us to understand what we experience and observe but provides a foundation for practice in student affairs" (p. 154). For instance, many theories that are focused on college students fall within categories such as psychosocial development; cognitive-structural development; social identity development; typology theories; organizational theories; campus environmental theories; and student success theories

(McEwen, 2003). Little attention is focused on theories related to transitions. Even in the book like *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession* by Komives, Woodward, Jr., and Associates (2003), minimal attention is given to Schlossberg's transition theory as it applies to college students, let alone transfer students. While Schlossberg's theory is mentioned, it is only recently being included into higher education research. Certainly in comparison to other theories such as Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure or Astin's (1984/1999) student involvement theory, there is significantly less research on Schlossberg's Transition Theory with respect to applying the theory to higher education. As such, this study is intended to understand community college transfer students' transition experience through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition theory.

I first became exposed to Schlossberg's Transition Theory from a colleague who knew I had worked on issues related to transfer students. He invited me to work with him on writing an article that discussed how to assist transfer students from an advising perspective. It was at this point that he began to explain Schlossberg's Transition Theory to me and how the theory, although originally developed for retiring older adults, could be utilized within an advising setting. A brief overview of this theory is provided next.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory has three major parts, which happen to be in phases connected to time. The first part is approaching the transition where the transition is identified and subsequently occurs. This portion of the theory looks at the context of the transition, the impact on the individual experience the transition, and the perception of the transition. The second part includes the affected individual taking stake of their coping resources, which is tied with the 4-S resource system of support, situation, self, and strategies. The final part is taking charge of the transition which revolves around the

individual strengthening the resources around them (Anderson, Goodman, &

Schlossberg, 2012). A detailed explanation of Schlossberg's Transition Theory can be

found later in this chapter.

Through many discussions, the theory became clearer to me and made practical

sense in its applicability to transfer students. In the ensuing years, we worked to provide

practical knowledge of the theory and our interpretation of its utility to transfer students

in both an article in a monograph as well as a few conference presentations. While

appreciating the value of this theory, we recognized that it was initially conceptualized

for retiring adults. As McEwen (2003) pointed out, theory helps provide "a medium of

communication and understanding among student affairs professionals" (p. 154). At the

same time, theory helps to understand experiences and make their complexities more

"manageable, understandable, meaningful, and consistent rather than random" McEwen,

2003, p. 154). Utilizing data to then determine whether a theory is applicable or not to a

new population helps provide empirical validity, which is one of the formal criteria for

evaluating theories (McEwen, 2003).

In reviewing dissertations and theses that have been published to date, Transition

Theory has begun to be considered by professionals in higher education as a viable theory

in understanding college students. For instance, Powers (2010) applied the theory in

understanding undergraduate male drop-outs perspectives of themselves. Kovton (2010)

applied aspects of Transition Theory to international students' transition to a United

States institution. Others have used the theory to review coping strategies of welfare

recipients in college (Pendleton, 2007), the transition to college for autistic students

(Heck-Sorter, 2012), first-generation students' transition to college (Long, 2005), military

veterans' transition to civilian college life (Morreale, 2011), and military veterans

transition into community college (Rumann, 2012). Few studies have sought to apply

Schlossberg's Transition theory directly to community college transfer student

populations.

Purpose of the study

This study sought to understand the experience that community college transfer

students had in transitioning to a large research university. Schlossberg's Transition

Theory has recently entered discussion within sectors of higher education, but rarely is

connected with the experience of community college transfer students. As such, the

purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand, through the lens of

Schlossberg's Transition Theory, how community college transfer students' transition to

a large land-grant, research university. The focus was to understand community college

transfer student's perceptions of their assets and liabilities with respect to their support

systems, strategies used in the transition, self characteristics, and the situation

surrounding the transition. Through identification of their perceived assets and liabilities,

discussion could then help to understand the most important challenges and successes

that community college transfer students face when transitioning to a large land-grant

research university. This study also helps to understand what resources community

college transfer students identify as the most important to their transition.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) provides a theoretical framework that

helps to better understand the key aspects to the experience of transitions. The original

theory has since been revised in 1995, 2006, and most recently in 2012. This theory has

been used to study multiple groups that have transitioned into new settings including

nontraditional returning students (Schaefer, 2010), academic probation students (Tovar &

Simon, 2006), withdrawing from athletics (Swain, 1991) student to professional (Koerin,

Harrigan, & Reeves, 1990), and retiring faculty members (Goodman & Pappas, 2000).

Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) pointed out that while this theory was

developed for adult development, collegiate staff members should consider this theory

and others that may be helpful in working with students, and even suggested its use in

assessment to help identify assets and liabilities.

> Transitions "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships,
>
> routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman et al., 2006, p.33), need to be
>
> understood as an experience that can be positively or negatively perceived
>
> depending on the individual and the holistic context in that moment in time.
>
> (McGill & Lazarowicz, 2012)

The three major parts of this theory are: approaching transitions; taking stock of

coping resources; and taking charge. (Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). The first

part [approaching transitions] "reflects the experience leading up to the transition- the

relativity, context, and impact of the move- and the transition as an event or non-event

(Goodman et al., 2006)" (McGill & Lazarowicz, 2012, p. 131). In the second part, taking

stock of coping resources, one can better understand how the person will cope with the

transition when they can see both the liabilities (negatives) and assets (positives) within

each of the four categories (4 S's) of self, support, strategies, and situation.

Schlossberg's theory also posits that there is importance in knowing whether the event is

considered planned, unplanned, or a non-event, which can impact the results within each

of the "4 S's." If assets outweigh liabilities then the transition will be less difficult

(Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). "In the final part, the person experiencing the

change begins to use new strategies to manage her or her personal evolution" (McGill &

Lazarowicz, 2012, p. 131).

> Assessing differences between pre- and post-transition environments can help
>
> gauge the impact the transition will have on the student (Goodman et al.,
>
> 2006)…There are two levels of appraisals involved for the individual in
>
> transition: the primary is how (s)he feels about the transition in general; and the
>
> secondary is how (s)he feels about their resources in dealing with the transition
>
> (McGill & Lazarowicz, 2012, p. 132).

Problem addressed in the study

Despite the number of students transferring, Townsend and Wilson (2006) found

that transfer students are typically ignored by college personnel in campus retention

efforts. Viewing this issue through the lens of Schlossberg's theory, these students would

have experienced liabilities within their resources, which could lead to a more difficult

transition. Archambault, Forbes, and Schlosberg (2012) pointed out that there are fewer

scholarships available for transfer students and often, rather than taking out loans, they

will postpone their degree goals. A study by Chen and John (2011) found a positive

relationship between financial aid and persistence to a bachelor's degree. They also

found that African Americans were impacted more by changes in financial aid policies

than White students were. In her dissertation, Radovcic (2010) found that African

American transfer students who were offered financial aid persisted at a significantly

higher rate than those African Americans who received no aid.

Financial aid is not the only problem. Student engagement of transfer students has continued to be lower for transfer students in comparison to native student peer groups. The National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) (2008) reported that transfer students were less engaged on four out of five benchmarks. Theorists such as Tinto (1998) stress the importance of engagement in student success and persistence.

The problem is multifaceted: transfer students experience difficulties during the transition; they receive less financial aid (Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso, 2011), are less engaged (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2008), and experience changes in cultures and academics, leading to transfer shock and culture shock (Cejda & Kaylor, 1997; Cejda, Kaylor, & Rewey,1998; Ishitani, 2008; Johnson, 2005; Whitfield, 2005). College and universities must begin to more fully understand transfer students' voices, and not just numbers. Schlossberg's (1984/1995/2006/2012) Transition Theory may help conceptualize how the transition experience occurs for community college transfer students and how their perceptions and realities of the transition can impact retention and persistence toward graduation at the receiving institution. By seeking to add a voice to community college transfer students and understanding their perceived reasons for being academically successful during their transition, universities may be able to subsequently improve the transition and retention for these students across many campuses.

Research questions

The central question was "how do community college transfer students perceive their transition into a large research, land-grant institution." This general question was addressed through the following sub-questions:

1. In what high impact practices did community college transfer students participate?

2. How did community college transfer students perceive their support systems at a large research, land-grant institution?

3. What most important forms of support (needs, types, and functions) did community college transfer students perceive they needed for a successful transition?

4. What liabilities and assets did community college transfer students report as prevalent in how they viewed themselves during the transition?

5. What strategies did community college transfer students consider to be the most effective mechanisms for coping with the transition?

6. What services did community college transfer students use on campus as they transitioned to a large research, land-grant institution?

General data-gathering methodology

Powers (2010) conducted a study to determine how Schlossberg's Transition Theory was applicable to nontraditional male college drop-outs. In her study, she utilized a qualitative phenomenological study conducting one set of interviews after obtaining demographic information through a pre-survey screening. Kovton (2010) utilized a mixed-methods approach, with the qualitative portion meant to address students' perceptions of the effectiveness of a course meant to improve their transition. The qualitative portion was conducted through a focus group. Heck-Sorter (2012) utilized a case study approach with seven college students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder to understand their transition into higher education. Helms (2008) collected

qualitative narratives through three separate interviews throughout the first semester of

college for women attending West Point Military Academy to understand the meaning of

their experience.

After reviewing the various studies including those listed above, it was evident

that the beginning work focused more on the qualitative data where rich quotes and

participant voice could be captured. For the current study, I employed a

phenomenological qualitative study to capture the meaning of the transition for

community college transfer students. I included a series of three open-ended interviews

for all participants. The purpose of the three-interview series was to understand the

experience and context leading up to the transition, the transition throughout the first

months of their experience at the university, and the meaning the transition holds to them.

The final interview also served as a way to confirm the accuracy of the perceived

experience the participants had. Participants were invited to take part in ongoing

journaling about their transition throughout the research project. While this portion was

not required of the participants, half of them chose to participate.

Previous Studies on Community College Transfer Students

Laanan (1996) conducted a quantitative study on community college transfer

students to understand and compare their previous experience and transitional

experiences and perceptions at the new institution. Laanan's results were comparing

students who were involved in a transfer program with those who were not. This study

began to provide valuable information from a quantitative perspective on the outcomes of

community college transfer students. While the transition language existed within the

literature, this study being early in the work on student transition, did not connect to Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Flaga (2006) employed a qualitative study with 35 community college transfer students to understand their experience at Michigan State University. She interviewed participants during the second semester, and focused on questions related to their transition, experiences between the first and second semester, and recommendations from the participants. While the findings align to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, there was no connection to the theory at all. As was noted above, much of the research connecting Schlossberg's Transition Theory to higher education is recent, within the past four years, so it would make sense why this theory was not employed at the time of Flaga's study. One recommendation made by Flaga included interviewing students soon after their transfer, to capture "in the moment" data (p. 16). Flaga also made a recommendation to review comparisons on gender and ethnicity.

With the recent return of many veterans from service in war, a number of studies have surfaced focusing on the transition of military veterans back home. Some have looked at their transition to civilian life from multiple approaches, including returning to college or starting college. Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) utilized Schlossberg's Transition Theory to understand and explain the college student veteran's navigation of college re-enrollment. Their justification for a qualitative grounded study was due to the lack of literature about this area, and thus they wanted to explain the phenomenon of transition as it related to veteran college students. Meanwhile, DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) conducted a qualitative grounded theory study as well to help understand the transition for military veterans to college upon returning home. Their

study included a mix of students who had previously attended college and some with no

prior experience. Lastly, Rumann and Hamrick (2010) also looked at student veterans'

transition to college after being in war zone deployment. Their study emphasized person-

level transition experiences as opposed to the perceived impact of federal assistance

programs (Rumann and Hamrick, 2010). Their phenomenological study was focused on

gaining the perspectives of the individuals through interviews while also utilizing news

stories and reports in newspapers as a further means to compliment the veteran stories.

Current Study

There are many ways in which this study could be implemented. Having said

that, early research on transfer students focused more on quantitative data such as transfer

shock and academic success. Recent studies have focused on examining transitions and

creating theories on what transition for students looks like. Few studies appear to have

tried to connect transitions that college students have with theories that already exist in

other sectors, such as Schlossberg's Transition Theory. While often qualitative studies

are meant to be inductive in which pre-existing theories do not impact the collection and

information in the study, as Creswell (1994) highlighted in his process of inductive

research, the final step involves either developing a theory or comparing a pattern with

other theories (p. 96). Creswell (1994) also indicated that a tentative conceptual

framework can exist in qualitative research that can help develop the study. For this

study, this justification was appropriate. As was discussed before, I framed the questions

and direction of this research through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

A phenomenological design was used, which involves studying the meaning of

things. More specifically, the purpose of phenomenological studies is to develop a more

"intimate awareness and deep understanding of how humans experience something" (Saldana, 2011, p. 8). According to Wertz (2011), phenomenological research stems from the work of Edmund Husserl and is meant to describe the human experience. One of the unique aspects of a phenomenological approach is that it "sets aside such theories, hypotheses and explanations as refer to biology or environment and investigates what is experienced and how it is experienced" (Wertz, 2011, p. 125). As mentioned above, while I framed the questions based on Schlossberg's Transition Theory, my goal was to understand the transition experience for community college transfer students. In the final chapter, I discuss the transition experience of these students and the application of Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Few studies have examined the transition experience at multiple points of time. Yet, Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) pointed out in the fourth edition of their book that, "the only way to understand people in transition is to study them at several points in time" (p. 48). While few studies have taken this approach, the current study took these authors' suggestion. Three interviews were conducted with incoming community college transfer students. The first was during the second month of the semester, a time generally considered by many college staff and administrators such as Tinto (1998) as a critical period for retention of college students. The second was during the third month of the semester. The final interview was completed in the last month of the participants' first semester at the new institution. I utilized the three-interview series approach described by Seidman (2013), which allows for the context of the experience, detail reconstruction of the experience, and reflection of the meaning to occur within the three interviews respectively. Data was transcribed and then coded for themes, as is

traditional in qualitative inquiry. The invited participants were all community college

transfer students who had completed twelve credit hours at their previous institution(s)

and were currently enrolled as full-time students at a large Midwestern research

university during the fall 2014 semester. Those who completed 12 hours or more through

dual-enrollment in high school, for this study are not classified as transfer students, per

this university's definition of transfer students for admissions purposes.

Assumptions

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1. Transfer students have completed at least 12 semester credit hours at a previous
   institution post-high school graduation or General Education Development (GED)
   program.

2. All information provided by the students (demographic and narrative) are accurate
   perceptions of the student and their transitional experience.

3. Student's perceptions of their transition can impact subsequent retention at the
   receiving institution. Carney Strange (2003) discussed the importance of
   constructed environments. He noted that models related to constructed
   environments imply that "perceptions of an environment constitute a reality" (p.
   306). If a student's perception is negative, they may lose their attraction or
   satisfaction with the institution, and not persist.

4. Retention and graduation variables are positive indicators of a successful
   transition.

Delimitations/Limitations

The following delimitations/ limitations apply to this study:

1. Rather than focusing on a small subgroup of community college transfer students, a broader group consisting of community college students will be used in this study. While the experience of specific subgroups may be important and helpful, a broad scope must first be utilized to determine better understand the broad transition experience community college transfer students have at this institution before future studies can focus on individual subgroups.

2. This study represents student experiences at one institution, and thus cannot be generalized to multiple institutions.

3. Participants in this study were limited to those transfer students who were 19 years of age or older. This was, in part, due to the fact that the legal age of consent in the state of Nebraska is 19, which would have posed complications for data collection.

4. Schlossberg's Transition theory was conceptualized as a counseling theory for aging adults, and was not originally developed around or for traditional college transfer students.

5. Community college transfer students are seen as one group looking only at their previous institution; if a student has transferred between multiple institutions they are not separated within the data.

6. Schlossberg's Transition Theory is a relatively new theory to higher education, and has been applied less in research in comparison to other known theories. While traditional phenomenological research tends to incorporate theory after

data collection, this study was guided through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition

Theory to create the questions and analyze the data. Some researchers may be

skeptical of this approach since it is not void of theory prior to data collection and

analysis.

A list and definitions of technical terminology

Articulation Agreement- an agreement between two institutions that determines

how credit will be received from one institution to another institution

Culture Shock- the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and

symbols of social intercourse (Oberg, 1960, p. 177).

Enrollment status- a student is full-time if they carry an academic load equal to 12

credit hours on a semester schedule. A student is part-time if they carry an academic load

below the 12 credit hour threshold.

Native Student- a student who has not transferred between institutions; one who

started at a 4-year institution and has maintained continual enrollment at the same

institution.

Lateral Transfer- a student who transfers from a 2-year institution (or 4-year

institution) to another 2-year institution (or 4-year institution).

Receiving Institution- The institution in which the student is transferring into.

Retention- The result of a student maintaining enrollment within an institution

until they are awarded a degree from that institution. This is reported in a percentage

based on the number of students who entered the institution in a given quarter/semester.

Reverse Transfer- a student who transfers from a 4-year institution to a 2-year

institution.

Sending Institution- The institution in which the student is leaving from.

Transfer shock- A severe drop in performance upon transfer (Hills, 1965, p. 202).

Transfer student- A student who has taken or attempted more than 12 semester credits of college or university-level course work since high school graduation (or the equivalent).

Transfer Up- a student who transfers credit from high school into a college.

Transition- any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 33).

Vertical Transfer- a student who transfers from a 2-year institution to a 4-year institution.

Significance of the study

There is no doubt that post-secondary education has become an increasingly important part of the fabric of this country. This is especially true of the significance of the community college. As President Obama highlighted community colleges in his 2011 State of the Union address, "Because people need to be able to train for new jobs and careers in today's fast-changing economy, we're also revitalizing America's community colleges …by the end of the decade, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world," a goal that begins with community colleges (para. 42-43). He did not stop there however. President Obama again reiterated the importance of community colleges in his 2015 State of the Union address. His call to action was a bill to be sent forth to congress to fund a new plan to make community college education free. As he said, cities like Chicago and at least one state being Tennessee have plans in place for free community college education. Pointing out that over 40% of college

students are choosing community college, he noted there is not one particular type of student who is impacted but many.

> Some are young and starting out. Some are older and looking for a better job. Some are veterans and single parents trying to transition back into the job market. Whoever you are, this plan is your chance to graduate ready for the new economy without a load of debt. Understand, you've got to earn it. You've got to keep your grades up and graduate on time. (Obama, 2015, para. 34).

Job preparation is crucial and more jobs call for a baccalaureate degree. A vast majority of community college students (81.4%) desire to obtain a baccalaureate degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

> Despite the desire to help college students become successful professionals, transfer student face many challenges (McGowan & Gawley, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Whitfield, 2005; Woosley & Johnson, 2006). In particular, transfer student often feel they are ignored by college personnel in campus retention efforts (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Cuseo (2012) states

> Advisers and advising program administrators can contribute to transfer student success by working with their own troops and winning skirmishes within the narrow confines of their own battlefields, and they can help win the war against attrition by teaming up with other troops and providing insightful input to field general that focus on big targets and systemic solutions (p. 136).

> No matter the staff member, be an admissions counselor or administrator, a professor, a governing board member, a student interested in mentoring, or external funding agency for students attending college, seeking to better understand transfer

students is essential. By hearing the community college transfer students' voice and placing into context the experience they have during the course of their transition, higher education institutions can provide these students better services, support, and opportunities. In turn, retention and graduation rates should undoubtedly increase. In today's economy, many colleges seemingly struggle to increase their student body, and just as importantly retain them, so understanding students and being able to better serve them is everyone's responsibility.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much literature exists discussing the process of transferring and difficulties that transfer students exist. To begin, a review of some governmental policies related to transfer students will be discussed. An overview of the transfer student's experience will follow. While there are many types of research related to transfer students, the focus of the literature review for this chapter will be to understand studies that have reviewed transfer student experiences as a whole, rather than particular sub-groups. The rationale will be briefly addressed in the next paragraph. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, a detailed review of studies that have utilized Schlossberg's Transition Theory will be addressed.

As will be discussed later, there are many types of transfer students. This literature review focuses predominately on community college transfer students, per the focus of the study. As was mentioned previously, what data is available at this institution pertaining to transfer students is quantitative in nature. When reviewing the data available at this institution and considering the relatively new application of Schlossberg's Transition Theory in higher education, it made more sense to view community college transfer students as a whole group rather than a small group first. If focusing on a small sub-group such as African American transfer students or a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered transfer student, the researcher would be missing a significant amount of information that could impact the larger group. Focusing on understanding the larger group before narrowing the focus provided the justification for this study.

To understand the community college student, it is thus equally important to understand the historical role of the community college with regard to the transfer function of the community college. The initial purpose of community colleges and junior colleges was to offer students the opportunity to complete two years of undergraduate education and then provide a smooth transfer to state universities for the completion of their education (Thelin, 2003). Over time, the mission has grown and varies between institutions to include: vocational programs and technical degrees, literacy programs and adult education, and the transfer mission into the larger university system (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Regardless of the institution, community colleges all have one overarching purpose of providing open-access education to all students who desire an education. To this respect, community colleges serve an important role to 4-year institutions because of the preparation work they provide for students wishing to obtain their baccalaureate degree.

State and Governmental Role in Facilitating Transfer Process

Public institutions are under the directives of their states and many states have increasingly given attention to transfer students and articulation agreements. Despite the increase and acceptance of community colleges and the associate's degree in the workforce, many students still desire to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Historically, students transferring credit from community colleges to 4-year institutions have been plagued with difficulties, but states have worked to remedy this issue. Table 4 shows evidence that many states in the United States are focused on streamlining and ensuring accessibility of transfer credit for college students. Articulation agreements are crucial to ensuring the continued education of community college students. As Grites and

McDonald (2012) point out " articulation agreements [as well as], programs and services that facilitate students' transition play a critical role in creating a transfer pipeline for students to continue their education beyond a 2-year college" (p. 21).

Table 4

Review of Legislative Mandates for Articulation Agreements and Common Course Numbering by State

Legislative Mandate for Transfer Articulation		Common Course Numbering	Recommended but not required	No Legislation
Alabama	Missouri	Arizona	Indiana	Delaware
Alaska	Nevada	Arkansas	Iowa	Idaho
Arizona	New Jersey	California	Nebraska	Michigan
Arkansas	New Mexico	Colorado	New York	Montana
California	North Carolina	Connecticut[a]	North Dakota	New
Colorado	Ohio	Florida		Hampshire
Connecticut	Oklahoma	Indiana		Vermont
Florida	Oregon	Kansas		
Georgia	Pennsylvania	Kentucky[a]		
Hawaii	Rhode Island	Louisiana		
Illinois	South Carolina	Minnesota[a]		
Indiana	South Dakota	Mississippi[a]		
Kansas	Tennessee	Montana		
Kentucky	Texas	New Mexico		
Louisiana	Utah	North Carolina[a]		
Maine	Virginia	North Dakota[a]		
Maryland	Washington	Nevada		
Massachusetts	West Virginia	Oklahoma[a]		
Minnesota	Wisconsin	South Dakota		
Mississippi	Wyoming	Tennessee[a]		
		Texas		
		Utah		
		Vermont[a]		
		Virginia[a]		
		Washington[s]		
		Wyoming		

Source: Education Commission of the States (2014). Retrieved from
http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbprofallRT?Rep=TA14A
[a] State only has partial common course numbering system in place

Just because articulation agreements are existent does not make the process of transferring necessarily smoother, especially for the indecisive student. Delmas (2012) pointed out that transfer articulation agreements are not as easy as they may seem. For agreements to work effectively, "students need to know which 4-year institution they will attend after leaving the community college" (Delmas, 2012, p. 19). Some states have provided some accommodations for this.

Harper-Marinick and Swarthout (2012) discussed some of the main components of Arizona's higher education sector that have increased the success of transfer students. First, they discussed the formation of the Academic Program Articulation Steering Committee in 1983 which brought together members of both the community college communities as well as the university and college systems. Their focus is on articulation agreements and policy recommendations and they have focused several task force groups to review various aspects of articulation. Harper-Marinick and Swarthout (2012) went on to highlight the even stronger commitment that Arizona had to transfer student success by mandating in 1996 the development of a transfer system that ensured students would not lose credit during their transfer. The solution was to develop a standard general education core, known as the Arizona General Education Curriculum, which formulated the basis of courses that students could take in any of the four transfer associates degrees offered at the community colleges. Since 2004, the number of students who have successfully transferred has doubled (Harper-Marinick & Swarthout, 2012). Some of the specific institutions have gone even further by creating specialized transfer programs which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Transfer Students

  Preparing for the transfer

   While not all students will share an intention to transfer right away, many students indeed do have that desire. Some will share initially when arriving at the institution, while others may not decide that pathway until later on. Either way, the community college administrators, faculty, and staff should consider what types of support they could provide to students which could aid in successful transfer later on. A few types of support mechanisms that have been documented in literature will be discussed below.

   Packard, Tuladhar, and Lee (2013), discussed some strategies that faculty members in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines within community colleges in Massachusetts are using to assist students considering transferring to a university. Often, people seem to underestimate the power of the relationships that faculty members can make with students and the positive or negative impact they may have on the likelihood of successful transfer. Students nominated faculty they felt help aid in their transfer process. They made comparisons between faculty who were identified as highly supporting their transfer goals with those who were rarely named by students as supporting their transfer goals.

   Some of the activities that faculty specifically engaged in with high frequency included discussing the content needed to transfer, sharing personal experience, and the benefits of education. Meanwhile the two strategies that were statistically different between frequently named professors and rarely named professors were motivational speeches about transferring and discussing strategies for transferring (Packard, Tuladhar, & Lee, 2013). This study highlighted the importance of faculty members playing the role

of supplemental advisers within the community college system and advocates of the transfer mission, particularly at institutions where advisers may have large adviser-to-advisee ratios.

The process of transferring.

Many students are transferring between institutions. In fact, a report conducted in 2006 for the U.S. Department of Education found that nearly 60% of students who graduated had attended multiple institutions. Many are transferring earlier, often before attaining their associate degree. Cejda and Kaylor (2001) explored this phenomenon and found that specific intentions, faculty member actions, certain personal factors such as changes in family status and support, other staff members and peers, and perceived problems at the community college all influenced early transfer decisions. While these students all have their reasons for early transfer, how do faculty and staff view these student's transition experience?

McGowan and Gawley (2006) found that administrators perceive transfer students as having become shoppers for colleges based on articulation agreements; they feel students generally are confused about university cultural norms and expectations; staff believe students have a good idea about their career goals but are less engaged socially; they observe students self-confidence about abilities to perform although they are unsure about the processes within the university setting; and staff have minimal internal and external administrative network links, which have created confusion for both staff and students.

Articulation agreements are extremely important. As Grites (2012) pointed out, now 40 states within the United States have some form or policy or procedure in place to

address articulation among institutions. This can, in theory, dramatically improve the

likelihood of a student graduating. While legislated articulation agreements are good,

Kuh (2008) argues that colleges are not held account accountable to enact the articulation

agreements completely. In his opinion, this is a problem that is causing some transfer

students not to succeed. If articulation agreements are not properly executed, or

admissions and recruitment resources are not distributed adequately to the transfer

student needs, transfer students will see the negative ramifications. As Grites and

McDonald (2012) pointed out "articulation agreements [as well as], programs and

services that facilitate students' transition play a critical role in creating a transfer

pipeline for students to continue their education beyond a 2-year college" (p. 21).

Doyle (2006) pointed out that "acceptance of credit hours in the target

institution…turns out to be key to students' success- or lack of it," (p. 58) which signifies

the extreme importance of articulation agreements among institutions. Many states are

beginning to provide mandates within their states to provide articulation agreements, but

how they are developed, how successful they are in accommodating students who change

their majors, and how they account for students who are considering multiple schools

remains questionable. While articulation agreements themselves are a state-level

government issue, the implementation and development is an administrative and faculty

matter.

The execution of articulation agreements is important. However, transfer students

often do not understand how articulation agreements work. For instance, Townsend

(2008) pointed out in her study that 20% of students were unsure of how many and which

courses transferred. This is particularly distressing for students, because as Townsend

went on to point out with the particular institution she utilized for her study, adviser meetings to discuss their major courses may not occur until the student is accepted into their major, and this can be as late as into their first semester after transitioning. An earlier study by Townsend and Wilson (2006) pointed out transfers are typically ignored during and after the transition by college personnel in campus retention efforts, especially traditional college-aged student who transfer into a larger university. The fact that students are unaware of how their credit transfers is just one example of this neglect by college and university staff.

The problems do not only include articulation agreement concerns. Overall, Tatum, Hayward, and Monzon (2006) found that many students believe that there is minimal effort in assistance and guidance throughout the transfer process. Their findings indicated that transfer students desired more assistance throughout the duration of the process. Cameron (2005) meanwhile also found students believed that this process could have been much smoother.

Some of these issues related to transfer also stem to financial concerns. One study by Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) found that transfer students experience significant financial strain. In particular, they receive significantly less grant and loan aid to attend college than native students. Although this was not specifically stated in the findings of this study, less financial aid likely can lead to the need to work more hours, be less engaged in the campus community, and more difficulties with academic success.

The question that is raised for administrators and staff alike is how to work on improving the transition experience prior to arrival at the 4-year institution. Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2000) raised some important issues to address that can help

alleviate the difficulties in the transition. First, administrators and staff having a better

understanding and appreciation of the difficulties transfer students face can allow for

improved services and outreach to transfer students. Second, staff must help the students

understand the differences between the community college and the 4-year college.

Examples may be helping them prepare for the differences in class sizes, grading

systems, academic resources, and use of graduate students and teaching assistants in the

classroom. Lastly, having an understanding of the expectations and experiences that

community college transfer students have entering the new university can help

administrators and staff address areas where there may be disconnect between the

expectations and the realities of transitioning into the new institution. Having noted all of

these things, it makes it rather apparent that difficulties for transfer students are prevalent.

The next section will focus specifically on academic difficulties as it relates to grade

point averages.

Grade point averages

There are many studies that have explored transfer student grade point averages

(GPA) in comparison to native student GPA's. As Ishitani and McKitrick (2010) point

out, the results of these studies are inconclusive in determining a single pattern for

cumulative GPA's. In an early study, Carlan and Byxbe (2000) studied native and

transfer students GPA changes from lower to upper level classes at six colleges within an

institution. They found that transfer and native student GPA's tend to level out after the

first semester of a transfer student's enrollment at the new institution. After their first

semester, transfer students semester GPA's were 0.3 lower than their cumulative GPA's

at their community college (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000). In this study, the researchers also

found that native students experienced fewer troubles with maintaining upper level GPA. Carlan and Byxbe (2000) tracked these students after their second semester at the university as well and found that the GPA's tended to level off, which the researchers indicated align with many other studies as well (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000).

One interesting result from this study indicated however that the college and major of the student could predict which students would have more difficulties academically. For instance, in this study students transferring in with a major in education and psychology had higher GPA's in comparison with business and science students (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000). Meanwhile, other variables including: gender, associate degree attainment, enrollment status, number of hours transferred in, and majoring in the arts did not impact GPA's of students at the upper level. This study, as well as other quantitative studies, has been able to pinpoint areas that researchers should delve into further to obtaining information.

Another study showed that lower GPA's were correlated with higher rates of departure for transfer students. Ishitani (2008) found that freshman transfer students are more likely to leave then sophomore and junior transfer students, with lower GPA's being attributed to the transfer of students. To some degree, these results would conflict with the results of Carlan and Byxbe's (2000) study, in which they found that number of hours transferred in did not impact academic success of transfer students. Similarly, Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998), showed that students in particularly fields may actually experience the phenomenon known as "transfer ecstasy," or an elation of grades after transfer. The subject areas that Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998) found to experience transfer shock were within math and science (p. 7).

Many studies have examined transfer experiences in regards to "transfer shock," GPA, and graduation rates; however, there has been little focus on specific courses to determine if transfer students have difficulties, which stems from past curricular experience. Similar to Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey's (1998) study, Whitfield's (2005) study compared grades in organic and biochemistry classes for transfer and native students to determine if department reform was needed. Using student records from both the community colleges and the research university, transfer and native students were studied during a 5-year time-period. Results showed that students in biochemistry science courses experience significant declines in GPA as compared to native students, which did not increase over time, indicating "transfer coma" as opposed to "transfer shock" in coursework.

A rather recent study by Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) used propensity score matching methods, which helped to compare students of similar characteristics, rather than looking only at academic level. For instance, some of the variables included in the study included the participants' background student characteristics such as gender and ethnicity, as well as pre-college achievement such as participation in an honors program and student government in high school, as well as financial aid and tuition costs. In this study, their broad findings indicated that transfer students had slightly lower graduation rates, however when using the propensity score matching, the rates of baccalaureate attainment between transfer and native students were similar. What this means is that comparing students with similar backgrounds, the likelihood that a transfer student is as successful as a native student is high. Overall, the graduation rates of transfer students were slightly lower, which may indicate that a higher level of at-risk

students may start at a community college rather than a 4-year university, which is

consistent with the national data (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center,

2012). Beyond this, Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) highlighted that many

students who may be at-risk due to their low socioeconomic status or ethnic background

never transfer into a 4-year university, which also causes concern.

GPA provides one factor of academic success which can lead to retention, but it

does not provide the full answer. For instance, why does this GPA tend to slip? Is it

because there is a transition in the way the courses are taught? Do the students recognize

or have access to resources to help them be successful in these classes? Could transfer

students have less knowledge of the resources available to them, that native students are

more cognizant about? Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) pointed out that

transitions can bring about stress. So, one explanation that may exist is transitions to new

institutions raise stress levels and thus cause students to have the GPA dip, yet a

quantitative study such as the one by Carlan and Byxbe (2000) cannot answer that.

One thing that Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) point out that grade point

averages are not the only thing higher education staff should be concerned about with

respect to transfer student success. They specifically highlighted the role of student

affairs personnel, noting that these staff members can help make the process more

seamless and ensure that transferring does not result in more credit being taken than is

needed. In particular Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) argued that "community

colleges have the responsibility to provide the academic preparation and transfer

curriculum necessary for students to transfer on time, and 4-year colleges should work

with the students during the transition phase to make the process smoother" (p. 282). The

next section addresses some of these difficulties more closely that create a bumpy transition for transfer students.

Experienced difficulties.

Community colleges enroll almost half of all first-time freshmen, and nearly 22% will transfer to 4-year colleges (Woosley and Johnson, 2006). Many of these community college transfer students experience difficulty in the early part of their transition to the new institution, which has been coined "campus culture shock." Davies and Casey (1999) found varied positive and negative experiences among the emergent themes. These themes including individual attention, the teaching-learning experience, coursework demand, student life, financial frets, social subsistence, and search for other support. Overall, students feel they "need strong support systems, and financial, social and institutional sources all contribute to, or detract from, a good college experience" (Searching for Other Support section, para 7). As indicated, this culture shock extends to multiple aspects including their social lives. The transfer students in Cameron's (2005) study felt their social lives were disappointing. Similar results were found by Flaga (2006) in that students felt a need for better understanding of learning resources, the necessity to connect to others academically, socially, and physically before and during the transition period, increased familiarity with time, adjusting to be successful, and social and physical integration.

Woosley and Johnson (2006) compared the academic and social aspects of transfer students to native students who lived in residence halls. Transfer students did not have significant differences in academic experiences, but did spend less time in activities, had lower involvement, and lower satisfaction with student activities than their native

counterparts. Although exhibiting similar success behaviors, native students self-reported higher levels of progress. Whitfield (2005) compared grades in organic and biochemistry classes for transfer and native students at a Washington university and found that students in biochemistry science courses experience significant declines in GPA as compared to native students, which did not increase over time, indicating "transfer coma" as opposed to "transfer shock" in coursework.

Campus engagement

Tinto (1998) pointed out that academic persistence is in much part based on how involved students are with their education both academically and socially with staff and students alike. If students are not as engaged they will likely drop out. Ishitani and McKitrick (2010) point out that native students score significantly higher in "active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, and enriching educational experiences" in comparison to transfer students (p. 584). Astin (1999) discussed his 1984 theory on student involvement and pointed out several indicators of student persistence in college to include: place of residence, involvement in honors programs, student-faculty interactions, academic involvement, athletic involvement, and involvement in student government all play strong roles in student persistence.

The study conducted by Ishitani and McKitrick (2010) showed a surprising difference to Astin's original theory. In their study, 44% of transfer students resided outside of the city they attended college in, compared to only 19.7% of native students (p. 582). Despite having a significantly higher amount of students residing away from campus, the only engagement pattern that was negatively associated with residing away from campus was student-faculty interaction (p. 587). As the authors point out, there is a

common myth that living farther away from campus hinders a student's involvement in

academic and social activities, but this study shows only interactions with faculty are

hindered. Regardless, as Astin's (1999) theory explains:

> Frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with
>
> college than any other type of involvement or, indeed, any other student or
>
> institutional characteristic. Students who interact frequently with faculty
>
> members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all
>
> aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of
>
> courses, intellectual environment, and even the administration of the institution.
>
> (p. 525).

Although Ishitani and McKitrick (2010) pointed out that this is the only negative

association with living away from campus, particularly out of the city, it is still a

significant fact that could lead to many problems, particularly for transfer students. This

could be particularly true for minority students. Wawrzynski & Sedlacek (2003) found

that students of color came in with the expectation that they will become a part of their

new college or university through interaction with faculty and students outside of class.

Skills and opportunities needed

Fee, Prolman, and Thomas (2009) investigated college student success among

transfer students. Often people clump all college students together, rather than

distinguish between the different groups. Each group of students needs to be treated

differently, and transfer students are no exception. Fee, Prolman, and Thomas identified

six findings in particular with college transfer students that are important for directors

and administrators to keep in mind when developing programs and assistance strategies to help these students.

      In this particular study, one of the most important factors for college students was time management (Fee, Prolman, & Thomas, 2009). Time management for transfer students is different than native students. As this qualitative study highlighted, many transfer students are non-traditional students which means that they are spending more time paying bills and often may focus more on work than school. This is an important skill for administrators and program directors to address early on in a transfer student's career. By tackling how to manage one's time more efficiently, students are likely to be more successful and then build their self-efficacy to continue at the 4-year institution.

      For directors of academic programs, one of the main focuses that transfer students often need is an ability to apply knowledge and skills they are gaining. By applying what they are learning to the real-world experience, students are more able to connect their academics to their lives and thus have a better experience in the classroom (Fee, Prolman, & Thomas, 2009). This seems to make sense given that more transfer students are non-traditional students or have had part-time jobs while in college. If they can see application of their education to the real-world setting, they are more likely to buy in to the course and give more effort, thus making them more successful in the classroom.

      An interesting piece of Fee, Prolman, and Thomas's (2009) study was that transfer students wanted more challenging courses. While this seems to be true of most students, it makes sense that a transfer student passing a more challenging course will likely build their self-confidence more and allow them to continue to achieve at higher levels. Similarly, transfer students wanted to take time to get to know their professors, as

many are interested in establishing close relationships with faculty and staff, particularly as they look to someone who can continue to keep them motivated. (Fee, Prolman, & Thomas, 2009, Getting to Know Professors section, para. 3).

A recent study by Ellis (2013) took a unique approach to studying transfer students by conducting a focus group with transfer students to identify what the successful student needs to transfer. One of the strongest indicators discussed was self-motivation. In particular, first generation students used that same self-motivation to complete so they could be role models to others (Ellis, 2013). One particular institutional focus that came to light from this study was also the importance of academic advisers; the participants indicated that advising was poor at both universities and their previously attended community colleges. Subsequently, they reached out to other sources of academic support such as websites and peer advisers (Ellis, 2013). This information highlights the importance to proper information and communication to transfer students as a way to aid the student during the transition. Another skill or trait that Ellis (2013) highlighted of these students was an ability to be persistent and seek answers to all of their questions.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges that transfer students run into is gaining acceptance from the receiving institution. Highlighted multiple times above, transfer students are a growing population in higher education, so institutions must begin developing a culture of acceptance of these students. This can be in multiple ways, adding positions that work specifically with transfer students, developing more articulation agreements, or even developing programs that work directly with students who are preparing to transfer or know they will transfer at some point. This next section

will focus on the latter and highlight some programs that currently exist with the purpose of assisting transfer students.

Sample programs designed for transfer students.

The topic of transfer student difficulties is not new, and many institutions have created programs to help transfer students be successful. A few examples will be highlighted below. One program that is trying to assist students who wish to transfer is occurring between Colorado State University (CSU) and community colleges in Colorado and Wyoming. The Vital Connections Transfer Program provides transfer students with many benefits including "a streamlined application process; no application fee; and information regarding transfer events, scholarships and advising services" (Davies & Kratky, 2000, Vital Connections Transfer Program section, para. 1). Students must have completed a year at the community college, which is required to help strengthen the student's academic background and use of community college resources. In turn, the belief is that they will be more successful at CSU. Upon applying to CSU, students then receive targeted communication pieces and must meet with an adviser from CSU when they come to visit.

Davies and Kratky (2000) then studied students' perception of the utility of this program using a qualitative focus group with eight randomly selected transfer students from CSU in the fall of 1996. Students agreed that the program was helpful, but information about the university, a more thorough list of steps to complete the transfer process, a campus tour, better understanding of class structure, and peer-mentoring were needed to improve the program. While each institution has to implement transfer programs that best suit their students, using research such as Davies and Kratky (2000)

will shed light to administrators on what transfer students do appreciate and value in programs designed to help them through the transfer process.

The University of Southern California (USC) has also teamed up with a number of community colleges to enhance the opportunity for community college students to transfer. The focus of this program was on partnering between the community college and USC. Many programs and activities were involved, but one of the most important was the implementation of a theory-based tutoring model which USC had developed (Kisker, 2007). USC tutors worked with community college tutors to help educate community college tutors on techniques that worked. USC administrators' theory-based tutoring model included establishing study groups, tutorials, and outside classroom support. Over time, much of USC's method was incorporated, yet at the same time adjusted to meet the community college needs (Kisker, 2007).

The other major piece of this program was faculty from both community colleges and 4-year institutions met to discuss college curriculum and modify it as necessary to "better facilitate students' matriculation" (Kisker, 2007, p. 288). This qualitative study found that although there were some hesitations among community college faculty to be more than instructors, some agreed that there were things they could do that were small, yet helped with the transfer process. This hesitation is not unwarranted as over half of community college faculty members are part-time employees (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013c). Over the five years of this study, transfer rates have rose from the participating community colleges to USC. Administrators also felt that many students began to consider a 4-year college when they likely would not have otherwise:

I think that some of our people were not thinking [transfer], and so it helped

people to think, "Oh, I can do it." So I think ... lifting their horizons a little bit

was beneficial. Some students won't be able to do it, but to at least have them

think of it as an option ... is a substantial change. (Kisker, 2007, p. 295).

Administrators also believe this program helped to invigorate faculty members to keep the option of students transferring at some point in mind, which helped to foster new energy when these faculty members were working with students.

For those students not admissible to a 4-year college, programs such as the Dual Admission Program (DAP) at Florida International University (FIU) exist. This program guarantees admissions to those not admissible as long as they participate in the DAP program. This includes a meet and greet session early in their experience at the community college, group advising sessions at the midpoint of the progression at the community college, and final meetings with FIU advisers as they plan their transition to FIU. Although the program has identified challenges such as the required completion of the AA within 3 years, much success has been exhibited such as a clear pathway to a bachelor's degree and a perceived faculty attention that assisted with students' transition (Valdes, Albury, Mahmood, & Merine, 2012).

Cited earlier, Harper-Marinick and Swarthout (2012), discussed a few specific programs within Arizona where institutions have gone further than required by state mandates to create transfer programs. One such program is between Maricopa Community College and Arizona State University. In this program (known as MAPP) multiple functions exist to improve the transfer student experience. Some of these include "increased financial support, joint training for student advisers, data sharing to

monitor progress, and an electronic transfer system" (Harper-Marinick & Swarthout, 2012, p. 83). The students who participate in this program, which prescribes the exact courses the student must take, receive guaranteed admission to Arizona State University upon completion of the program, along with many benefits that native students receive.

The above programs are a sample of the different types of programs that exist throughout the country to address transfer students' needs. Each of these focuses on the specific needs of their institution, but regardless they all are geared to ease the transition, particularly the transition that occurs amongst the institutional differences between their previous institution and the institution they will transfer into. The next section highlights the importance of understanding culture shock as it applies to transfer students.

Culture Shock

I specifically address culture shock last in discussing transfer student research. This is particularly because culture shock can be viewed from both a transfer student and racial perspectives. The term culture shock first surfaced in the literature in 1960 by anthropologist Kalervo Oberg. Oberg (1960) defined culture shock as "the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 177). He goes on to state that removal of these cues leads to symptoms such as a feeling of helplessness and a longing to go back home. Culture shock impacts many transfer students regardless of race. This is highlighted in Laanan's (2007) study, in which he found that social demographic variables did not account for differences in social adjustment. This suggests all students will experience some form of cultural shock upon arrival to their new institution.

Having said that, Oberg pointed out that culture shock can impact everyone differently, and the adjustment that occurs varies between people. This culture shock can be even accentuated when the African American student is attending a predominately White institution. Torres (2009) found that African American students felt marginalized as they transitioned into the predominately White institution. In particular, many of the African American students highlighted their feelings of a culture shock and feeling isolated and out of place. Some defined culture shock simply being part of a statistical minority on campus while others focused more on having to immerse themselves into a predominately White culture from living in a predominately Black community or neighborhood. Much of the culture shock that occurs on a college campus is influenced by the ways in which a student is or is not involved.

Other Theories Utilized with Transfer Students

Laanan (2001) wrote about the need for more research understanding transitions of community college transfer students that transfer to senior-level institutions. In particular, he highlighted that some studies have used theories such as Tinto's to look at persistence. He further went on to discuss the three approaches that researchers use to address college adjustment: psychological, environmental and climate. In this section, I will briefly explain some of these theories with the purpose of helping the reader understand why I have chosen to use Transition Theory instead. The theories that will be discussed in this section include: validation theory; Bean and Metzner's Attrition Model; and Smedley, Myers, and Harrell's Stress-Coping Model.

Validation Theory

For many years, transfer students have fallen into different categorizations in comparison to their native student peers. Community college transfer students tend to be older, first-generation, low-income, and racially diverse. To summarize the students at community colleges would be too reaching, but The College Board (2011) pointed out in their report that "community colleges attract students from underserved groups in greater numbers than 4-year colleges and universities" (p. 7). As such, Rendon (2002) discussed students' need to feel validated:

> In- and out-of-class validating experiences are especially important with nontraditional student populations such as returning adults, low-income students, first-generation students, and many women and minority students from working class backgrounds. Many nontraditional students come to college needing a sense of direction and wanting guidance but not in a patronizing way (p. 644).

Rendon (2002) further goes on to separate academic and interpersonal validation. Academic validation focuses on assisting students to know they can be academically successful, while interpersonal validation focuses on personal and social development. There is a clear difference though between validation and involvement, Rendon (2002) pointed out, especially relating to nontraditional students.

While validation theory is an important theory to consider with transfer students, it fails to appreciate the experience of the transition from one institution to the next. It does not account for the process. Further, validation focuses on the external factors beyond one's control and does not include as much focus on the self. Transfer students must understand how they are part of the picture within the transition. Support and staff

are an important variable to the transition, but there is more than people that impact the

transition that transfer students have.

Bean and Metzner's Attrition Model

Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a model to help understand why students

drop out. As Laanan (2001) pointed out, this approach was meant to serve as a

psychological approach to understanding college adjustment. The theory was developed

around older, part-time, and commuter students. Their meta-analysis of previously-

conducted research highlighted a model that included many factors such as the students'

background and demographic variables; academic; environment; psychological

outcomes; and social integration variables which effect the academic outcomes, intent to

leave, and drop out. They view the model as a compensatory model that if certain areas

are lacking, other areas may help to improve the likelihood of retention. They go as far

to suggest if academic support was low, yet environmental support is good that the

student would stay enrolled. What this model fails to acknowledge is that in any given

situation, if even one aspect of the situation, support, self, or strategies accessible to the

individual at that moment in time is changed, the outcomes may be completely changed.

This theory, while providing the opportunity to see each person as an individual, over-

emphasizes the ability that each area has for compensation for other areas. The one area

that this theory does not address is the process of transition that occurs. By recognizing

that perceptions of these factors could change over time could impact the final reason that

students did not persist.

Smedley, Myers, and Harrell's Stress-Coping Model

Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993) developed a stress-coping model in an effort to help better understand how stress impacts adjustment in minority students. Although adjustment is conceptually different than transition, there is nonetheless the expectation that a transition will require some form of adjustment. Their model utilized three attributes: individual; psychological and sociocultural stressors; and strategies used to cope with the stress. This theory unjustly focuses on the negatives of adjustment and implies that stress ensues with all transitions. The value of this theory should not be overlooked. It attributes that there are individual characteristics, there is a situation that causes the stress, and recognizes that each person will experience the situation differently based on their coping strategies. It does not however account for supports that exist to assist the individual, nor does the theory account for the impact of time and recognize the process of moving through the transition and how this could change a person's ability to adjust.

Transition Theory

As discussed in other areas throughout this dissertation, Schlossberg's Transition Theory was originally developed as a counseling theory to work with retiring adults. Despite its initial purpose, many people have seen the utility of this theory and applied it to other populations. The following section will briefly highlight some of the literature and the groups and findings. Much more will be discussed in chapter five related to Schlossberg's Transition Theory and studies connecting this study to the research that is currently present.

Studies Framed by Transition Theory

      Veterans

Many studies have utilized Schlossberg's Transition theory to address veteran's

transitions. Wheeler (2012) specifically focused on their transition to a community

college. One of the main themes that surfaced in her study was that veterans had mixed

reactions to the services offered by the Veteran Affairs Certifying Officer, which could

be classified within the support structures of the 4S model. Similarly, while many

services were used by veterans, there were no other consistent services used among the

veterans in the study. Similarly, there was consensus that the strategies used within the

orientation model were not helpful, even going as far as calling the orientation "really

stupid" (Wheeler, 2012, p. 782). Wheeler focused more of her discussion on the process

of moving in, moving through, and moving out of the transition. Having said that, she

made a point that those who were moving out of the military service into the transition as

a community college student, were doing so by having coping resources within the 4S

model (p. 786).

      Athletes

Many people have shown an interest in understanding how college athletes

transition into careers outside of athletics as their college careers end. This was the case

with a dissertation by Henderson (2013) where she utilized Schlossberg's Transition

Theory to frame her work to understand how Division I female athletes assess the

situation, support, strategies, and self as they transitioned out of college athletics. Her

assessment of the use of Schlossberg's Transition Theory was summarized as follows:

"Schlossberg's transition theory was found useful in examining the transition experiences

of college student-athletes at the end of their athletic eligibility." (p. 110). One limitation

that Henderson (2013) did point out was that she was interviewing students who were in

the moment of transition, rather than looking at the experience retrospectively. While

this can lead to a lack of reflection on the experience, it does provide the most active

discussion of how the student feels in the moment, which this researcher feels may be just

as valuable as a retrospective review.

An older study by Wheeler, Malone, VanVlack, Nelson, and Steadward (1996)

examined the transition for athletes with disabilities as they transition into a retirement

from sports. In their study, they completed interviews with 18 athletes. The questions

asked were geared toward the model of moving in, moving through, and moving out

phases of the transition. The three questions used in this study included, " "Tell me about

your life and experiences as an athlete," "Describe the point of retirement, how you came

to retire and how you felt about it," and, "Describe your life now, your career, your

hobbies, and your health." " (Wheeler et al., 1996, p. 384). They found that the athletes

experienced significant emotions related to the transition and were concerned about a

lack of support. Individuals used different types of coping mechanisms as they adjusted

to life after sports. In conclusion, the authors of this study made clear that they felt

Schlossberg's model was very useful to address transition of athletes.

Students on Academic Probation

Tovar and Simon (2006) utilized the concepts of Schlossberg's Transition Theory

as a way to conceptualize their concern about using some other theories in working with

students who were on academic probation. They argued for the use of Schlossberg's

Theory over traditional college student development theories developed by Tinto and

Astin because they felt Schlossberg's Transition Theory better helped address the minority student population and the theory "considers these freshmen on a more individual basis and, in particular, their needs that arise in adapting to college life" (p. 550).

Subsequently, using the College Student Inventory, Tovar and Simon (2006) sought to determine if probationary students of different ethnic backgrounds reported differences in their personal academic motivation, their coping strategies, and use of support services. These areas directly connect to the 4-S structure that Schlossberg utilizes with situation, self, strategies, and support. The results indicated that there were differences between ethnicities in their confidence, their attitude toward instructors, and their interests. With respect to coping and receptivity toward institutional assistance, students also differed by ethnicity. Their conclusion noted that those who work with students on probation should indeed consider the work of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. By working with the student to address the transition the probationary college student has as they enter that stage provides a positive impact, rather than simply providing information.

Career Loss

McAtee and Benshoff (2006) conducted a study to understand the differences among women who had been laid off. They reviewed two groups of participants including one group of women who chose to enroll in a community college to gain additional training and another group that sought immediate re-employment. The results indicated significant differences depending upon the women's age, strategy for future

employment (immediate employment versus community college enrollment), and supports. For instance, one finding indicated white women who perceived having a strong support structure were more likely to enroll in community college coursework. On a broader level, one of the researchers' hypothesis was supported that indicated "women who had more positive feelings about her situation, her self, her supports, and implemented a variety of strategies would likely enroll in community college for retraining" (p. 705). This study showed that indeed Schlossberg's Transition Theory can help identify why people take certain actions over others. By understanding why these women made the choices they did, in part due to their perceptions, can help many professionals who work with people in transition co-develop plans for successful transitions into the next phase of life.

Nontraditional College Male Drop Outs

In a unique dissertation, Powers (2010) used a phenomenological approach to understand the experience of the self-perceptions that nontraditional male drop outs had throughout the college process. She specifically focused on Schlossberg's 4-S structure to understand students' perspectives throughout the process leading up to dropping out. The themes that surfaced in this study included a strong connection to family; perceptions of time and job constraints; financial concerns; and institutional related. With respect to the institutional-related themes, the responses were varied with both positive and negative perspectives. What can be said about this study is that the results support the overarching view of the theory in that each person has individual experiences depending on their situation, support, strategies used, and self in addition to their perceptions of each of

these areas. While trends can be seen with regards to the nontraditional male drop out, they still experienced differences.

Conclusion

There is considerable research that discusses the difficulties transfer students face. Both qualitative and quantitative studies have looked at academic success, the difficulties with academic credit transfer, and a lack of support at the receiving institution. Researchers have utilized well-known theories such as those created by Tinto (1998) and Astin (1999) in understanding engagement and participation of transfer students, but few have expanded to consider new or other theories. Schlossberg's Transition Theory has been utilized with sub-groups other than retiring adults, such as returning veterans, college student drop outs, students on academic probation, adults experience career loss. To this researcher's knowledge, no studies had looked at a broad population of community college transfer students through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. This study sought to understand their transition through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, which may be more applicable to this specific population, rather than relying on traditional theories that have been developed for a broader college audience.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter identifies the research methods that occurred within the dissertation. The beginning of the chapter will focus on explaining the need for the use of a phenomenological qualitative research design and the specific details of the study. The first broad section will focus on pre-study considerations of the research, including an outline of the problem, the epistemology, the role of the researcher, and certain ethical considerations I needed to consider. The second portion of this chapter focuses on the research design, including the population, sample size, and recruitment of the participants. This will be followed by the methodology, instrumentation, and site description. The last section focuses on analysis and validation of the data collected throughout the study.

Introduction

Through multiple interviews and voluntary journaling, this study attempted to understand the transition of community college transfer students to a large research institution. As discussed in chapter two, much of the initial research with various populations using Transition Theory was conducted using qualitative measures. While quantitative data provides numerical analysis of a particular question, qualitative research provides a voice for the participants. By capturing the voice, one is able to truly understand, without bias, the subjective meaning of the experience. This is the benefit that the late psychologist, Gordon Allport, claimed as an added value of qualitative research. In particular, the value of qualitative research methods are "valuable in their own right and superior to other methods in the investigation of meaning and many important human phenomena, such as love, perception of beauty, religious faith,

experience of pain, ambition, fear, jealousy, frustration, memory, fantasy, and friendship"
(Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011, p. 44). What
meaning the community college transfer students give to the experience of their transition
and their perceptions of assets and liabilities justifies the importance of hearing the
participants' voices to this study.

Using a phenomenological, qualitative methods approach, I attempted to
understand their perceptions with respect to their assets and liabilities within the support
systems, strategies used in the transition, self characteristics, and the situation
surrounding the transition to the new institution. Schlossberg's Transition Theory was
used to guide the conceptualization and questions for this study. This led to a deeper
discussion that helped better understand the transition that these community college
transfer students had as they enter a large research institution.

Restatement of the Problem

As mentioned in chapter one, there are many more students transferring between
institutions today than even 10 years ago, and this trend does not seem to be changing.
Despite the number of students transferring, researchers such as Townsend and Wilson
(2006) found that transfer students are typically ignored by college personnel in campus
retention efforts. Furthermore, we have failed to truly understand and appreciate the
experience that transfer students have in their transition to the new institution. With
fewer scholarships available, fewer student services geared toward assisting transfer
students, and lower retention rates, transfer students are treated as second-class citizens
within higher education. Using the language that Schlossberg laid out in Transition

Theory framework, these students would have experienced liabilities within their resources, which could lead to a more difficult transition.

College and universities must begin to more fully understand transfer students' voice, and not just numbers. Schlossberg's (1984/1995/2006/2012) Transition Theory can provide a lens to view how the transition experience occurs for community college transfer students and how their perceptions and realities of the transition can impact retention and persistence toward graduation at the receiving institution. By seeking to add a voice to community college transfer students and understanding their perceived reasons for being academically successful or unsuccessful through their transition, universities may be able to subsequently improve the transition and retention for transfer students across many campuses.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study was to assess how community college transfer students perceive their transition into a large research, land-grant institution. This general question was answered through the following sub-questions:

1. In what high impact practices did community college transfer students participate?

2. How did community college transfer students perceive their support systems at a large research, land-grant institution?

3. What most important forms of support (needs, types, and functions) did community college transfer students perceive they need for a successful transition?

4. What liabilities and assets did community college transfer students report as prevalent in how they view themselves during the transition?

5. What strategies did community college transfer students consider to be the most effective mechanisms for coping with the transition?

6. What services did community college transfer students use on campus as they transitioned to a large research, land-grant institution?

Because this is a qualitative study, the general questions above were answered through a series of individual interviews. The nature of the interviews will be discussed in a later section, but the best method to achieving the most thorough information was through a series of interviews, which allowed trust and rapport to be established and a more thorough conversation was able to occur. Also completing multiple interviews allowed the participants to think more deeply about their transition to the new institution. Similarly, having multiple interviews allowed me the opportunity to digest the information received and follow up with more questions as needed to provide a more accurate and detailed depiction of the transition experience for these students.

Philosophical Assumptions

A person's worldview, as Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) point out, provides "a general philosophical orientation to research" (p. 40). Creswell (2007) discussed four different worldviews that researchers may take in qualitative literature: postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) go on later in their textbook, there are five elements that define a worldview: ontology (nature of reality); epistemology (how we gain knowledge about what we know); axiology (role of values); methodology (the process of research); and rhetoric (the

language of research). (p. 42). This section will outline my worldview, or philosophical assumptions, I subscribe too.

In my work in higher education, I have had many opportunities to work directly with transfer students. This is a growing population in higher education, yet despite that as the literature highlights, they experience many difficulties and often these students feel neglected. This group of students often feels as though they are not heard or their experience is not valued as much. Creswell (2007) discussed one worldview, social constructivist, as being one in which the researcher focuses on the participants' view of the situation to truly understand how the participant understands the world around them, in this case the experience of transitioning into a large university from a community college. As I have considered my role within this study, and the purpose for this research, the worldview that I subscribe to is that of a social constructivist.

Creswell (2007) noted that in a social constructivist paradigm, the researcher seeks "understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 20). He goes on to state that "these meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meaning into a few categories or ideas." (p. 20). The questions asked should be broad and general to help construct the meaning of the experience, be open-ended, and understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Wertz (2011) pointed out an important aspect of this paradigm, noting that "validity requires multiple perspectives…multiple accounts or interpretations of discourse are expected…" (p. 306).

Researchers who use this paradigm recognize that their own experience influences their interpretation of the data they collect. That said, they realize that their goal is to

make sense of the meaning others have about an experience. I want to understand how

transfer students view their experience in the transition, not just my own interpretation of

what I believe they may be thinking. Similarly, although more aligned to an advocacy

approach, my hope was to truly understand the community college transfer student

experience and improve their experience, if needed. Information that surfaced indicating

where the university could improve aspects of the transition will be shared with

administrators and program directors on this campus. This research would help to provide

a rationale for new policies or added services that will positively influence the experience

these students have.

Ontology, as mentioned above, is the nature of reality. Often we hear about one

perspective as the viewpoint for the whole group. With social constructivism, the nature

of reality is relative in that it is localized to the participants and is co-constructed between

the researcher and the participant. The goal is understanding this reality amongst all of

the participants and highlighting each of these to show that multiple perspectives exist

and that they all must be presented, not just one. My research is meant to understand the

full realm of experiences transfer students have and expose why their experiences may be

different.

Epistemology explains how one gains knowledge. As Creswell and Plano Clark

(2011) highlighted, this is the relationship between the researcher and that being

researched (p. 42). Using a social constructivist worldview means that the participants

are the experts of their experiences. Their views are subjective. The role of the

researcher is to collaborate with the participant and truly understand their subjective

experience. As I have worked with transfer students, I have found one thing, I am very

much an outsider. As a staff member, early in my career, I had not stopped to fully

understand the transfer student's experience. If I did not give voice to the participants

and more importantly see them as collaborative experts, then I would have never truly

understood the transition for these students.

Axiology is the role of values. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) noted that values

are negotiated (p. 42). In thinking about what this meant to my worldview, I recognized

that indeed I have my own values which I bring to the research. Those values shape how

I view a subject, how I ask questions, and the way I write. Yet, through that, I realize that

I must give voice to the participants' values as well to fully understand and give voice to

their experience. I think that it is important that the reader understands both where my

biases come in as well as what is important to the participant.

Methodology is the process of research. This means how the data is collected and

who is included, paying specially attention to including all relevant persons. Creswell

(2012) indicated that with the constructivist paradigm, the methodology and approach to

inquiry should be inductive in nature and take on a literary style. It is conversational in

nature. Throughout the interviews, the reader shall notice that often the flow of the

conversation occurred much like a dialogue between two people as a way to allow an

ability to best understand the experience. This approach also understands that the values

of an individual are intrinsically valuable to each individual, and those values build each

person's reality. The nature of this approach is subjective, but the research is conducted

to ensure shared stories are authentic and meaningful. Perhaps best summarized, Wertz,

Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, and McSpadden (2011) indicated that

"interpretation is generally understood as self-reflective, interactive, and ongoing, with

the interpreter mindful that his or her pre-understanding influence interpretation and the new insights influence how a text is understood as a whole" (p. 66).

Finally, rhetoric is the fifth component of a worldview. Rhetoric is the language of research, and transformative language is advocacy-based with a focus on words that initiate or bring about change. When writing about transfer students in particular, I recognize the countless research articles that discuss the challenges and problems that this group faces. Much of the literature is geared toward suggesting change and strategies to make that change happen. As I wrote, I wanted to ensure that a sound scientific presence is existent, but also focused on using words, sentence structures, and placement that allowed the voices of the participants to be heard, clear ideas and suggestions to resonate, and no individual's experience left behind.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher impacts the study in many ways, including affecting how the study is approached and how the research is conducted (Saldana, 2011). While phenomenological studies are designed so that the researcher remains as unbiased with their interpretation of the data as possible, their personal experiences will impact the way the study is approached. Creswell (1994) recommended addressing the following issues related to the role of the researcher: past experiences related to the research topic, entry into the setting, disruptions, and information on how the results will be reported, and the value to the gatekeepers. These will be addressed in following section.

My interest in transfer students stems from previous work conducted with transfer students through a focused outreach project I conducted as an intern with a university

Career Services office. In that study, I was intrigued by the lack of utilization of career services as a student support service by transfer students. Few students utilized the services throughout the year, even after e-mails were sent to all 900+ transfer students from that fall. This project led me to wonder why students were not using the services, as well as the perception of the utility of career services.

My first position as a graduate assistant and then full-time staff member was working with a learning community. Based on my experience and the fact that we had a number of transfer students coming in during their second year of college, I actively worked to create a better experience for our transfer students to be connected to the learning community given that many students who transferred into the community had little contact with staff. My experiences with the learning community gave me an appreciation for the issues that transfer students face and led me to wonder how college personnel can best impact transfer students' experience.

In a qualitative research course, my project was trying to understand the experience that minority transfer students have at the institution. The sample size was small and one thing that I found in reviewing the data was that the experiences were very different for each participant and I could not distinguish the reason for this. By doing a more thorough study, I felt I could provide a better, more thorough, understanding of transfer students' transition.

Currently, in my role as a coordinator and academic advisor for one of the colleges at a large research institution, I coordinate our efforts with transfer students. This includes communications, transfer credit review, and coordination of transfer student enrollment days. Through this work, I interact with transfer students and hear

them speak of the experiences they have had throughout the process up to the point of enrolling in classes at the new institution. Each of these students comes from different backgrounds, has different rationales for transferring, and experiences the transition differently, and I see my role as being someone who can advocate for programs, policies, and procedures that enhance the experience these transfer students have. Although I see transfer students on a regular basis, I do not have time to ask them pointed questions as this study provided. Asking these important questions allowed me to more fully understand the experience these students have had and provided a more accurate assessment of their transition, rather than making assumptions based on what I heard in passing.

Qualitative researchers must openly share their perspectives regarding the topics in which they are researching. As Creswell (1994) pointed out, researchers will have biases and values related to the topic they are studying, and these issues should be shared openly. Having said that, Marshall and Rossman (1999) pointed out that researchers should try to limit the impact of the bias on the study. They provide points that can help the qualitative researcher accomplish this including having a strong understanding of qualitative methodology as well as an understanding of the varying viewpoints that researchers share about "what constitutes knowledge and knowledge claims, especially the critique of power and dominance in traditional research" (Marshall & Rossman , 1999, p. 28)

In my experience having attended conferences on transfer students, visited with transfer students individually, and visited with colleagues about transfer student issues, we have yet to fully develop effective practices for assisting transfer students, at least at a

local level. A commentary by Ott and Cooper in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* was

entitled "They're Transfer Students, Not Cash Cows" (18 March, 2013). The chief

concern in this editorial was a lack of acceptance of transfer credit. Similarly, the process

at this institution, while getting better, is still particularly troublesome in that many

students transfer in truly unsure which courses will count toward credit within their major

and which will be classified as elective credit, "the place where credit goes to die," as a

colleague articulates (personal communication, J. Moseman, n.d.). I believe there is

interest by many professionals to improve the experience for students across all

campuses, as the buzz-word of retention is a priority on many campuses across the

country. That said, the priority cannot only be with the incoming freshman student, but

rather must include all students regardless of transfer status, age, race, sexual orientation,

gender, or ability. While there are strides being made to improve the transition for

transfer students, there is much work to do.

Another important consideration within the researcher's role is gaining access to

the population to study. There are four particular staff members and offices within the

institution who have roles working with transfer students. These include the Academic

Transfer Coordinator, the Director for First Year Experience and Transition Programs, an

Associate Director of Admissions, and the New Student Enrollment office. I sought their

support in soliciting student participation since they were most directly connected to the

transfer students who attend this university. Because I had working relationships with

these staff members already, and they have an understanding of my professional interests,

their support had been established through previous conversations. This institution is

particularly attuned to improving retention rates; the value of this research to these

particular "gatekeepers" will include valuable findings related to community college

transfer students, which can help them continue to enhance the experience this population

of students has within their time at the institution.

One issue that is important to address in qualitative studies is eliminating as much

disruption as possible during the research. As the researcher, my goal was to be as

flexible as possible and work around the participants' schedules and needs to gain as

many participants as possible. This included varying times, locations, and modes of

collecting the interviews, such as utilizing video conferencing.

Finally, the results of this dissertation will also be disseminated within the

university community, particularly focused on those services and centers that work with

transfer students. These results presented in this dissertation will also lead to some

focused papers related to specific topics which will be shared within appropriate national

journals within the higher education community.

Ethical Considerations

There are many ethical considerations to keep in mind with qualitative research.

Saldana (2011) perhaps asserts the most important ethical consideration for qualitative

research "But first, do no harm" (p. 24). In working with human subjects, it is important

to realize the emotional, physical, or psychological issues that can emerge as a result of

the information that is being shared. For these participants, the transition occurred for

many reasons. For a few, they were denied admission the first time they applied. While

they may have preferred to attend this institution first, due to their academic record they

were forced to continue at the community college. For others, finances hindered them

from beginning their careers at the institution. Yet, for others, they are returning to

school at a later age for personal reasons. No one had any drastically negative experiences. Some had much excitement regarding the transition to this institution. The process was relatively seamless for some, while raised some confusion for others. As the researcher, I had to be prepared to refer students to appropriate resources if any issues surfaced as a result of the conversation. In one case, I did refer a student to a tutoring center after reading his frustration with his professor in a class he was taking.

Although sometimes not seen as an ethical issue, one does include establishing trust and rapport. Some researchers may choose to share their own personal experiences when collecting the data from their participants. I see these two as hand-in-hand and something I had to think about very carefully. In the interviews, I shared with the participants a background of my professional role on campus, and my role specifically working with transfer students in my role as an adviser. My goal was to do this as a way to establish a rapport that I am trying to be an advocate for transfer students.

There are many areas of ethical concern with data collection such as reporting contrary findings, rewarding participants, disclosing sensitive information, and assigning anonymous names. Knowing that the transition could have been difficult, should emotional distress had surfaces among any of the participants, I was prepared to inform them of availability of services available through the Counseling and Psychological Services for students. This fortunately did not occur during the duration of this study. There was also the strong possibility that not all students experienced the same transition, and it was important that I share each of their experiences in my results, even though sometimes they did vary among students.

Lastly, one ethical issue can be the interview itself. I worked to conduct the interview in locations that were most comfortable for the participants. There were four different locations that the interview took place including the student veteran organization office (for one participant), a library study room (for one participant), Skype online interviews (for one participant) and my office (for nine of the participants). This hopefully allowed the participants to feel the most comfortable in the environment, and thus ensure the ideal environment for the student to feel comfortable sharing information.

Research Population

The students asked to participate included all degree-seeking transfer students whose last attended institution was a community college. These students had completed a minimum of 12 semester credits at the previous institution and were enrolled as a full-time student at the current institution. This study used Schlossberg's theory of transition to assess community college transfer students' perceived assets and liabilities regarding the specific strategies, support, self-characteristics, and situational experiences that strongly impacted their successful and unsuccessful moments during their transition.

Recruitment of Participants

In order to recruit potential participants, a promotional flyer was given to all transfer students who attended an in-person New Student Enrollment day (See Appendix A). The university registrar's office provided a list of transfer students who were enrolled full-time as of the university census date, which was the sixth day of the semester. The registrar provided my adviser a list of 235 e-mails and the adviser sent an e-mail out to the potential students. The e-mail was sent to all students at the end of the second week of the semester, and students were instructed to e-mail the researcher if they

were interested in participating. This e-mail is presented in Appendix A. The e-mail

asked for a response by September 12. As outlined in the electronic letter, in exchange

for participation, the students were entered into a drawing for one of two $50 gift cards if

they participated in the interviews, and an additional $25 drawing for those who

participated in the journaling. One reminder e-mail was sent a week later. In a final effort

to obtain as many participants as possible, the researcher utilized a snowball sample e-

mail request with current participants asking them to inform anyone else they knew who

transferred into the institution during the same semester of the opportunity to participate

(See Appendix A). This effort resulted in no additional participants.

Methodology

This study utilized a phenomenological, qualitative approach. A

phenomenological study focuses on the lived experiences of a person or group of people.

Phenomenological studies tend to be extensive and throughout time help to develop

explainable patterns and connect meaning to the experience (Creswell, 1994). One thing

that is important about phenomenological studies is that the researcher keep their

assumptions out of the study and really focus on developing a new understanding of the

phenomenon based on the data and stories collected (King & Horrocks, 2010).

I used an intentional analysis approach, which Wertz (2011) describes as focusing

on the how and what of the experience. Phenomenological studies focus on the most

general concept. Through a process of eidetic reduction, they determine what the

experience includes for everything within that phenomenon, in this case the transition.

Through this study, I sought to understand the transition experience that community

college transfer students have had while attending a large research institution. The

general collection method included three semi-structured, open-ended interviews, which

were transcribed verbatim by an outside transcriptionist who signed a transcriptionist

confidentiality agreement (See Appendix E). The analysis of the transcribed data is

described below.

A secondary form of data collection was solicited as a voluntary option for

participants. The journaling was intentionally loosely structured, as I wanted to give the

participants the opportunity to provide any unfiltered comments they thought pertained to

their experience. This data collection is complementary to the interviews, but provided a

way to enhance their interview reflections and provide a deeper understanding to the

meaning and experience of the transition for these participants. I provided general

suggestions for things they could consider adding to their journal such as: written

commentaries about events such new student enrollment and events geared toward

transfer students; participation in and reaction to individual meetings such as meetings

with advisers, admissions, financial aid officers, and others; and general observations.

Six people participated in this second data portion of the research.

Site Description

Midwestern University was the site chosen for this study for multiple reasons.

First, the type of environment that exists within a large research-extensive institution

would seem to be very different than the mission and philosophy of most community

college settings. Second, the location of the institution allows for access to the

researcher. Finally, between 2005-2010, over 50% (2251 out of 4414) of the students

who transfer into Midwestern University were community college transfer students.

Over the past five years, the demographic distribution of the university has been made up

of 75% in-state residential students, although the percentage of out-of-state students is slightly increasing each year.

According to the Carnegie Classification, this university is classified as a comprehensive doctoral, 4-year research-extensive university (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2013). The American Association of Community Colleges discusses a blanket mission of the community college sector as one that provides open-access educational opportunities with a focus on serving the surrounding community (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013b). Few of these institutions focus on disseminating and conducting research or provide upper-class educational coursework. As such, the educational missions, setting, and experience that students have can vary greatly from the community college to the large research-extensive institution. Utilizing students who have transferred from institutions that are vastly different in purpose (mission, size, and structure) I felt would provide the best opportunity to understand a group of transfer students who would likely experience the significant transition, rather than comparing the transition from two very similar institutional types.

Sample Size

As Saldana (2011) pointed out, there is no right or wrong number of participants to include. Saldana (2011) indicated that some researchers feel three to six participants can provide enough data, while others suggest 10-20 participants. All currently enrolled transfer students who completed at least 12 semester credits previously at a community college and enrolled as a full-time student at the present institution were invited to participate. The key point that Saldana (2011) pointed out is that there is sufficient

interview data to analyze. Initially 20 people responded to the initial e-mail for

participation. Five were ineligible to participate as they did not meet the full criteria: two

were not enrolled full-time and three were not transferring from a community college.

Three people who were eligible never responded after the initial e-mail to set up

interview times. The final number of participants for interviewing was 12. Of those 12,

six participated in the journaling portion of the study. Table 5 shows a summary of the

participants living situation and employment intentions. Table 6 shows a summary of the

personal characteristics of the participants and table 7 highlights transfer-related

characteristics of the participants. That section is then followed by a brief description of

each participant.

Table 5

Housing and Employment Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Number (percentage)
Living	
On-campus (Residence Hall)	2 (16.7%)
Off-campus	9 (75.0%)
Off-campus (with parents)	1 (8.3%)
Intending on working	
Yes, On campus	2 (16.7%)
Yes, Off-campus	8 (66.7%)
No, but may look eventually	2 (16.7%)
No, not intending to work	1 (8.3%)
Hours intending to work	
1-10 hours	1 (8.3%)
11-20 hours	3 (25.0%)
21-30 hours	2 (16.7%)
30+ hours	5 (41.7%)
Not intending to work	1 (8.3%)

Table 6

Personal Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Number (percentage)
Age at transfer	Range: 21-41
	Mode: 21
	Average: 25
Gender [a]	
Male	5 (41.7%)
Female	7 (58.3%)
Ethnicity	
White	8 (66.7%)
Hispanic/Latino	1 (8.3%)
Black or African American	1 (8.3%)
Biracial/multiracial	1 (8.3%)
Not disclosed	1 (8.3%)
Relationship Status	
Single	10 (83.3%)
Married	1 (8.3%)
Unmarried, living with partner	1 (8.3%)
Children (Primary Caretaker of)	
None	10 (83.3%)
1	2 (16.7%)
Military Status	
None	9 (75.0%)
Enlisted, pre-basic training[b]	1 (8.3%)
A discharge veteran not serving in Active Study, Reserves, or National Guard	2 (16.7%)
Highest Level of Formal Education obtained by either parent	1 (8.3%)
High School Graduate	3 (25.0%)
Some college	6 (50.0%)
College graduate	1 (8.3%)
Some graduate school	1 (8.3%)
Graduate or Professional Degree	

Note: all data was self-reported on their initial questionnaire.

[a] The university transfer population for the fall 2014 semester was 55.9% male and 44.1% female)

[b] The one participant who indicated he is enlisted is set to complete basic training during the summer after his first year of coursework at the university.

Table 7

Transfer-Related Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Number (percentage)
Class Standing [a]	
Freshman (0-26 credits)	0 (0.0%)
Sophomore (27-52 credits)	2 (16.7%)
Junior (53-88 credits)	6 (50.0%)
Senior (89 credits and over)	4 (33.3%)
Type of institution formerly attended	
Community college in Nebraska	10 (83.3%)
Community college outside of Nebraska	2 (16.7%)
Transfer cumulative GPA	
4.0	1 (8.3%)
3.5-3.99	7 (58.3%)
3.00-3.49	2 (16.7%)
2.50-2.99	2 (16.7%)
University Transfer Events attended	
Individual Campus visit	4 (33.3%)
None	4 (33.3%)
How to Transfer day	3 (25.0%)
Midwestern University Transfer day at previous institution	2 (16.7%)
Red Letter day	0 (0.0%)
Participation in New Student Enrollment	
On-campus	9 (75.0%)
Mail-in	2 (16.7%)
Late Registration	1 (8.3%)
Credits enrolled in during first semester	
12 credits	1 (8,3%)
13 credits	2 (16.7%)
14 credits	6 (50.0%)
15 credits	0 (0.0%)
16 credits	1 (8.3%)
17 credits	2 (16.7%)
Financial Aid	
Grants or scholarships (university/ government granted)	7 (58.3%)
Scholarships (private)	1 (8.3%)
Loans (Perkins, Stafford, Direct PLUS, private)	9 (75.0%)
Unsure	1 (8.3%)

Note: all data was self-reported on their initial questionnaire. The only information that could be verified was credits at transfer, which was done by using unofficial transcripts submitted by the participants to the researcher.

[a] The class standing for the university transfer population for the fall 2014 semester was 17.0% freshmen; 34.9% sophomore; 36.8% juniors; 11.2% seniors

Participant Information

Table 8 will provide a brief snapshot of each participant, which will be followed by a

description of each student participant in more detail.

Table 8

Participant Information

Name	Academic Major	Age at transfer	Ethnicity	Class Standing	Location of Attended Community College
Jefferson	Electrical Engineering	21	Hispanic/ Latino; White	Junior	In-state
Anastazia	Animal Science	21	Hispanic/ Latino	Senior	In-state
Elizabeth	History	21	White	Junior	In-state
Max	Biological Sciences	22	White	Junior	Out-of-state
Mya	Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism Management	23	Black or African American	Junior	In-state
Nadine	Pre-Spanish Education	23	White	Junior	In-state
Clark	Psychology	24	Preferred not to answer	Sophomore	Out-of-state
Tom	Political Science	25	White	Junior	In-state
Nicholas	Business Administration	25	White	Senior	In-state
Jean	English	25	White	Junior	In-state
Suzy	Supply Chain Management	30	White	Senior	In-state
Ronnie Lea	Child, Youth and Family Studies	41	White	Senior	Out-of-state

Jefferson

Jefferson previously attended a community college in a town about three-and-a-half hours from the institution. He completed his new student enrollment session through an on-campus enrollment day. His self-reported grade point average was above a 3.5 at his previous institution. Enrolled in 14 credits his first semester, Jefferson indicated he was using loans to pay for his schooling. He was living off-campus and was not working at the time of the study, although he was considering looking into job opportunities later during future semesters.

Part of Jefferson's unique background, and reason for not getting a job, is that he was enlisting in the United States Marine Corps and would be attending training in the spring, which ended up being pushed back to after the completion of classes his first year at the university.

Anastazia

Anastazia transferred from the community college that is affiliated with the same university system she transferred into. She completed her new student enrollment session on campus and also had previously attended an individual campus visit before coming to the university. Her self-reported grade point average was between a 3.0-3.49 at her previous institution. Enrolled in 14 credits her first semester, Anastazia indicated she was using loans to pay for her schooling. She was living off-campus and was working 21-30 hours per week at the time of the study at a local pet store.

Anastazia had lived in the state since the time she was in middle-school, but prior to coming to Nebraska, she had lived in inner-city Chicago. She disclosed about the how she felt the transition from Chicago to Nebraska helped her with future transitions she has

experienced. Anastazia had a unique experience at her community college, since she was the only one who lived on-campus while attending the community college. She was also a resident assistant in the dorm that she lived in. She noted this as her specific reason for choosing to live off-campus.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth transferred from a community college in a large urban city about one hour from the institution. She completed her new student enrollment session through an on-campus enrollment day and had previously attended an individual campus visit as well. Her self-reported grade point average was above a 3.5 at her previous institution. Enrolled in 14 credits her first semester, Elizabeth indicated she was using university grants and scholarships to pay for her schooling. She was living in a residence hall on-campus and was not working at the time of the study, although she was considering looking into job opportunities later during future semesters.

Elizabeth was the only participant to be involved in the transfer student learning community. She consequently was the only one who also discussed in detail her experience with the resources that were specific to transfer students, such as the academic success coach who taught the transitions course and facilitated activities for the learning community. Elizabeth talked about many of the friendships she had made as a result of the living learning community, which was housed in the suite-style university housing complex.

Max

Max transferred from North Carolina. He was not unfamiliar with the state, however, as he was stationed at an air force base about one hour from campus. He was in

North Carolina however at the time he was preparing to transfer to the new university. Because of the distance from campus, he completed his new student enrollment session using the mail-in advising option, and did not come onto campus until the beginning of the semester. Majoring in Biological Sciences, he was classified as a sophomore student transferring in 56 credits from four different institutions. His self-reported grade point average was above a 3.5 at his previous institutions. Max initially enrolled in 17 credits during his first semester and indicated he was using loans to pay for his schooling. He lived off-campus and was intending to look for a job, although at the time of the study Max was not working.

As mentioned above, one unique identity that Max brought was his military background. He chose to complete the interviews at the Student Veteran Office in the campus union, as this was a location he spent a lot of time at. Because of the importance of this part of his identity, he was involved with the student veteran organization, and was the only student who indicated that he was involved in a campus club or organization.

Mya

Mya previously attended the community college in the same town as the university. She completed her new student enrollment session on campus and also had previously attended a How-to-Transfer Day as well as an individual campus visit before coming to the university. Her self-reported grade point average was between a 3.0-3.49 at her previous institution. Enrolled in 13 credits her first semester, Mya indicated she was using loans to pay for her schooling. She was living off-campus and was not initially working at the time of the study. Toward the end of the semester, she did get a position working with the campus newspaper however.

One thing that made Mya unique to this study was the fact that her mother worked on campus. As such, she had ready access to a member of her support system, although she made it clear she wanted to do things on her own and learn the system without having to rely on the help from her mom. One thing she also pointed out during the study was that while she was African American, she did not want to solely focus on her ethnic identity as a means for getting involved or getting to know people. She hoped to branch out into other ways to be involved on campus that were not related to her ethnic background.

Nadine

Nadine also transferred from the community college in the same town as the university. She completed her new student enrollment session on campus and also had previously attended a university transfer day that was held at her community college campus. Her self-reported grade point average was between a 2.5-2.99 at her previous institution. Enrolled in 12 credits her first semester, Nadine indicated she was using university grants or scholarships and loans to pay for her schooling. She was living off-campus with her parents and was working part-time as a restaurant server at the time of the study.

Nadine was one of only two participants that had a child. While she was non-traditional in the sense of having a child, she was still traditional-aged, and she indicated she felt that she blended in well and students were often surprised to learn how old she was and that she had a child. While she felt different for having a child and being 23, she did not feel that others tended to view her as a non-traditional student.

Clark

Clark completed his new student enrollment session on campus prior to leaving for Germany and also had previously attended a How-to-Transfer day at the university. His self-reported grade point average was above a 3.5 at his previous institution. Enrolled in 16 credits his first semester, Clark was using funds from the GI Bill to help pay for his schooling. He was living off-campus was not working full-time at the time of the study.

Clark had two things that made him unique to the other participants of this study. First, he was one of two participants who was a military veteran and through his experience, he had also suffered a traumatic brain injury, which he indicated has impacted his studies. The other part that made Clark's experience unique was that he was doing all of his coursework online. He was currently in Germany with his wife who was studying at a university in Germany. He was unsure as to when he would return to take courses on campus at the university.

Tom

Tom also transferred from the community college in the same town as the university. He completed his new student enrollment session on campus and also had previously attended a How-to-Transfer day at the university. His self-reported grade point average was a 4.0 at his previous institution. Enrolled in 14 credits his first semester, Tom indicated he was using university grants or scholarships and private scholarships to pay for his schooling. He was living off-campus and working full-time at the time of the study.

Tom was one of the only participants to indicate that he was an active participant in a student organization at his community college. He spent a year on the student senate at his community college, and he felt that really impacted his last year at the community college. Another unique aspect of Tom's experience is that he was one of two participants who was home-schooled through high-school, which gave him a unique perspective to transitioning amongst institutions.

Nicholas

Nicholas attended three different institutions in the state, most recently attending the community college in the same city as this university, before his transfer. He completed his new student enrollment session on campus as part of a late-advising session and did not complete the orientation session, although he did previously attended a Transfer Day at his previous community college. He was the only participant who did the late-registration option. Nicholas started his university experience as a Nutrition Science major, and at the end of the semester he changed his major to Business Administration. His self-reported grade point average was between a 2.50-2.99 at his previous institutions. Enrolled in 14 credits his first semester, Nicholas indicated he was using university grants or scholarships and loans to pay for his schooling. He was living off-campus was working full-time at the time of the study.

Nicholas was unique in that he spent time between three institutions before transferring to Midwestern University. Three other participants also attended more than one previous college. He started off as an athlete playing at a community college and spent one semester at a private school before being unable to afford that university's tuition. He transferred again back to his original community college before transferring

back to the community college that was in the same town as this university. Being

denied admission initially to this university, he was one of three participants who had to

complete additional coursework at the community college before he could transfer. He

had vastly different experiences at each institution that he shared in our interviews.

Jean

Jean attended a community college on the opposite side of the state, six hours

away. Because of the distance from campus, she completed her new student enrollment

session using the mail-in advising option, and did not come onto campus until the

beginning of the semester. While Jean's most recent community college was in-state, she

had attended two previous institutions. Her self-reported grade point average was above

a 3.5 at her previous institutions. Enrolled in 17 credits her first semester, Jean indicated

she was using university grants and scholarships as well as loans to pay for her schooling.

She lived on-campus and was intending to look for a job, although at the time of the

study Jean was not working. Jean had a younger brother that was also attending the same

institution, which was unique in comparison to the other participants.

Jean had a difficult experience toward the end of the semester that she had to deal

with. Her father was diagnosed with cancer, and as such she did miss some class to

travel to be with him. She continued on with the semester because she knew her father

would want her to do so, but her experience toward the end of the semester was impacted

by this experience. He was transferred to a location that was one hour from campus, and

that allowed her the opportunity to visit him when she needed to. She was not sure how

this may impact her future enrollment moving forward at least in the short-term.

Suzy

Suzy was the second oldest participant. She was one of four participants who attended multiple institutions, although most recently prior to transferring to this institution, she attended the community college in the same town. She completed her new student enrollment session on campus and also had previously attended an individual campus visit before coming to the university. Her self-reported grade point average was above a 3.5 at her previous institution. Enrolled in 14 credits her first semester, Suzy indicated she was using grants and scholarships as well as loans to pay for her schooling. She was living off-campus and was working full-time as a customer service representative in a call center at the time of the study.

Suzy was one of a small handful who had completed an associate's degree before she transferred to the university. She had a vocational associate's degree in information technology and then pursued as second associates degree through the academic transfer program, although she did not complete the second associates degree. She also was especially grateful for her parents for providing her a place to live so she did not have to find a location to live at while complete her schooling. She was only one of only two students who was living with their parents while going to school.

Ronnie Lea

Ronnie Lea was the oldest participant in the study, and similar to four others in this study, she too attended the community college in the same town as the university. She completed her new student enrollment session on campus. Her self-reported grade point average was above a 3.5 at her previous institution. Enrolled in 13 credits her first semester, Ronnie Lea indicated she was using university grants or scholarships and loans

to pay for her schooling. She lived off-campus with her son and was not currently

working at the time of the study.

Ronnie Lea was one of only two participants that had a child, which she

highlighted was her first priority in life. While not working during the study, she

indicated she spent time volunteering at her son's elementary school. Part of the reason

that Ronnie Lea chose to go back to school was due to the fact she had lost her job when

the recession had hit. She found through her volunteerism at her son's school, what she

was passionate about, hence her choosing a major in Child, Youth, and Family Studies.

Instrumentation

Qualitative studies do not utilize a specific instrument, but rather a specific style

of data collection. Having said that, many methodologists have detailed specific steps

that can be used to standardize the structure that qualitative research takes. One of those

researchers, Seidman (2013) describes a method known as the three-interview series

approach:

> The first interview established the context of the participants' experience. The
>
> second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the
>
> context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on
>
> the meaning their experience holds for them. (p. 21).

Seidman (2013) made a recommendation of spacing the interviews between three

to seven days apart. The benefit of the passage of time allows for there to be less impact

of a non-representative interview for whatever reason the participant may have had a

direction or bad day on during one of the interviews. The modification to having a month

between the first and second month of the interviews was strategic, although varying

from the recommendation of Seidman. Capturing the initial viewpoint of the time

leading up to the arrival of the new institution required an interview early into the

semester before their experience may have been clouded over by the current experience

they were having after their arrival to the university. Similarly, completing a second

interview too quickly after arriving to the new university could not conceivably allow for

enough time to have an accurate perception of how the transition was occurring. As

mentioned earlier, Anderson et al. (2012) stressed the importance of studying the

transition over several points of time. As such, measuring a time of only a few weeks

would not allow for enough time to transpire to more fully measure the transition process

that the participants experienced at the new institution.

There are multiple benefits of this three-interview series approach. This process

allows: a) trust to be established by the researcher and participant, b) more details to be

gathered on each participant's experience, and c) reflection between interview sessions

and an ability for participants to add details they may reflect on between sessions.

Seidman's series provides a detailed approach to ensuring quality data is gathered to

paint the full-picture, not just outline the experience. In turn, this allows a more vivid

story to be shared about the experience of the participants, a key benefit of the qualitative

methodology.

With the first interview focusing on the context, the goal in this interview was to

help understand the process leading up to the transfer and transition to the new

institution. We focused on how they came to the decision to transfer and the timeline of

the transfer experience. This interview averaged 48 minutes and 22 seconds. Most of the

applicants spoke very candidly about their experiences, highlighting both positive and

negative aspects of their experience at the community college. I did have to focus some

of the participants on staying with describing their experience at the community college,

as opposed to jumping into explaining their experience they had at the university to that

point. To try to help this, I provided a description of the purpose of the interview at the

beginning. I made it clear to them by stating "the purpose of this interview is to learn

about your experience at the community college up to the point at which you transferred

to Midwestern University."

　　　　While I did find myself asking a lot of probing questions, I felt that the purpose of

the probing questions was to understand how important that particular information was to

the transition itself. For instance, Jean mentioned in her experience at the community

college that she was working at the same time as attending school so she did not have to

take loans out. I subsequently asked her whether she felt working had influenced her

experience at the community college. One thing I learned was that while not all of the

questions directly influenced their transition, per se, it helped me to develop a rapport

with the participant and also truly better understand what their life experiences had been

prior to leading up to the transition into Midwestern University, which would be covered

more extensively in the second interview.

　　　　The second interview focused on the details related to the experience including a

focus on the steps they took after arriving to the new institution, understanding who

helped them in the transition, and what resources were utilized throughout their

experience. The focus on this interview was understanding the actual experiences and

processes employed while transitioning. The second interviews averaged 1 hour, 1

minute, and 5 seconds. I anticipated going into this interview that it would be the longest

of the three interviews, because it had the most direct content related to the transition experience. One thing that I asked at the beginning of each interview was whether there was anything that they recalled after our last interview that they wanted to make sure to discuss or elaborate on. As I mentioned earlier, Seidman (2013) suggests spacing the interviews three to seven days apart. Because I wanted to get a broader understanding of their transition over time, completing all of the interviews within two weeks would not have allowed for this. As such, it was possible that they did not recall everything we discussed in the first interview, which led to no further elaboration on details discussed in the previous interviews.

I felt that the second interviews went as well as I anticipated them to be and I did obtain a lot of data to review. None of the participants felt there were any questions I forgot to ask when I posed that question at the end of the interview. Similar to the first interview, while I did find myself asking a lot of probing questions, I felt that they served a similar purpose as the first interview. For instance, when asking Max about his classroom experience, he mentioned that he really enjoyed his introductory English class because it was so small and he could have discussions. I further probed to ask what his expectations were about how classes would be structured at Midwestern University and how his experience in his classes has impacted his transition. Through this interview, I learned a lot about their general experience at Midwestern University, beyond just the transition they were having. This was purposely designed to show that I was interested in their overall experience, and that ultimately their description of the general experience they were having also impacted their transition they were having as well.

The final interview provided two purposes. I presented my interpretation of the data to determine how each participant felt about the accuracy of my interpretations. The second purpose was focused on a reflection of the meaning of the experience and understanding what meaning being a community college transfer student had on their experience as a college student. This interview was the shortest of the three, averaging 38 minutes and 50 seconds. I anticipated that this would be the case, as the interview was designed more as a reflection and follow-up more than truly obtaining a significant amount of new information. Having said that, in reviewing the transcripts from the first two interviews and coming up with the consistent patterns, I did have a few questions that I added. Examples included: "From the time in which you started that transition to thinking about coming to Midwestern University to now, at what point did you start the transition?", "is the transition over for you?", and "Do you feel like at this point you would say you're a fully integrated Midwestern University student?" These questions really helped to provide a better understanding of each person's view of the timing of the transition and the impact on them. The thing that impacted me the most about the third interviews, was the reactions of the participants. One thing most said, was something along the lines of "I didn't realize so many people have similar experiences to me." All of the participants felt that the general summary I provided in the third interview really fit well with their experiences.

As mentioned above, the participants were given the option to voluntarily participate in journaling to collect additional information regarding their transition. Six participants completed journaling throughout the semester. The participants were instructed to send their journals to my e-mail weekly, which was then placed into a

separate document on the university server to help improve confidentiality. I sent weekly

reminders on Thursday's to ensure that I would get weekly participation, which the

participants indicated that they appreciated.

Data Analysis

Using a digital audio recorder, I recorded all conversations and then saved the

files to the university server. Following the uploading, I utilized professional

transcription services to have the conversations transcribed. A transcription

confidentiality agreement was signed (See Appendix E). Once transcripts were received

for the first two interviews, detailed reading of the transcripts began as a way to inform

some of the dialogue that occurred in the final interview. The final interview was then

transcribed and read through before completing the final analysis. I also incorporated the

journal entries into the document analysis the same way that I did with the transcripts

from the interviews. While there was overall less content than I anticipated, there were a

number of meaningful comments and reflections within them. There was a total of 66

entries by a total of six participants with a total word count of 14,264 words (average of

216 words per entry). All data was analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software,

MAXQDA 11.

The journaling process, complimentary to the interviews, provided an opportunity

for additional data collection, as a form of validation known as triangulation. Primarily,

the journaling served two purposes: a) to better understand the experiences that the

students had in their transition between the interviews, and b) to provide additional

support and validation to the information that they shared within their interviews. As an

example, one thing that most of the participants did journal about was when they felt like

the transition was coming to an end. The timing of these conversations varied by participant, so journaling helped to better understand how the transition differs from person to person.

Phenomenological studies are designed to capture the essence or the meaning of the experience for the participants, and as such some researchers argue for a more flexible, yet scientific approach that allows for an "analytic description of the phenomena not affected by prior assumptions" (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 137). There are many different ways to analyze qualitative data, and one important thing that researchers must recognize is that there is no right or wrong way. As Gibson and Brown (2009) made clear there is no perfect definition of how to create themes, only suggestions and guidelines to help researchers make the best decision for their particular study. I was particularly grateful for this because I had a hard time deciphering which coding methods made the most sense. Certainly, one aspect of phenomenological research is to seek out the significant statements that generate the meaning or essence of the experience (Creswell, 2003).

After a conversation with my adviser, he recommended utilizing open and axial coding, an analysis method typically used in grounded theory research, but one that could be applied to phenomenological studies as well. In reviewing Strauss and Corbin's (1998) discussion on coding procedures, they articulated that phenomena are the categories that are found within axial coding and they help to explain what is going on. Knowing that phenomenology is meant to examine lived experiences of a person or group of people and understand the meaning to the experience (Creswell, 1994), the explanation of open and axial coding discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) provided

additional support for open and axial coding. As such, I chose to use the open, axial, and selective coding approach that was described in Boeije (2010), which is described below.

Open Coding

The first step in the analysis process is to look critically at each statement or data point and break it down to the fine points. At this step the researcher is not concerned as much about the broad picture of the data, but rather with combing through the data in fine details. Creating a code is simply a way of adding a statement or words as a "summarizing phrase for a piece of text which expresses the meaning of the fragment" (Boeije, 2010, p. 96). The codes are continually compared as the researcher reviews the data, and as multiple statements or data points highlight the same material, they are coded with the same codes. Themes do not fully emerge in this stage, but they allow for the researcher to begin to identify what theses may exist, which occurs in the second phase of the analysis, axial coding. The process for open coding includes:

1. Read the whole document.

2. Re-read the text line by line and determine the beginning and end of a fragment.

3. Determine why this fragment is a meaningful whole (Text which belongs together and deals with mainly one subject).

4. Judge whether the fragment is relevant to the research.

5. Make up an appropriate name for the fragment, i.e. a code.

6. Assign this code to the text fragment.

7. Read the entire document and code all relevant fragments.

8. Compare the different fragments, because it is likely that multiple fragments in a text address the same topic and they should therefore receive the same code (Boeije, 2010, p. 98).

One of the suggestions that Boeije provided is that the researcher must think beyond just putting words with codes. The researcher must truly begin to ask questions concerning the data. The researcher should begin to conceptualize what kind of picture is being painted by the data, which will ultimately lead to a more critical analysis and better understanding of the data and codes.

Axial Coding

The second step of analysis is axial coding. This process is meant to take the coded phrases and bring them back together. Now it is taking already grouped fragments and making more abstract connections. Strauss and Corbin (1998) highlight the overall function of axial coding as a process of "reassembling data that were fractured during open coding. In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena" (p. 124). The process for axial coding includes:

- Determine whether the codes developed thus far cover the data sufficiently and create new ones when the data provide incentives to do so.

- Check whether each fragment has been coded properly, or if it should be assigned a different code.

- Decide which code is most suitable if synonyms have been used to create two equal categories, and merge the categories.

- Look at the override of fragments assigned to a certain code. Consider their similarities and differences.

- Subdivide categories if necessary.

- Look for evidence for distinguishing main codes and sub-codes and assign the sub-codes to the main code.

- See whether a sufficiently detailed description of a category can be derived from the assigned fragments and if not, decide to collect new data to fill the gap.

- Keep thinking about the data and the coding. (Boeije, 2010, pp. 109-110)

Selective Coding

Selective coding focuses on "connections between the categories in order to make sense of what is happening in the field" (Boeije, 2010, p. 114). Having said that, the point of this is ultimately to look at determining the theoretical concept that is central to the study, ultimately becoming the foundation for the grounded theory. This step, not being a grounded theory, served a different purposes. Boeije (2010) pointed out that the core concept does not "magically emerge from the data" and rather "describes and explains the researcher's observations" (p. 116). This phase seeks to answer the following questions outlined by Boeije (2010):

- What themes have turned up repeatedly in the observations?

- What is the main message that the participants have tried to bring across?

- How are the various relevant themes related?

- What is important for the description (What) and the understanding (Why) of the participant's perspective and behaviour? (p. 116)

Because my focus was not on creating a core category, but rather the main concepts instead, Boeiji (2010) point out using the following elements as guidelines for identifying the core concepts:

1. Research question and purpose: the most influential factors in determining how the data will be integrated and what findings will look like.

2. Literature: the results are contrasted with the relevant literature and demonstrate how the sensitizing concepts have functioned.

3. Data: the outcomes are guided by what stands out in the data in terms of richness and the insights they have yielded.

4. Fascination: the surprising, fascinating and original parts should be included in the findings.

5. Actuality: the results occasionally grow in value if they fit the actual content of societal and scientific debates or events. (p. 117).

Finally, in determining the final codes, this phase did not rely on textual coding as in the first two phases, but rather developing the shape of the experience in an order. This analysis served as a step to provide "a fresh, theoretical look at the phenomenon under study…and an invitation to the reader to think about and pose questions about the meaning of the findings" (Boeije, 2010, p. 118). The end result of this phase leads to the most important concepts of the study and answers to the research questions, which ultimately became the emergent themes.

Reporting the Findings

The next chapter will highlight the findings of this study. With the emergent themes, a narrative approach will be used to provide richness to the details. As Saldana

(2011) indicated, humans place knowledge within the form of narratives, and adding this

creative nonfiction mechanism to provide details can bring the participants to life. Using

this approach can allow the reader to better understand the meaning of the themes and

provides the author a way to "create an evocative portrait of participants through the

aesthetic power of literary form" (Saldana, 2011, p. 128). The flow of the results section

will be organized by themes, as is traditional with qualitative research. To help

understand the coding aspects of the research study, a series of trees will be shown

including the tree that came out of the open coding and axial coding processes.

The final chapter will then begin to look back at literature that relates to

transitions and Schlossberg's Transition Theory to examine parts of the study that

confirm and disconfirm the central question of this study, "what experience do

community college transfer students have in transitioning to a large research university?"

In this chapter, I will provide my personal interpretation of the experiences students had,

my thoughts on how their transition fit or did not fit within the context of Schlossberg's

Transition Theory, as well as discuss some of the limitations and direction for future

research.

Validation

Lincoln and Guba (1985) paved the way for qualitative researchers to validate

their qualitative studies. Methods they discussed in their 1985 work included prolonged

engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checks, use

thick, rich description, and external audits. More recently, Creswell and Miller (2000)

provided a new list of methods for validation. They admit the list is not exhaustive, but

provides a thorough review of many of the most utilized techniques in qualitative

research. They included nine methods: triangulation of data sources; member checking; disconfirming evidence; thick, rick description; researcher reflexivity; prolonged engagement in the field; collaboration; peer debriefing; and the audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell and Miller (2000) pointed out the importance of using multiple validity methods, but to also consider the different lens within the context of the study. The three lens include that of the participants, that of the researcher, and that of those external to the study. Lastly, Creswell and Miller (2000) indicated that when determining validity techniques being used, the researcher should understand the lens in which the study is being viewed from.

As I mentioned above, the paradigm that I view this study from is a social constructivist approach. This approach focuses on understanding the participants' view of their experience, recognizing that everyone's experience could indeed be different or varied. Some of the standard methods for validation within the constructivist paradigm include disconfirming evidence, prolonged engagement in the field, and thick, rich descriptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, to ensure the highest accuracy of the study, I also included triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing or peer reviewing. This in total accounted for six of the nine validity techniques discussed by Creswell and Miller (2000).

1. Disconfirming evidence is a process that requires the researcher to seek out evidence that goes against the themes that surfaces in the study. Constructivists believe in multiple perspectives, so the use of disconfirming evidence allows for the researcher to help highlight this reality.

2. From the lens of the participant, having the researcher be involved in the
   research sight for a prolonged amount of time allows for the researcher to gain
   trust from the participants as well as connect to the gatekeepers who would be
   able to grant the access needed to the participants. In particular, this means
   the researcher must also "reciprocate by giving back to people being studied"
   (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 128). While this approach is considered less
   systematic, Creswell and Miller (2000) recommended the researcher be
   engaged in the site for at least four months. As the researcher, I have been at
   the site for seven years, and feel I have gained significant insight into the
   academic world, particularly with transfer students. This research spanned a
   time of three months between the first and last interviews, which allowed for
   considerable reflection, discussion, and review of the conversations that
   occurred within the study. The three-stage interview process also allowed for
   prolonged discussions with the transfer students and helped build trust
   between the participant and the researcher so they were willing to open up
   more fully about their experience.

3. Thick-rich description ensures that a detailed and vivid description is provided
   of the experience, to the point that the reader is "transported into a setting or
   situation" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129).

4. Triangulation "is the process of corroborating evidence from different
   individuals (e.g., a principal and a student), types of data (e.g., observational
   fieldnotes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and
   interview in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2008,

p. 266). For this study, the inclusion of journaling serves as a second method of data collection, and thus provides additional data to analyze alongside the interviews.

5. As discussed in the interview protocol (see appendix D), the third interview was meant to provide an opportunity for member-checking. Member checking "consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 127). The first topic of discussion in the third interview was to discuss themes and categories that emerged as a result of analyzing the data and interpreting concepts and themes from the first two interviews. As recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000), I included the following questions: do these themes seem to make sense and do you feel the overall account is accurate? Finally in this process, Creswell and Miller (2000) recommended that the researcher incorporates those comments from that discussion into the final report to show credibility of the findings and add a final reaction to the story.

6. Peer debriefing or peer reviewing is the last method I used to validate the findings. This method requires the researcher to work with someone who is "familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 129). That person or persons not only provides support but also critically evaluates the work of the researcher by challenging the findings of the researcher and is willing to probe for a deeper meaning or more meaningful explanation or interpretation. To accomplish this, I reviewed a

representative sampling of my data analysis with two colleagues. These

included a colleague at another institution who is widely familiar with

Schlossberg's Transition Theory and an Academic Success Coach within the

First Year Experience and Transition Programs at the university. These

reviews served to analyze my initial coding strategies as well as the final

validity check for accuracy of language and meaning. In our discussions

where some discrepancies existed, we discussed each other's viewpoints and I

adjusted as needed. In most cases there was consistency in thought and

neither had major disputes with the coding analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experience that community college transfer students had in transitioning to a large research university. I wanted to have a detailed and descriptive understanding of how community college transfer students experienced their transitions. A significant body of literature previously discussed highlighted a lot of the experienced problems that occur for transfer students, but spent little focus on understanding what the transition was like. I felt that this study would provide a more descriptive understanding of how community college transfer students experience the transition and identify what measures can and should exist to make the transition as seamless as possible for these students.

Coding Analysis

Before discussing the themes, it is important to understand how the analysis got to this point. This section will briefly provide an overview of the codes that emerged during the open and axial coding phases of the analysis. The first step of the process was open coding. As mentioned in chapter 3, open coding is the process to code all data by providing a "summarizing phrase for a piece of text which expresses the meaning of the fragment" (Boeije, 2010, p. 96). To create these codes I read the statements multiple times and completed a line-by-line textual analysis to determine whether the statements were meaningful to the transition. I assigned the codes accordingly. For some coded fragments, there were similarities, at which point I coded with the same code, and sometimes renamed the code to more accurately fit the data as I continued to read

through the transcripts. The open coding analysis tree is provided in Figure 1 to highlight

how the codes were established in the first phase of data analysis.

Pre-Transfer
- Reason for Community College
  - CC was cheaper
  - Unsure of future
- Community College Satisfaction
- Community College Experience
  - Community College Involvement
- Community College Classes
- Choosing Major
- Completing Associates Degree
  - Pursuing Associates Degree First
- Choosing New Institution
  - Receiving Information about UNL
- Expectations of UNL
  - Desired Involvement Opportunties

University Experiences Leading to First Semester
- Experiences At UNL Pre-Enrollment
- Preparation for Transfer
  - NSE
  - Nervous
- Picking classes at UNL

View of Transition
- Transferring Credit
  - View of Transfer Credit
- Comparison to Previous Transitions
- Campus Comparisons
- Meaning of Transferring
  - Reasons for Pursuing Bachelor's Degree
  - Shifting focus in career
- Transition takes time
  - Things get easier with time
- Feelings about transitioning
- Initial View of University
- Timing Transition Occured
- Additional Time to Degree
- Became a university student

University Experience
- Staying connected to home
- Willingness to Adjust
- Making Connections to others
- Strategies used
    - Time Management
- Overwhelming
- University Class Experiences
- University - General Experience
- University Involvement
- Lacking knowledge of UNL
    - Lack of knowledge
    - Lacks understanding of major
- Exhausted
- Experiences Early in Semester
- Experienced Challenges at university
    - Experienced Distractions

Views of self
- Motivated to be successful
- Values Education
- We're unique
- Independent
- Confidence
- Views as non-traditional
- View as a CC Transfer Student
- More Maturity
- Change in roles

Support
- Needs
- Work is supportive
- Friends
- Friends as Support
- General Support
- University Supports and Resources
- Family Support
    - Family is important
- Advisors- Support
- Advice Recieved
- University E-mail Strategies

Non-School Related Experiences
               ┌─ Outside Involvement
               └─ Activities outside of school
                          ─ Hobbies

Finances
               ┌─ Paying for College
               ├─ Taking out loans
               └─ Working while in School

I wish I would have

Possible Quotes

Figure 1. Open Coding Analysis Code Tree for first phase of coding technique. This technique follows the recommendations provided by Boeije (2010).

       The second step of the process was axial coding. As mentioned in Chapter 3, axial coding is the process of "reassembling data that were fractured during open coding. In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). Boeije (2010) discussed the focus as a way to "determine the properties of the categories. In doing so it becomes clear by which indicators a category can be recognized in the data" (p. 109). The sub-codes that fell within the new coding structure were "instances, specifications, parts or stages of the main codes" (Boeije, 2010, p. 109). It is important to note that in this phase of the analysis, codes can be analytical or descriptive, and there is no set process for how to use the code, other than "they must simply be meaningful for you or the research team in the sense that they indicate the nature of the data grouped by the code in some way (Lewins & Silver, 2007)" (Boeije, 2010, p. 111).

       This is the phase where I noticed my previous knowledge with Schlossberg's Transition Theory begin to play into my analysis. As I had read the transcripts multiple

times, I continually was finding myself relating the parts of the transcripts to different aspects of the theory. There were certainly aspects that did not fit into the theory, and they too are represented, but it was evident that aspects of the transition discussed in the transcripts fit within parts of the theory. To create these codes I read through the coded statements multiple times both recoded and assigned main codes as they fit the data. Some codes went from being main codes in the open-coding phase to sub-codes, and some sub-codes were combined into a different code all together. Sub-codes were then assigned to main codes accordingly. Many of the codes fell within categories of the integrative model of the transition process and the coping resources that Anderson et al. (2012) outlined in Transition Theory. Aspects of Schlossberg's Transition Theory were discussed in Chapter 1. The axial coding analysis tree is then provided in Figure 2 to highlight how the codes were established in the second phase of data analysis.
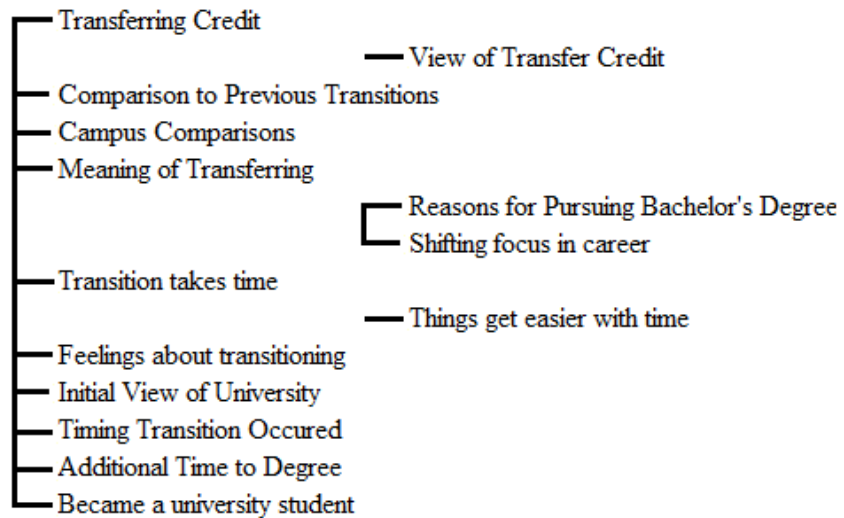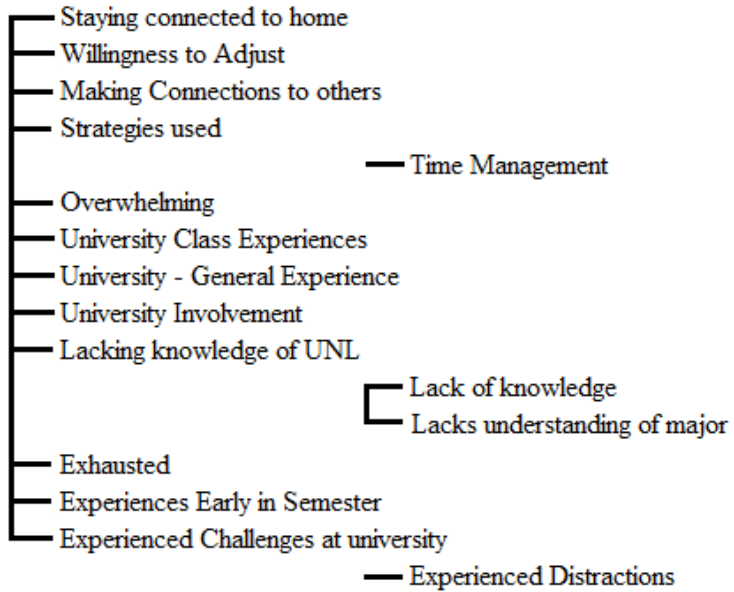
Axial Code System
Pre-Transition Experiences

- Community College Satisfaction
- Community College Experience
  - Community College Involvement
- Community College Classes

Situation

- Reason for Community College
  - CC was cheaper
  - Unsure of future
- Completing Associates Degree
  - Pursuing Associates Degree First
- Finances
  - Paying for College
  - Taking out loans
- Transferring Credit
  - View of Transfer Credit
- Additional Time to Degree
- Meaning of Transferring
  - Reasons for Pursuing Bachelor's Degree
- View of Transition
  - Feelings
  - Things get easier with time
  - Comparison to Previous Transitions
- Shifting focus in career
- Timing Transition Occured

Strategies

- Modifing the situation
  - Time Management
  - Making Connections to others
- Control the meaning of the problem
- Managing the stress
- Staying connected to home
- Working while in School
- Choosing New Institution
- Choosing Major

Self

- Expectations of UNL
- Values Education
- Independent
- Views of Self
  - Motivated to be successful
  - We're unique
  - More Maturity
  - View as a CC Transfer Student
  - Views as non-traditional
- Confidence

Support

- Family
  - Family is important
- Advisors- Support
- University Supports and Resources
  - University E-mail Strategies
- Friends
- General
- Advice Recieved
- Work

Involvement

- University Involvement
- Outside Involvement
  - Volunteering
- Desired Involvement Opportunties
- Personal Social Life
  - Hobbies

Moving In

- Needs
- Nervous
- Preparation for Transfer
  - NSE
- Overwhelming
- Experiences At UNL Pre-Enrollment

Moving Through

- University Class Experiences
- University - General Experience
- Needs
- Experiences Early in Semester
- Transition takes time
- Lacking knowledge of UNL
  - Lack of knowledge
  - Lacks understanding of major
- Experienced Challenges at university
  - Experienced Distractions
- Change in roles
- Initial View of University
- Campus Comparisons

Moving Out

- Became a university student

I wish I would have

Possible Quotes

Figure 2. Axial Coding Analysis Code Tree for second phase of coding technique. This technique follows the recommendations provided by Boeije (2010).

The final phase was selective coding. This phase, as discussed in Chapter 3, focused on "connections between the categories in order to make sense of what is happening in the field" (Boeije, 2010, p. 114). I read through the codes and full transcripts focusing on the questions that Boeije (2010) suggested as mentioned in Chapter 3, such as looking at the most repeated themes, seeking out the main message, and focusing in on what appeared to be the most important aspects of the transition for the participants. For this phase, I kept in mind the original research question and what data really stood out the most by how detailed the participants' descriptions were as they related to the codes. This phase ultimately led to five key codes, or themes, that became the overarching themes of the study.

The remainder of this chapter will present the key findings gained through 36 semi-structured interviews with 12 participants and weekly journals from half of those participants who were interviewed. Five major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: funding the college experience; transition takes time; support is critical; maturity; and personal responsibility. These themes will be addressed separately first, and then within the context of the original sub-questions that were posed for the purpose of the study.

Theme 1: Funding the College Experience

One of the key reasons the participants chose to start at the community college, rather than a 4-year institution immediately was directly tied to finances. Out of the 12 participants in the study, 10 highlighted this as one of the top reasons. Anastazia pointed out the combination of her financially-based decision being tied to family circumstances stating "It was definitely financially based. When we moved to Omaha we went through a whole bunch of family struggles which left me with no money in my college fund anymore." Meanwhile Jean noted the added value of a scholarship she received at the community college, "I actually had the ACT scholarship at my community college so it was free tuition. Even without that, it would have been cheaper to go there." Clark even commented "I would recommend people do it that way just because they can go to a community college that's more inexpensive, start out there, then transfer to a four year university and finish out that way. That way they can have their degree come from the four year university but not have to spend as much money on some of those course classes that are going to be the same."

While Anastazia and Jean were more traditional students, the cheap cost of the community college was particularly important to non-traditional community college transfer students like Ronnie Lea and Suzy. Ronnie Lead pointed out that community college was "economically- that what I needed to do. I'm a single mom. I needed to deal with the economic part of it so I did as much as I possibly could at [the community college]." Meanwhile, Suzy highlighted her intentions to complete the associate's degree and exhaust her credits at the community college "due to cost. Nothing personal, it's just due to cost."

Financing the university experience was also a very important part of the conversation for participants as they transitioned. Most were very conscious of the increased cost in attending the university and it was an important part of their transition, particularly as they were trying to find ways to be successful students while avoiding significant amounts of debt. Many talked about when choosing their institution to transfer to, that finances played a part. Jean received a specific university grant that awarded her $7,000 toward tuition. She pointed out that she likely would not have come to Midwestern University without the grant. While she had to take out some loans to supplement the grant, she recognized the value of her degree stating "I have to remind myself that once I get a degree I can hopefully get a job where I get paid more than I was." Anastazia was considering other schools but they did not provide as much financial aid. Mya focused her search only on Midwestern University because of a tuition discount she received having her mother work at the institution. Some, like Suzy, had considered private institutions, but again finances weighed heavily on the final decision to attend Midwestern University.

During their first semester at the university, 9 of the 12 participants were employed. Table 5 in Chapter 3 showed the number of hours on average the participants were intending to work each week. While 11 out of 12 anticipated working, only 9 out of 12 were currently employed, the other one was intending to seek out employment while attending school. Most were working to pay for bills and to avoid taking out loans. While some had taken out loans, most were debt adverse and trying to pay as they went. Nicholas emphasized this point: "I don't want to be in so much debt that I take out big loans so I would compensate by just working full time." At the same time, Mya pointed that she's "paying for my semester as I go so I'm taking out loans and paying it back through the semester so it's less expensive."

Finances were a very dominant part of the discussion with all participants. When choosing where to live, 10 out of the 12 chose to live off campus. One of the two living on campus was participating in the transfer student learning community. When asked about participating in the learning community, nearly all had mentioned they did not know a lot about it or did not want to live on campus. Three specifically noted that living off-campus was due to cost. Suzy pointed out that "living at home is the most economical choice at this point," while Anastazia noted "it's like $4,000.00 cheaper to live off campus than living on campus" and Max added "I'm actually saving money by living off campus."

For those living off-campus, some discussed the importance of using alternative travel to campus to avoid paying for parking permits. Some mentioned biking to campus, others mentioned being close to bus stops to use the bus service, and others found alternative parking lots off-campus that were cheaper than on-campus parking. Two

chose to live off-campus because they had children. In the end, every person mentioned

the importance of considering their financial status with regard to making the choice to

transfer to a university. Whether it was finding the cheapest institution, avoiding debt,

working, or saving money in strategies they were implementing to navigate to campus,

everyone recognized the amount of cost invested toward pursing their bachelor's degree.

Theme 2: Transition Takes Time

The second theme that surfaced was the notion that the transition takes time.

Many felt overwhelmed at the beginning of the transition process. The sense of feeling

overwhelmed surfaced in multiple ways. From the moment of researching institutions to

transfer to through well into their first semester at the institution, this feeling existed.

Jean pointed out that "I think that might have been the overload of information too. I just

didn't even know what to look at." Some students took advantage of campus tours prior

to coming to Midwestern University. Many of those who did participate in the tours were

overwhelmed with the sheer size of Midwestern University. Suzy stated "the tour I took

was nice, but overwhelming with the number of locations and activities."

While most participants were in-state transfer students, two of the participants

were from out-of-state community colleges. Max indicated that he did not initially have

a feeling of being overwhelmed before arriving to Midwestern University because had

utilized a lot of resources online to learn about the university, including using resources

such as College Board, US News, and others to evaluate the program, costs, and student

population. He even completed a virtual tour using his computer. Having said that, the

feelings of being overwhelmed did set in once he arrived at the institution.

Some did not take the tour, and they too felt like they were overwhelmed with the amount of information about campus they did not know. Max noted his thoughts on missing out and feeling overwhelmed. He wished he would have had the opportunity to be on campus prior to arriving noting:

There's not a whole lot of information about that [speaking of on-campus housing] prior to coming in. It would probably be a little different if I lived in Nebraska and I could come and tour. Those information – that stuff is presented to you before you come to the school. I never came here. So I didn't have that option. Transfer from so far away and never coming to visit. If you ever – if you took a tour you would know about that stuff. I might – I don't know if I was better informed I might have capitalized on it.

While some discussed the importance of finding information online prior to arriving at Midwestern University, most had access to campus as 10 out of 12 participants were Nebraska residents and only two had attended community colleges outside of the state. Having said this, even being an in-state transfer student did not alleviate the feeling of being overwhelmed initially on campus due to the sheer amount of information and physical buildings each had to learn.

The transition did not end once the student arrived on campus. The notion of the transition ending varied for each participant. Many pointed out that it would take through the end of the first semester before they felt like they could say the transition was over. Anastazia was unsure of when the transition would really end, stating "I don't know. I don't know if the transition is over for me yet." At the same time, Mya felt "like it's not

going to be over until I walk that stage." Yet, some argued that transitions never end.

Nicholas articulated this clearly stating:

> I don't think the transition ever is going to be completely over just because you're
>
> always going to have -- even though you might have a preconception of
>
> something and you find out it's not true, it's always in the back of your mind…
>
> There's going to always be things just because of work and school that I'm going
>
> to have to figure out but I think ... it's over from that stand point.

Some discussed not knowing what to expect with classes. Whether it was classes

or the environment, it seems there were many mentions of nervousness that many felt

would take time to overcome. Nadine was dreading the new environment, but excited

too. "It's new, I'll have to adjust. I'm a new student at a new school again. I know I'll

feel comfortable when I've been there a while. I was – I was worried about my comfort

level at first." This highlights the consistent idea that it would take time to get into a

rhythm of what was needed from them. About three months into the semester, Jefferson

felt like he was "gaining some momentum and direction" with regard to classes. For

Nadine, she found herself getting more comfortable about half-way through the semester:

> I have a routine and know what to expect from my professors. I think they know
>
> what kind of work to expect from me now as well. Parking is no problem.
>
> Getting to and from my classes is a piece of cake too. I am starting to get more
>
> comfortable in my classes as well as warming up to my peers…I still get nervous
>
> and hate talking in front of the class but I'm feeling more confident again.

While the transition may take time, one participant did not want the transition and

the identity of being a transfer student to impact his experience. Jefferson pointed out

that the role of being a transfer student was not critical for him and in fact he would not

take advantage of transfer-specific resources indicating he wanted to focus on being a

student and that everyone, regardless of being a native or transfer student, has to adjust to

the institution. His mindset was "I have to do the same credit hours everybody else does

whether I started here or didn't."

For most participants, the notion that the transition takes time was related to three

key pieces: acclimating and learning the new environment; understanding the resources

and support systems that existed on campus, and developing an increased sense of

confidence in one's own abilities. Suzy identified her transition experience as having

ended when she has gotten comfortable with campus. "I know where I'm going, I know

how to get signed up for classes, I know where most of my classes are going to be. I

know the resources and the library, the journals…" Nadine highlighted the importance

that the increased sense of confidence played: "I feel confident that I can do it. I'm really

looking forward to starting the spring semester. I know what to expect now"

It is important to note that while the transition will take time, the participants did

not see it as a negative thing. In fact, nearly all of the participants found the transition to

be a positive experience and felt their experience was as smooth and seamless as it could

have been, despite some of the challenges that they experienced. Elizabeth summed it up

best stating "overall this semester has been fun but a serious challenge."

Theme 3: Support is Critical

In order to transition successfully, everyone highlighted a wide variety of supports

that they relied on. Supports were personal, work-related, and institutional. Support was

discussed both at the community college as well as the university level and was both

active support as well as implied support. In fact, the word "support" was said over 250

times within the interviews while "resource" was used over 170 times. One aspect of

support that was talked about a lot was academic advising. The word

"advise/adviser/advising" appeared over 280 times in the transcripts. The participants

highlighted the need for support throughout the whole process. These will all be

discussed in this section.

Community college advising

Many of the participants had mixed experiences with advising at their previous

community college. All of the participants felt that advising was critical for an effective

transition. Some of the participants such as Anastazia and Nicholas discussed some of

the difficulties they had with community college advising, particularly in that the advisers

seemed to use an instruction manual for advising as opposed to individualizing the

experience for their particular situation. Nicholas attended two different community

colleges and had the following experience that really marred his view of advising at the

community college:

> The teachers were the advisors. Well, my teacher was an English professor
>
> and he just looked at a book and I told him what I wanted to go into and he
>
> just wrote out of the book. … I – sitting at home had to go from 17 back down
>
> to only three credits because there was only one class that I truly needed and
>
> then build my own schedule back up to 17. So, that was really frustrating
>
> because – it was the same at [the community college]. I talked to one advisor
>
> which was a teacher and he said, "Oh if you just get your associate's, your
>
> associates will transfer as a block to [Midwestern University] and you won't

have to worry about this credit not transferring or this credit." Well, I talked

later on with a different advisor who was very – this guy – I actually really

appreciated him. He really liked the advising aspect of his teaching career and

when I talked to him, he said, "Well who told you that because that's wrong."

For a year I took classes going to my associate's that didn't go to what I was

going into and so that was frustrating as well.

Not everyone's experience with advising at the community college was poor

however. For instance Clark's perspective on an effective adviser was simply someone

who helped him get enrolled in the right classes. "The person who I started with, she was

– I would say the best advisor that I had, but the ones who took over for her still – they

would help me enroll in classes if I needed help…" Similarly Jean was focused on

ensuring her credit was going to transfer over and her perception was positive saying this

about her meetings with her adviser:

I wanted to make sure I'd be done in a year with all my classes, I'd get the degree

in a year. So he did help me make sure that I'd be done with the degree. I told

him I was thinking of [Midwestern University], UNO and stuff…he assured me

that it would be transferrable here.

There were mixed views on how well the advisers at the community college were

connected to other advisers to ensure the right information was being provided to the

students. For instance, Max was undecided on his major when he was transferring to

Midwestern University and was pleased that his original adviser at his community college

had connections to other advisers who knew about some of the other majors he was

considering. He specifically pointed out that "they seem to be all very interconnected.

Even if I go to my advisor and they can't help me, some other advisor will be able to, for sure. I'm positive." However, that was not the experience for Ronnie Lea. She was particularly frustrated saying:

> There's a breakdown between the advisor over there and the advisor over here. You have somebody as a go between over there, but that's one person that doesn't necessarily have all of the information for everything that happens between that campus and here. That's impossible. That's not gonna happen. The thing is that to be able to bridge like that is tough to do. I mean, they always say, "You're going to want to talk to the advisors over at [Midwestern University]." So they're gonna send you over here. That's how they're gonna do it.

As I have highlighted above, the community college advising experiences were mixed. Some had great experiences, while others were left frustrated. While the experience with advising was mixed, nearly all of the participants still indicated that they enjoyed their overall experience at the community college however.

University advising

Another important support that was talked about a lot was university advising. All of the participants of this study were pleased with their advising experiences so far into their experience at Midwestern University. No one highlighted any poor experiences so far. Not everyone viewed the role of the adviser in the same way though.

The first aspect of university advising that was discussed a significant amount was the transfer of community college credit. Many expressed that they anticipated courses would transfer fine, but didn't know how they would transfer. For some, particularly those from the community college within the same city as the university, they felt that the

institutions had a good working relationship that they were not worried, even though they may not have taken the time to identify exactly how credit would count.

The advisers at the university were considered very knowledgeable and able to articulate how credits were transferring in, although a number expressed that this process took time. For a few they did not know exactly how some of the credits had transferred in, even after the semester had started. For a number of them, they were still working into the end of the first semester trying to determine how some of their credits would count toward their degree requirements.

Elizabeth was one who did not use an adviser regularly at the community college level, but she heeded the advice of others as she transitioned to the new institution. She said that she had been told to meet with advisers to "build a relationship, and always make sure you're on the right track. It's an adjustment to always meet with an advisor, but it's nice that I can have a support group that will keep me on track." Max echoed Elizabeth's comments stating "advisers are very helpful for putting you on track."

Meanwhile Anastazia did not feel she really needed to use an adviser, and preferred that she had just gotten a list of courses to take, since she felt she could just use the list as a guide. She found over time though that the advising relationship became much more personal, which she appreciated. For instance, her dog died during the early part of her first semester, and her faculty adviser had a conversation about that experience with her. She found that to be particularly helpful stating "personal conversations help too. Just figuring out that your professor is actually a person rather than just a professor."

Other institutional supports

While advisers have been helpful as highlighted above, other supports and resources were also talked about. The important piece that was highlighted by nearly all participants was the fact that there are so many resources, that it is hard to truly understand what does exist and where those support units may be located. Tom really highlighted this the best when he said that he could have used "a little more hands on information as to the resources that are available…I know the resources are there, but to find out about them or to discover how I can utilize them, that's a little more."

While a number of resources were discussed such as the library, the accessibility of wireless internet, and online resources, a few specifically highlighted in details how helpful the financial aid office is. As discussed in the first theme, finances were extremely important to transfer students and having a good understanding of their financial situation, including how to receive aid, were important. Mya felt they were always open and assessable and straightforward, while Jefferson highlighted that he called financial aid quite a bit and they were "super nice."

The last institution support that every participant highlighted was the Transfer Connections email that comes out weekly. "The Transfer Connection is e-mailed to newly enrolled transfer students weekly during the fall and spring semesters and monthly during the summer. The Transfer Connection includes timely reminders, events on and around campus, and helpful suggestions." (University of Nebraska-Lincoln First Year Experience and Transitions Programs, 2015).

Every student used this email in different ways, but everyone appreciated getting them. Nadine put simply:

They give you an update for transfer students and what's going on this week. It's

nice to see and get an update every week… I do skim it. I don't read it verbatim

every week. But it's nice to have. [The community college] had an email system

but it wasn't through our personal emails so I never checked it. I didn't pay

attention. Here it's a lot more accessible.

Similarly Nicholas also echoed Nadine's comments:

I'm one of those that never read it, but it was nice knowing it was there in case

there was something I need. I feel like even though I haven't used them, the

resources are there and that's a huge safety net for me.

Lastly, Suzy found this resource to be particularly helpful highlighting the fact that she

doesn't spend a lot of time on campus as a commuter student:

There are certain events on campus, there's this program, there's that program for

your major, here's some clubs you could consider. I think the email has been the

biggest piece for me because I don't spend a lot of time on campus.

Many did feel that generally e-mail is the best way to communicate with them,

and they feel the university generally does a good job with using e-mails at all levels.

However, they did often feel overwhelmed with the amount of e-mail they received. A

lot does not get read, but they appreciate knowing that the university is working to

communicate with them on things related to their academics.

Family support

Advisers were not the only support that was important for the participants as they

transitioned. Family played a critical role, but that role varied for participants. For

instance, two participants had children, one was out of the country and his family was

playing a different supportive function, and some lived with their parents still. A few of the different roles will be highlighted below. One thing that was important for all of the participants was the point that their family needed to be supportive of their decision to pursue the bachelor's degree. Nearly all of them said that had their family not have been supportive of the decision, they would have strongly reconsidered the decision to attend the university. Nicholas is a first-generation college student and while his family could not fully understand the experience he was going through, he felt they supported him. He said "once I told my family I was finally accepted and I was going here they were like, 'Good. That's really good for ya.' I felt like I had the support that I needed."

One of the types of support that family played was financial support. The financial support included some of the small things like purchasing school supplies like Mya's parents did. Mya really appreciated this saying "itty bitty little steps just to help, but she's helping." Mya's mother also happens to work on campus, so the financial support Mya receives through the form of an employee scholarship she indicated is very helpful. Another form of financial support was providing housing, as was the case for Suzy. Her parents were providing her a place to live, rent-free, while she was going to school and she noted that has been extremely helpful.

Sometimes the support the family provided was not financial; in fact, most of the time it was in in other forms. For instance, Nadine shared the importance of having her sister around, since her sister would occasionally watch her child when she needed to do something related to school or work. Ronnie Lea took a different approach with using her child as a support. She felt the best way for her to be supportive to her child is by being a role model for him, and subsequently, he also provided support for her.

I tell him every day, "Have a good day at school." I pick him up, "How was your day?" He does the same to me. He is learning from me that it's never too late to go to school. It's never too late – we have a dynamic between the two of us where we sit down and do homework together. It's cool to have him watch me go to school and I watch him go to school. It's a constant motivation when I'm struggling or –it's constant – "Mom how was your day today? Did you go to east campus or did you go to city campus today?" He knows enough that he's asking me questions. It makes you want to keep going where before I had no motivation.

Jean discussed the academic support that her mother provided. Like some of the other participants, seven of the participants had family members who had gotten bachelor's degrees before and those family members provided a different kind of emotional support. For instance, Jean's mother had helped her review her degree audit to ensure she understood what courses she still needed, for the purposes of a "double check," as she called it.

One thing that was brought up however was the fact that family can also be a distraction too. For instance, while Ronnie Lea talked about the support she received from her son, he also provided a distraction such as when he was sick or when she needed to attend his school activities. Similarly, Nadine who was also living at home ran into family distractions that were unintentional, yet problematic at some points.

Also with them, that they struggle with, is supporting me when I'm at home trying to do homework or get that stuff done. Since I'm there, I don't think they realize, "I'm in the middle of reading this article, you've stopped me five times. I need to get it done, just let me read it." But, I know each one of my family members

probably had something to say to me or just interactions. Since I'm there, "Hey, let's talk." I think everyone has been really supportive.

Overall, the general message was the same. Family has been a vital part of the transition in helping provide a wide variety of supports. Whether it be financial, emotional, or physical support, the added value of having close family support has impacted their ability to feel successful as they started at Midwestern University.

Support from Friends

Another important support for many of the participants was from their friends. Again, similar to family support, while it was a consistent group, they played different roles. For instance, Anastazia's roommate was already a student at Midwestern University, so she had some knowledge of campus such as navigating the busses and using the library. She appreciated the fact that her roommate knew "the little things that you don't really think about, she's probably helped me through it." Jean talked about the internal emotional role that the support of friends had on her transition. She highlighted that it made the transition easier and that it was "nice knowing that you're not alone in the world, I guess. It makes life easier." Tom also echoed this comment as he talked about his experience comparing notes on the transition with a friend of his who transferred to the same institution this semester.

Some have used friends for academic support. Nadine has begun using friends from class as a way to go over problems for math and Spanish, while Jefferson is working with friends on his chemistry review. Tom particularly noted that he did not really study with anyone at the community college and it was something he hoped for coming to the university. He did get the opportunity to form some study groups, which

he found to be really helpful. "I was definitely happy when I was able to get to know a couple people well enough to study with them." Clark, a military veteran who suffers from a traumatic brain injury as a result of combat, was in a unique situation in that he was doing all of his coursework through distance education since he was currently out of the country with his significant other. Clark talked about the important role his wife played in supporting him and keeping him focused on his coursework, particularly since he does not like online classes. He was very appreciative of the support his wife provided stating:

> My wife reminds me a lot. She actually wrote down in her little schedule – she's super organized and very schedule oriented and everything. She wrote down on her schedule most of my main assignments that are due just so she could remind me, "Oh hey, you have this coming up, you need to make sure you get on it."

Socializing as a support was also a consistent form of support as well for many of the participants. Some, like Elizabeth, talked about having social nights with their roommates while others talked about experiencing aspects of the city with friends that they had met. Nadine also talked about friends she has kept from work who are in similar life situations with having children and they often will do family events together, which she is very appreciative in having. Jean also talked about the important social support her church network has provided her as she transitioned to Lincoln. A few others such as Nicholas and Mya talked about having time to spend with their significant others.

Support from Work

As mentioned earlier, 9 out of 12 participants were working while pursuing their bachelor's degree. One thing that nearly all articulated was some flexibility and support

that their employer and coworkers provided. The support came in a variety of ways. For some, the employer has been willing to be flexible with scheduling hours to ensure the student was able to go to class or study as needed. Mya talked about another form of support in that her boss had a graduate degree and critiqued her resume for her.

Tom was a participant who had juggled multiple jobs both at the community college level as well as in his time at the university. His employers have been extremely flexible with him. He commented that "my employer knew I was still in school so they've been very understanding, very accommodating and continue to be with my class schedule…" He articulated the importance of communicating with the supervisor in advance to ensure that he could continue to focus on his studies alongside working.

Anastazia did have one experience where she felt that work was not being supportive however. One thing she was hoping she could do during her first semester at the university was attend a football game. She was interested in having some campus experience, but so far that had not been able to occur. She is still optimistic that she will be able to attend a sporting event or experiencing a fine arts event in the campus theater.

Theme 4: Maturity

The next theme that surfaced related to the participants' views of themselves. This theme specifically relates to Transition Theory's focus on coping resources and the appraisal of the assets and limitations for the factor known as self. Every participant viewed themselves as being more mature. The time spent at the community college allowed them to better create a vision of who they wanted to become and what they wanted to do. Some of the participants even said they would not have been mature enough to start at the 4-year institution and felt that being a community college transfer

student provided them a great opportunity to be more focused on their academics when they transferred over.

Jean provided a dialogue that really highlights what some of the participants felt with regard to their maturity:

One thing I've noticed is – and because I had some time off in between college… I'm able to compare it to working at Wal-Mart. I'm excited for the second chance…I used to complain because in art class I really like pencil sketching and the teacher would make me color it in…and I didn't understand why…Sometimes my mom would be like, "[Jean], sometimes you have to do things in life that you don't like in order to get something you like." She was like, "Just color the picture."…Then I'd understand. I just have to do that to get something out of it I like. Now it's kind of like I understand, I just have to color the picture. Also, because of my time off, I can compare my other options to the end result of coming back to college. I'm actually excited to be able to color the picture and have that chance again.

Many of the participants compared themselves to the other students in their classes that had started at Midwestern University. They could see that they valued their educational experience more than many of them. Some attributed this maturity to age (the average age of the participants was 25 years old at the time they transferred), but also because they felt they had a broader range of life experiences having been at multiple institutions. Ronnie Lea felt that the non-traditional transfer student is more focused, "They are really focused on the career aspect. I know when I was younger I was not focused on school. I went to school for all the wrong reasons."

Those who were more traditional age like Anastazia had a slightly different viewpoint on their maturity. She felt she was mature, but she sought out experiences in part because she wanted to continue to grow in her maturity. She felt she was too mature to live in the dorms, and she wanted to also grow and learn the realities of being adult such as paying bills on her own "rather than just paying the school and getting it over with."

With the view of maturity, some did highlight some frustrations with being viewed as older. For instance, some felt the professors in some of their classes geared assignments toward traditional-aged students and did not account for those who may not have parents they are going home to on the weekend. In other portions of campus-life, some felt the organizations were geared mostly toward the traditional-aged student who started at Midwestern University, and felt less inclined to participate in those.

For many the sense of maturity was a different experience for them, compared to the community college system. They felt that at the community college there was a broader range of students, so they often felt they blended in more, As Ronnie Lea said "for me to walk up and say I'm a non-traditional student that was pointless because almost everyone in my class was non-traditional."

Theme 5: Personal Responsibility

The final theme that emerged in the study was personal responsibility. This theme surfaced as participants talked about what the transition meant to them. They appreciated the support from the broad spectrum of people and campus departments, but in the end they knew that they needed to take the personal responsibility of pursuing a bachelor's degree for themselves. Nadine pointed out that she had to prove she could do

it for herself. Her comments really highlighted how becoming personality responsible

was a great feeling, "I really realized how much of an individual I am, my own person

this semester since being here… I'm already a mom. I've already been a student. But, I

definitely feel more on my own and I'm okay with it." Mya talked about that while her

mother worked on campus and had a lot of knowledge, she wanted to figure things out on

her own. Max pointed out that while the resources definitely exist, he has to figure it out

on his own because it is internal.

The participants used a lot of different strategies to navigate their transition.

Everyone's strategies were different but all used strategies they felt would effectively

help them have a better experience. In fact, when asked how they felt about the strategies

they had used to navigate the transition, all of the participants felt confident that their

strategies were effective. No one highlighted any strategies that did not work.

Many of the participants talked about making a personal decision to take on a

lighter load their first semester as they transitioned to the university. While they felt they

may have been able to take on more, there was a sense of wanting to ease into the

transition and make sure they better understood the resources and system before taking

on more. There were two students who wished they would have taken a lighter load, as

one ended up dropping a course and felt that the 17 credits he was enrolled in was too

heavy of a load for his first semester.

Some of the strategies used included effective communication. Many talked

about needing to communicate frequently with their advisers, professors, and employers

about what they needed to be successful or to get guidance on what they were doing.

Some talked about effectively communicating their needs to family members to ensure

they could continue to pursue their goals. Many talked about the importance of being willing to ask questions. One participant talked about asking random students they overheard talking about something in the union. Others talked about simply asking others around their classrooms if they would be willing to study together, which they had not done at the community college. Many also pointed out that they had to be more willing to ask questions from various offices on campus such as advisers, the education abroad office, and financial aid.

Some found that they needed to find places on campus to be more successful in their transition. Most had never utilized their community college as a place to study and instead were going home. Now, some who were commuting onto campus were looking for places to spend time studying. For Suzy, she used the library. Nadine started off using the student union, but quickly found a place in her college's main building that she could study in. Max utilized the student veteran center as a place to study on campus. The students, because they were spending more time on campus, were taking on the role of a student more than they had at the community college, and as such were finding themselves taking on even more responsibility to ensure they were successful in the transition to the university.

Taking on this personal responsibility for their degree and ultimately obtaining a bachelor's degree led to the discussion of what the transition meant to the participants. For many, the transition means it's a "big step" in moving forward toward their goals, as Max said. "Every step counts because it gets you closer," Nadine highlighted. A number talked about now they can focus on classes that are directly related to their careers and what they want to do the rest of the lives. They are contemplating questions such as

"what am I supposed to get from this class?" and "how am I supposed to add this to my career?" as Mya put. Many connected the meaning of the transition to their career potential, but it was particularly important for the non-traditional students who had worked for years in jobs they were not necessarily satisfied with. As both Ronnie Lea and Suzy pointed out, the move would allow them to pursue careers they were more passionate about and ultimately prove more stability financially.

Initial Questions for Study

The previous sections highlighted the themes that surfaced from the study. The themes do not necessarily fall directly in line with answering the questions that were originally used in conceptualizing the study. Less time will be spent on the questions that were answered as a result of the emerging themes. The following section is meant to highlight the data that directly answers the questions this study originally asked.

Community college transfer student involvement

One of the questions posed at the beginning of the study was "in what high impact practices did community college transfer students participate?" Very few were involved with anything on campus with respect to student organizations. Many articulated the strategy of easing into the transition and not taking on more than they could handle. Many highlighted the fact that they would consider getting involved if the involvement was meaningful to them. They were aware that Midwestern University offered a significant amount of opportunities for involvement and many appreciated the fact that the university understands that students need both academic as well as social experiences while in college. While many opportunities exist, many of the non-traditional students

highlighted that the groups typically focused on younger students and as Ronnie Lea highlighted they do not seem to be "non-traditional transfer student friendly."

Only one was actively involved in a student club. Max, a military veteran, participated in the Student Veteran Organization. He identified heavily as a veteran and noted the bond that the organization provided for student-veterans. This organization did not require a lot of time, but it helped him make a connection that was meaningful:

> It's just really nice to have a group of people that you can connect with because most university students don't understand what it was like to be in the military or what the military does. Veterans do. We all have a kinship all most. They know what it's like not only to be in the military but to be in the military and now be in school. It's a common struggle. It's nice to have those other people to talk to and identify with.

Some had participated in on-campus experiences. This tended to be only because they were receiving extra-credit through a class. Some had participated in research opportunities, but only because it was either required by a class or the research project was tied to their major or a specific career interest.

This does not mean that the community college students were not involved in something however. Many were involved in off-campus activities. One volunteered a lot at her child's school, while another was active in her church group. Clark was experiencing a lot of tourist experiences since he was taking online courses in Germany. He equated is educational experience to being similar to a study abroad experience. Suzy was actively involved in the community Toastmasters group. Tom coordinated an alumni group for a church conference he helped with.

Involvement was valued by the participants, but not at the expense of their educational endeavors. As pointed out earlier, the involvement had to be meaningful and work within their schedules. The concept of "getting involved to just get involved" is not one that resonated with these community college transfer students, and most hoped that as they continued to transition, they would be able to find something that was meaningful to get involved in whether it was campus-related or community-related.

Identified needed support

I asked each participant the question "what are the most important forms of support that you need to be successful?" There were a wide variety of responses to this question. Some related to specific knowledge needed, others related to specific resources, while others focused on functions of support.

All of the participants talked about the functions of support, particularly as it relates to people affirming them in their decision to pursue a bachelor's degree. They highlighted that having people around them encouraging them, being understanding of their situation, and providing a welcoming feeling were all extremely important to their ability to transition successfully.

With regard to specific people, family, friends, work, and university resources were all highlighted as discussed above in the third theme. Highlighted the most at the institutional level was academic advising. Other sources also mentioned were financial aid, education abroad, faculty, and tutoring. Particularly, a few mentioned the confusion they had in finding specific resources, and as such they felt they needed clarity with respect to the resources that do exist on campus.

The services that will be listed in the next section are only a small portion of the many resources that the campus offers students. Most students felt overwhelmed with the amount of resources and information needed to learn over the first semester. Many admitted that they had not learned about a lot of them even by the end of the semester, and wished there was a more streamlined mechanism for finding the resources most important to community college transfer students.

Support services used during transition

As mentioned above, there were many support services that were used by the students. A handful talked about the New Student Enrollment office and the amount of support that office provided as they prepared to transfer into Midwestern University. Many appreciated the fact that transfer students were treated differently than new freshman students, although some of the non-traditional students still felt the orientation moment was geared toward traditional-aged students.

The university support service that was used by all were the academic advisers. The advising experience was generally viewed positively, with a lot of the questions students had being addressed. The second most used service was Scholarships and Financial Aid. Those who used this resource felt the office was very willing to assist students and provided answers to all of their questions. The one veteran student who was on campus found himself using the veteran student office frequently and found that to be particularly beneficially as he transitioned.

Generally, all participants felt positive about the support resources that were available and the ones that they had taken advantage of. No participant mentioned having problems with any of the resources. While students had utilized only a few of the

support systems in place, they felt the university was providing for their needs and if they needed support in some way they felt confident that they could obtain it.

View of self

This question was set up to understand whether students embraced the role as a community college transfer student, or not. Did they see it as a positive identity or one that would hold them back throughout life? With little exception, everyone felt that being a community college transfer student was a positive things. A few felt indifferent, while no one felt negatively about the role.

Many felt that being exposed to multiple types of institutions would be beneficial because it would show that they can adapt to new settings. For instance, Elizabeth highlighted that more faculty members would know her, and she could go to more people for references rather than being limited to a select group of faculty members. Some felt that had a lot more life experiences and have a better sense of who they were and what they want to do with their lives.

While the students did not see being a community college transfer student as a negative, there were some negatives that they mentioned. Some of these included less time to get to know faculty members; difficulties adjusting to some larger classroom sizes; and limited availability and opportunity to get involved, which some thought they would have done if they started directly at a 4-year program.

Perhaps the best way to summarize how the half of the students felt about their experience is a quote from Ronnie Lea:

The experiences I got from everything that I built at the community college level, I wouldn't discount those for anything because those are what got me here. So

I'm proud to be a transfer student. That's ... if it wasn't for that, I wouldn't be

here at all. I'm proud to be a transfer student. I'm perfectly fine with that. Call

me a transfer student for the rest of your life, I don't care.

For the other half of students, this quote from Tom really summarizes their feelings:

Probably always a transfer student, but I wouldn't place much significance on

that. A student is a student. You're still trying to learn where ever you're at

regardless of if you came in as a freshman or sophomore or junior. Yeah, you're

always a transfer student but it's not a bad thing.

Strategies used in navigating the transition

Like the section on support above, the emerging theme of personal responsibility

in this study really answered the question of the strategies that the participants used in

navigating the transition. The strategies were both directly tied to navigating the college

experience, while others were more broadly applicable to all aspects of their lives. All of

the participants felt positive about the strategies they used, and no one felt that any of the

strategies they used were particularly ineffective.

One of the biggest academic strategies that most of the participants used to ease

into the academic transition was taking a lighter course load their first semester, and for

the two that did not, they both highlighted the wish to have considered a lighter load.

Because this was the first time for many feeling as though the student role was a bigger

part of their identity, many found themselves spending more time on the university

campus compared to their community college experience. While for various reasons,

most chose to stay on campus between classes rather than go home. Many found

themselves studying in campus locations such as the union, college academic buildings, the library, and the student veteran center.

For both academic-related issues as well as off-campus relationships and work, many highlighted the increased importance that they have effective communication strategies. Whether it was communicating with university faculty and staff, employers, or their families, by having effective communication, participants were able to ask the right questions, gain the needed support, or learn more about the campus and opportunities than they would have otherwise.

Summary

A significant amount of data was discussed in this chapter. Five emergent themes highlighted the overall experience that community college transfer students had throughout their time leading up to and during their first semester at the university.

The first theme, funding the college experience, was extremely important to the participants. Whether it was starting at the community college to save money, working while in school, obtaining particular scholarships, or having resources such as family to provide free room and board, made the transition easier for these students.

Many of the students came into the university overwhelmed with the amount of information needed to take in. They came to realize that the transition would take time. Part of the time would include learning where all of the resources and buildings were at. Knowing exactly when the transition was over varied from person to person. For some, the transition felt over early in the semester, while some felt that the transition would not be over until the end of the semester or even later.

There were a wide variety of support systems that the participants talked about. In particularly, they highlighted the need for advising at the community college level to ensure they were adequately prepared to transfer to a university. They were exceptionally pleased with the academic advising at the university. There were other campus supports in place that were helpful too, although many of the resources were not very well known to the participants with the exception of a few. In particular, the e-mail newsletter, *Transfer Connection*, was considered by all to be a nice resource even though it was used to varying extents by each of the participants. Family support came in multiple ways as well, financially, emotionally, and motivationally. Friends were supportive in different ways, whether providing academic or social support or helping with navigating campus. Meanwhile work, in most cases, provided support for the nine participants who were employed by being flexible with the student's schedules and supporting them in their endeavors to complete their bachelor's degrees.

The participants felt they had a greater sense of maturity than most of the students who were sitting next to them in class. Ultimately, they felt they valued the academic experience more than their peers. For many, they sensed that they had experienced real-life and knew what life could be if they did not have a bachelor's degree. They felt that they had a great sense of direction in knowing where they wanted to go in life and had moved past the initial immaturity that 18-20 year old college students tend to bring with them.

Lastly, while all appreciated and needed varying forms of support, the recognized in the end that they needed to have the passion and drive to navigate the transition into the university and that no one could do it for them. It was their responsibility to

communicate effectively and seek out and ask for the help that they needed. They

realized it was their steps that would ultimately get them to the finish line of a bachelor's

degree, which would lead them to achieving their goals, dreams, and passions.

Participants felt positive or neutral about being a community college transfer

student. In the end, they were all students looking to achieve a goal of graduation. For

some, they planned to use their role as a community college transfer student to show how

they have had a broader experience as a student. Others felt it was just the pathway they

took, but it would not impact them positively or negatively either now or in the future.

The meaning of the transition could be briefly summarized into the following phrase,

starting the new chapter and moving forward.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The study is now complete, but the data and study are only as valuable as one makes it, presuming something is learned that can be applied to current and future community college transfer students. As such, this chapter provides me the opportunity to reconnect my findings back to literature related to community college transfer students, particularly, studies that have used Schlossberg's Transition Theory as a frame-of-reference for their studies. This chapter will focus on a number of discussion points to address the following pieces: (a) the initial study purpose and central question; (b) comparing this study to previous literature using Schlossberg's Transition Theory within Higher Education; (c) limitations of this study; (d) recommendations for community colleges, universities, applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory; and future research; and lastly (e) researcher reflections.

Initial Study Purpose and Question

When the study began, I had specific interests in better understanding information on transfer students. At this particular institution, there was minimal data on any transfer students, let alone community college transfer students. This was particularly concerning, given that the trend over the past five years at this institution has shown than on average there are more than 1000 first-time transfer students each fall. The data that does exist at this institution was all quantitative, which means there is a lack of understanding of what the student's perceptions are as it relates to their transition.

As such, the purpose of this study was to learn about the transition community college transfer students have, and focus on better understanding how they transition.

This included looking at their experiences as they prepared to transition as well as experiences throughout the transition. I asked questions related to activities they were involved in, working while in college, perceptions of their support systems, strategies they used to process through the transition, and their view of themselves as transfer students, among others. The central question to the study was "how do community college transfer students perceive their transition into a large research, land-grant institution."

Comparing to previous work using Schlossberg's Transition Theory in Higher Education

As I have mentioned earlier, Schlossberg's Transition Theory was the theoretical framework that guided my study. While Schlossberg's Transition Theory was initially developed for use with retiring adults, a number of researchers have begun to incorporate the theory within higher education. This section will highlight some studies that have specifically discussed Schlossberg's Transition Theory in higher education and discuss how my results compared to those found by other researchers. To provide an idea of how the questions asked in the study related to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, I have added Table 9. Each of the secondary research questions is tied directly to the central question "how do community college transfer students perceive their transition into a large research, land-grant institution."

Table 9

Sample Study Questions Relation to Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Secondary Request Questions	Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012)	Interview Questions Asked
In what high impact practices did community college transfer students participate?	The second phase of the transition process is moving through in which the person(s) is learning new roles and routines. Individuals experiencing the transition "confront issues such as how to balance their activities with other parts of their lives and how to feel supported and challenged during their new journey" (p. 57).	Did you consider joining the transfer student learning community? Did you consider participating in the transfer student transitions course? In any of your classes, have you formed or participated in any group projects or developed any study groups? What things have you chosen to participate in?
How did community college transfer students perceive their support systems at a large research, land grant institution?	The primary and secondary appraisals "determines the impact of the transition, the perceived challenges and meaning this holds, and the specific needs for coping" (p. 44). Perceptions can be positive, neutral, or negative Primary appraisals look at the transition itself while secondary appraisals look at their assessment of coping mechanisms	What services did community college transfer students use on campus as they transitioned to a large research, land-grant institution? What services did you not find useful? Do you feel like you have gotten what you've needed in order to transition?
What most important forms of support (needs, types, and functions) did community college transfer students perceive they needed for a successful transition?	Support is one of 4 coping areas Can include intimate relationships, family, friends, institutions or communities Support can play multiple different functions such as affect, affirmation, or aid.	How important was it to receive assistant or guidance regarding transferring? What significant people, places, or events (good and/or bad) have been critical throughout your transition? What is the role and influence of your family as you have transitioned? Friends?
What liabilities and assets did community college transfer students report as prevalent in how they viewed themselves during the transition?	Self has many different characteristics including: socioeconomic status; gender and sexual orientation; age and state of life; state of health; ethnicity/ culture; psychological resources; ego development; outlook – optimism and self-efficacy; commitment and values; and spirituality and resilience.	How do you feel being a community college transfer student will impact your college experience at Midwestern University? Do you think being a community college transfer student provides any advantages that students who started at Midwestern University do not have? Do you think being a transfer student provides any limitations on you in anyways? Do you think being a community college transfer student will help you or hinder you in any ways in your future career paths? How do you feel that you have managed the transition? Has your confidence level to be successful in your transition changed at all over time?
What strategies did community college transfer students consider to be the most effective mechanisms for coping with the transition?	Three types of strategies in responding to transition: modifying the situation; control the meaning of the problem; manage stress after transition occurred. Self-reliance versus advice-seeking is an example of modifying the situation	At what point did you start preparing for the transfer to the new institution and how much time did you devote? What steps did you take in preparing for your transfer? Did you have any conversations with your professors, advisers, or mentors about your plans to transfer? Who do you most often consult with for academic guidance? What strategies have you engaged in throughout your transition?
What services did community college transfer students use on campus as they transitioned to a large research, land-grant institution?	Anderson et al. (2012) highlight the use of Kahn's Convoy of Social Support model and university services and professionals would fall within the outer-layer of convoy membership	What services exist to help transfer students? Where do you go most often for assistance?

Schlossberg's 4-S Coping Resources

Schlossberg's Transition Theory was first developed to be used as a counseling theory with retiring adults. Fittingly, research has also been conducted looking at adults returning to college. Schaefer (2010) looked at the experience of older baby boomer students going back to college. The themes in her study directly tied to the 4-S coping resources. She found that the students needed a better understanding of the educational process, were motivated by their career aspirations, and have complex support needs. The need for better understanding of the educational process is directly tied to the support and information gathered prior to transitioning. Similar to this study, my participants discussed having a lot of confusion and how to access some resources. My participants were often career-driven too, which relates to strategies used in modifying their current situation. Finally, the complex needs were important. The students in my study discussed varying needs leading into the transition as well as throughout the transition. Their needs related to things from the institution as well as individuals such as friends and family.

Rumann's (2010) dissertation highlighted the experience of student veterans returning to a community college. One of the themes that emerged in his study was interactions and connections with others. Within this theme he found several key relationships that were important to the transition experience including family, military peers, civilians, and the veteran affairs certifying official, faculty, and college peers. In particular, Rumann (2010) highlighted that "family relationships and interactions as being integral to managing their transitions back to the civilian world and college." My study also found similar results with regard to the impact of family. Rumann highlighted

the emotional support that was apparent among the military students, but in my study the

support was broader. Not only was it emotional support, but they often provided

financial support, child support, or motivational support alongside the emotional support.

DeVilbiss (2014) studied the transition that conditionally-admitted students have

through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. What she found in her study

highlighted the importance of new supports, particularly a variety of people and places on

campus. Some were teachers, new friends, a college transition class, and welcome week

events, among many other university services. My study also found this to be true with

community college transfer students. They talked about the increased importance on

advisers, the value of friendships made, connecting more to students in their classes, and

finding support service offices across campus. In one case, Ronnie Lea talked about the

value of her "Life Skills for Success" class, which made her navigate campus and find

nine different support offices. Jean talked a lot about the value her college group through

her church had been in providing her support while her family was on the other side of

the state. These findings relate well to DeVilbiss' findings and highlight the importance

of the role that support coping resource that Schlossberg's Transition Theory highlights.

DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) studied military veterans as well

returning to college and framed their study within Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

They also found a number of similarities with my study in that the students had a higher

level of maturity in comparison to other students. One quote that DiRamio et al., (2008)

highlighted was that of a veteran who said "I've just seen so much more than most of the

college students here. I've traveled around the world. I've been given so much more

responsibility and leadership. I feel that's helped me out quite a bit" (p. 87). While their

study attributed the experience to world travel and cultural experiences, my study found that the maturity was felt because they had seen multiple institutions and had more general life experience, they felt older than the traditional student even though some were not more than 22 years old, and they felt they had a clearer vision of their educational goals.

Archambault's (2010) dissertation was designed to improve community college transfer student preparation, and she too used Schlossberg's Transition Theory as her theoretical framework. She completed an action research study, and part of the study included pre and post-surveys. She found that students felt less confident with their ability to cope with change and had lower views of self. Students in my study felt overwhelmed and were unaware of some of the resources that were available, and that did impact their experience, but most felt that they were able to cope with the transition fairly well. Students also did not see being a community college transfer student as a negative identity role and felt more mature as well, which differs from her dissertation results. Another aspect of Archambault's (2010) dissertation that was different from my participants was the reliance on support from family and friends and less likely to receive feedback about the transfer. In my study, the support coping mechanism was viewed as extremely important to the participants. Some felt they would have altered their plans had they not received the support from friends and family.

One area that Archambault (2010) found that was similar to my study was the participation in support activities. She found that they participated in less activities. While a number of my participants were involved in outside activities, they generally were not involved in campus support organizations or clubs. The benefit to a qualitative

study in this case, allowed me to understand why these students were not participating in campus activities, which often was due to work or family obligations, community activity involvement, and time management throughout the transition.

Three-phase transition process

An assertion that Archambault (2010) made was that perhaps early on in the transition, students focus on the process of moving into the transition, rather than moving through the transition. The three-phase model highlights moving in, moving through, and moving out of the transition. In her study, she felt that she was perceiving the students as ready to move out and pushing them into a phase they were not ready to transition into. The students in my study were likely more in the moving in phase, since they were still adjusting to the new environment, learning the system and determining how the university worked. The moving through period "begins once learners know the ropes" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 57). As such, few of my participants really felt like they knew the ropes, as indicated by the theme that the transition takes time. This could suggest to us that the moving in phase could take on more time for transfer students than what universities may realize as often they push students to get involved and take advantages in opportunities early in the semester, when they have not really fully learned the ropes of the institution and the transition they were experiencing.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory was also the impetus for a study of African American transfer students who were forced to relocate after Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana in 2008. Patton and Davis (2014) discussed the factors of moving into the institution as being impacted by the convenience of institution location and the cost of attending. The moving in portion of the transition is establishing new roles, relationships,

and routines. In this case, Patton and Davis equate the selection of the institution as part of this process, which does make sense since that would be the moment where they are becoming familiar with the institution they were looking to go to. A good number of my participants chose to come to Midwestern University because of proximity to their hometown or community college or cost. A smaller few, similar to Patton and Davis's (2014) study, chose the institutions specifically because of the majors that were offered.

To me, this indicates the importance of the three-phase transition process highlighted by Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The moving in phase of the transition for a community college transfer student appeared to be the process from the moment they made the decision to transfer to a university through the early part of their time at the new university as they continued to learn the ropes of the institution. The moving through phase may indeed not happen as early as I would have thought. Students often talked about being overwhelmed and still not knowing a lot about the resources even into the end of the first semester, yet a few felt like the transition was over. Many felt the transition would be over near the end of the first semester, which means that they would feel as though they had known the ropes and how to navigate fully through the transition. Patton and Davis (2014) argued that their study and Schlossberg's Transition Theory show the importance of the receiving university providing a supportive environment and in particular, providing a structured and detailed orientation. This was the point that often students felt extremely overwhelmed since there was so much to take in both physically with locations and buildings as well as intellectually with policies and procedures.

The moving out phase may indeed begin, at least in this case, during the second semester the students are at the university where they may feel that the transition could be over. A few mentioned the idea that you are constantly transitioning, and thus they would simply be looking at what is next, something that Anderson et al. (2012) addressed in their book. Anderson et al. (2012) highlighted the moving out may not indeed end for a student until they have graduated; if that happens to be the case, then the process of moving through the transition could indeed last longer than even some of the students anticipated that it would.

Having said that, similar to what Rumann (2010) found in his dissertation, it does seem difficult to create a specific timeline that the moving in phase for community college transfer students happens from this point to that point and the moving through period happens from this period to that period. I feel that Schlossberg's Theory validates this argument though. Specifically, Anderson et al., (2012) highlighted that the model itself helps partially answer "why different individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times" (p. 63). The transition occurs differently for each individual, which shows why creating a standard one-size-fits-all approach to working with community college transfer students would not begin to possibly work.

Limitations

Every study will always have limitations. These are focused on the methodology of the study, and as such it is important to reiterate some of those limitations in this section, as they will impact the amount of scope the recommendations can have on

applicability of the study. Qualitative studies cannot be generalized, and as such it is important to address aspects of these limitations within this discussion.

This study utilized the experiences of 12 participants who all transferred to the same university. Already that limits the discussion because it could have been very different had I interviewed students who transferred into different universities that were similar to Midwestern University. Midwestern University had over 980 transfer students this fall, so there is undoubtedly many voices that are not captured in this study.

I focused on community college experiences, and six of the participants had all attended the same community college, which does happen to be the largest feeder institution to this university. Nevertheless, that can impact the range of experiences captured. It would be impossible to begin to argue that the results of this study would necessarily be the same if I had interviewed 12 different community college students, or 12 that were all from out-of-state, or other demographic. Generally though, the sample could be argued to relatively reflect the general breakdown of our transfer students in terms of community colleges that students transfer from to this institution.

Nearly all of the students who transferred, came in as junior or senior standing. The amount of students who transferred into this university with freshman status was 17.0%, while sophomores represented an additional one-third of all transfer students this fall. Only two of the participants were sophomore standing, so I potentially missed the viewpoints of at least a portion of community college transfer students in this study. This was likely in part due to the fact that participation in this study was limited to those who were 19 years of age or older. Some students who came directly out of high school and transferred after one quarter or semester at a community college may likely not have been

eligible based on their age, which does limit a group who could have changed the results considerably. Many of the students viewed themselves as non-traditional and as such were working and less involved. It is possible that a more traditional-aged transfer student may have had a very different type of transition in comparison to those who participated in this study.

Another limitation for this study that was unanticipated was the fact that a number of the students did not feel their transition was over. This begs the question as to when the best time is to capture the transition experience. Is it during the transition? Is it after the transition is over? When is the transition actually over in the first place? I captured data at three separate times throughout their first semester alongside journaling from half of the participants. That said, interviewing participants upon completion of their first semester, rather than during the first semester, may have highlighted different perspectives from a reflective standpoint, rather than an active moment.

With respect to the research questions, one limitation that may have impacted the study was the framing of the questions. As I went through the whole process of the study, having used a phenomenological approach, I consciously had to try to separate my previous exposure to Schlossberg's Transition Theory to ensure that I was asking a broad range of questions that truly were meant to understand the transition experience. Phenomenological studies are not meant to be influenced by previously theory. Nevertheless, when creating questions and analyzing data, the researcher will always be somewhat influenced by their previous knowledge and experience. I worked as best as I could to avoid letting the theory dictate how I framed questions and coded data, but that does not mean it was fully free of bias.

Along with framing the questions, the research analysis could be viewed by some as a limitation. The process of open, axial, and selective coding is a more traditional approach for grounded theory. Although, as I discussed, literature did provide support of using open, axial and selective coding for finding the central phenomenon of a study, which is in line with phenomenological research. In visiting with colleagues at conferences who recently completed their dissertations, those who completed phenomenological studies most often used the phenomenological analysis process described by Moustakas (1994). While I discussed this as a potential limitation, I am confident in the open, axial and selective coding approach used in this study.

Recommendations

The recommendations made in qualitative studies are limited in scope because the study is not meant to be generalized. Perhaps the phrase considerations would be better suited. That said, there were many instances where the findings in this study supported, and in some cases varied from, recommendations made by other studies. This section will thus look at some recommendations that have been made in previous studies and compare those to the perspectives of the participants in this study. To better organize the recommendations, I have broken them down into the four following categories: (a) recommendations for community colleges; (b) recommendations for universities; (c) recommendations on applying Schlosberg's Transition Theory; and (d) recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for community colleges

One of the most consistent services discussed at the community college level was the use of academic advising, and the participants' mixed reactions with their advising

experiences. Some talked about receiving poor advice, getting inaccurate information on transferring courses, and a lack of personal attention in the advising appointment. Some did have positive experiences, but there were fewer examples. Given the importance these participants placed of strong academic advising, if community colleges were to ensure that those who advise at the community college are properly trained and given adequate resources, there are strong indications that these students' experiences with advising would have been more consistently positive. Cuseo (2012) highlighted the fact that national data indicates that students place high importance on academic advising. In fact, he pointed out that there was higher importance placed on this service over any other support center in community colleges. This relates to a study completed by Allen, Smith, and Muehleck (2013), in which they found that receiving accurate information was the highest function for advising. This was defined as "the ability to give students accurate information about degree requirements" (p. 336). They also found in that study the importance of connecting students to their academic, career, and life goals as they related to their majors. Similarly, Archambault, Forbes, and Schlosberg (2012) highlighted the following aspects of effective adviser training. First, the adviser should be trained and knowledgeable about requirements at the institutions which are most popular for their students to transfer to. Just as importantly though, they highlighted the fact that advisers must "encourage students to take advantage of all relevant opportunities and identify students in need of additional support" (p. 111).

Some of the participants in this study talked about poor experiences with faculty advisers. While any trained adviser in transfer student issues may be helpful, because there are so many different types of students at a community college, if community

colleges implemented transfer-specific advisers this may have led to more consistent and positive advising experiences. Having transfer-specific advisers may have helped these participants to ensure they were speaking with an adviser who was trained and knowledgeable about transfer student issues. Whether it was Nick's initial experience with a faculty member advising him incorrectly about how credits would transfer or Suzy's positive experience with developing a plan with her transfer adviser to ensure she was taking courses in the right order and ones that would transfer in, both highlight the value of an adviser trained in transfer student issues. Just as an adviser in a College of Business advises business students and likely has minimal knowledge, at best, of advising students in mechanical engineering, such could be said of the adviser for an automotive diesel technology adviser trying to advise a student interested in transferring to a university as a philosophy major.

Cuseo (2012) recommended implementing intrusive advising to ensure that all students are meeting with advisers regularly before they sign up for classes that may not count. Being required to attend an advising session was not something that this particular group seemed to highlight as necessary, but they did mention advising and the importance of the advising relationship. Some did rely on self-advising more than others, but it did not seem to lead to many negative consequences with the transfer of credit. A few did mention a lack of positive advising experiences, but most indicated successful transfer of most credits. Having said this, as highlighted by some of the difficulties faced in getting accurate transfer information, training advisers to be more aware of transfer-related concerns, policies, and procedures is important, as highlighted by the perspectives of the students in this study who used their advisers. Having an adviser present, or just

having "looked at a book", as one student mentioned in my study is not enough. Mya highlighted the immense amount of support that her community college adviser provided her in keeping her motivated. Elizabeth talked about developing a relationship with her adviser. While this was not everyone's experience, these few experiences support the recommendation made by Orozco, Alvarez, and Gutkin (2010). They found that often community college students identify the need for supportive counselors who "have time to listen to student needs, impart basic educational planning, provide support beyond academics, accept the student's cultural background, and understand the family, school, and work responsibilities of their counselees" (p. 726).

Archambault (2010) pointed out that faculty members have the ability to play an important role in helping students transition. That being said, she noted that many fail to assist these students in that preparation, and many fail to have meaningful conversations outside of the classroom. One recommendation she pointed out was to help provide faculty with greater knowledge so that they do not have to always refer students away. In part, this can be essential since there is no guarantee that the student will make contact with another person such as a counselor or adviser at the school. From the perspective of this group, this recommendation would be particularly critical. While some did mention meaningful relationships with a few faculty, many did not. For a few who did discuss their notion to transfer with a faculty member, most found it be to be helpful. The few who did not find the faculty interaction helpful often related their interaction with the faculty members in their initial experience at the community college where that person was serving as the adviser in that moment helping them select courses, rather than engaging in a conversation between a professor and student as Archambault described.

The few that had meaningful exchanges in this study tended to highlight those exchanges happening as part of their class, not an advising moment.

Few of the participants in this study are on a traditional 2+2 transfer path. Often, most were looking at 5-6 years or more to complete their degrees. Part of this was due to poor planning, while sometimes it was due to time off of studies at the community college. Nevertheless, academic planning is important. At a recent conference on transfer students, Grites pointed out that transfer students continually procrastinate thinking that they have time, which can often lead to disappointment and frustration throughout the transition due to any number of reasons (Grites, McKay, & Teranishi, 2015). The participants in this study often discussed the fact that getting their bachelor's degree was going to take more time than a traditional student who started directly at the university. Some of the reasoning was due to career change and as such the timing was not related to poor planning. Others, however, ran into some difficulties and could have transferred over earlier if they would have planned better. This study supports the recommendation made to help students plan earlier. If community college staff members can help identify students preparing to transfer sooner, they likely can help alleviate some of the challenges the students may later face.

Flaga (2006) and Grites recommended that community college should consider implementing a course to help students transfer out of the community college to be particularly insightful (Grites, McKay, & Teranishi, 2015). This course could provide a wide array of content, but ultimately looking at the experiences of the students in my study, the course could include resources on timelines for transferring, guidance on how to navigating the institution search, learning how to use online transfer resources,

bringing in members from admissions and advising from popular institutions their students feed into in order to receive direct advise, among others. The students who understood how to navigate these aspects of the transition tended to have more positive experiences and less confusion than those who did not.

No one in this study talked about the opportunity to participate in a course of this type, yet many felt overwhelmed about the amount of information they had to understand and many still had confusion late into their first semester at the university. In particular, Flaga (2006) discussed that for those with a feeder school close by, could have the seminar at the 4-year institution. As she pointed out "this would allow students to get firsthand experience with parking and campus logistics on a smaller scale than they will experience during their first full-time semester at the 4-year university" (p. 14). Parking was a major concern for many of the participants in this study, and as such from the perspective of this group, having this kind of experience may have helped some make the transition even more smoothly. This is not something that at this point Midwestern University has tried with its local community college feeder school.

Only two students had participated in a transfer day workshop at their institution. Flaga (2006) pointed out that having these type of events can be extremely helpful, "eliminating unpleasant surprises, increasing awareness of campus services, and beginning a relationship with an academic advisor" (p. 13). At the local feeder community college, they have two "how to transfer days" for students to get information about transferring to Midwestern University. While only two students in this study participated, they indicated positive experiences. Based on the experiences of those who participated in this study and had similar experiences, if community colleges host more

events like this with institutions their students tend to transfer to, they likely could help improve the students' transition.

Advising is not the only area that community colleges should be taking into consideration. As one of the themes highlighted, support is crucial. While often this was family and advising, there is a lot of potential for support in other ways from the community college. Townsend and Wilson (2006) talked about the value and need for community college transfer students to have social support and social integration, particularly at the university-level. This participants of this study support for this recommendation. For instance, most talked about the fact that at the community college they were not involved in anything beyond going to and from class. Few knew about any opportunities and many were just content working and coming home. Yet, when they arrived at the university, many felt as though being a student meant more to them than it did at the community college. While they did not necessarily say that a lack of the social integration at the community college led to a poor experience, it could help prepare them for the increased expectation to get involved that they mentioned exists at the university. Community colleges could capitalize on this by encouraging faculty members to engage with the students beyond the confines of the classroom experience. If faculty take an interest in making the educational experience beyond the classroom period, students may identify more as a student at the community college level, and indeed learn to engage more in opportunities that exist at college, particularly once the student transfers.

Cuseo (2012) provided recommendations for finding ways to connect students to faculty mentors, delivering timely transfer workshops, and developing a physical space for a transfer center where students considering transferring have a centralized location

for both support as well as ways to connect to other students looking to transfer as well.

A few participants in this study agreed with the idea that a transfer center would have

been helpful. By engaging students more at the community college level, they may help

students embrace the role of being a student more. Most of the participants in this study

discussed the fact that as they transitioned to the university they felt more like college

students. In some ways, this discounts their experience as a student at the community

college. The one student who lived on-campus at her community college had the most

connections and opportunities for engagement and involvement. While most participants

in this study did not discuss many of the recommendations by Cuseo (2012), the few that

were mentioned, such as a transfer center and positive faculty interactions, were valuable

in creating the sense of being a student at the community college.

Finally, the last recommendation I make to community colleges is develop

relationships with former students who transferred. This study only captured the

experiences of 12 participants, but there would be significant value for community

colleges to hear the broader perspectives of their students who have transferred to any 4-

year institution. By reaching out to their former students and asking about their

perceptions of the services and efforts they have in place at the community college, they

can then capture a broader understanding of who they are serving and how well they are

serving students who do transfer out to a 4-year program.

Recommendations for universities

Large land-grant institutions such as Midwestern University have a significant

responsibility to the community and the state in which they are in. Knowing that the

number of community college transfer students coming to these institutions will only

increase makes it even more important to ensure that there are appropriate services and support available.

One of the points made by a few of the participants was that it did not appear the institutions really worked together, or there was a lack of collaboration between the community college and the university. Based on these students' experiences, this collaboration could be crucial for a positive transition .Flaga (2006) highlighted the need for 2-year and 4-year schools to collaborate. She pointed out that as there is an increased value for 4-year universities having an active role with community college transfer students through all phases of their college experience both at the community college and the 4-year university. Students in this study discussed quite frequently their perceived lack of accurate information they received from their advisers at the community college. In many cases, the requirements they were aware of seemed to change from meeting to meeting with their advisers. If universities strive to connect with their feeder institutions, it is likely that they could develop a more seamless advising model that would benefit the students from the beginning of their academic journey to the end of it.

DiCesare and Younger (2015) shared their ongoing training model that is implemented within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. They noted that they bring together advisers and transfer specialists yearly for a conference, have annual orientation training for new specialists, and host regional transfer meetings to discuss updates that pertain to particular regions of the state. Since implementing some of these programs, students' perceptions of overall ease of transfer and overall satisfaction has gone up. Bridging the information between institutions can help to ensure that students are receiving timely and accurate information that can help ease the

frustration they may experience as they navigate their community college experience

through their transition to the new institution. Given the feedback by students in this

study, it would seem this aligns well to the recommendations made by Flaga (2006) as

well corresponds to work that is already happening at other institutions such the

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

A few participants in this study took advantage of visiting with staff from the

university during campus visit days at their community colleges. If more universities

implemented this type of outreach, it is possible more students would transfer and likely

have more accurate and meaningful information as they prepare to transfer. As

mentioned earlier, Flaga (2006) recommended regular visits to feeder schools. 4-year

universities need to have ongoing relations with students who are considering transferring

and need to make regular and intentional visits. This is a particularly effective way to

connect to potential transfer students and answer questions. Advisers from a 4-year

institution will go to the community college and discuss students' questions, provide

them with resources, and begin to make the early connections of a relationship as the

students are completing coursework at the community college. This institution currently

does this on a small scale, attending two events each year. I have gone to a number of

these visits at the community college in the same town as the university, and they often

have led to great discussions, although often the students who may need the interaction

the most do not end up attending. As was highlighted by two students in this study, the

meetings were valuable. In order to more effectively facilitate the transfer process,

community colleges should make targeted efforts to include these sessions on a regular

basis and develop ways to incorporate them as requirements into classes where there are

large amounts of pre-transfer students in attendance. This can help to increase the likelihood that students are making connections to the right people while they are still at the community college preparing to transfer. Only two students in this study participated, but their experiences were positive. Continuing to implement Flaga's (2006) recommendation would seem to be a highly effective practice.

Before the student even arrives at a transfer orientation, community college transfer students undoubtedly have concerns about their finances. The students in this study discussed, at length, the impact finances have had on their academic journey. Many things they mentioned included a lack of scholarships and financial aid, the increased cost of tuition, and feeling a need to work, among of others. If institutions restructured their financial aid packages, they may attract and recruit more community college students. As Archambault et al. (2012) pointed out, the student's experience with financial challenges may be real or perceived, but either way this viewpoint impacts student's choice to work or reduce credit hour loads. While this university does have some limited funding for transfer scholarships, the students ultimately experienced a financial challenge or increase in educational cost as was consistent with Archambault et al. (2012). Hossler, Ziskin, Gross, Kim, and Cekic (2009) made a concluding remark that larger financial aid packages undoubtedly will increase student persistence. As such, it would seem that this university and others may consider how their financial aid models work for community college transfer students and determine how to better accommodate the cost of education that these students experience.

Handel (2008) points out that financial aid systems are set to assume that families support students in their quest for a college education where in this study for most that

was not the case. Similarly, the cost of most aspects of a university are more expensive.

Some students in this study did mention that room and board was not more expensive

since they were living off campus, but nonetheless much of their tuition and fees were.

Not everyone in this study was using financial aid and a number were paying at least

some portion out-of-pocket. As Handel (2008) pointed out, some students do not fill out

the FAFSA form for a number of reasons, and universities, particularly admissions

offices need to help reiterate the importance of this step to community college students

preparing to transfer. Handel (2008) said rather plainly "feel like a financial aid expert?

Me neither. But at least you are able to direct your students to the financial aid resources

available to them, and, in doing so, serve them even more effectively than you already

do." (p. 16). Once a university can help show students the value of the investment of

their college degree, these students may feel less obligated to work full-time and could

focus more on working part-time while investing the remaining time in university

engagement.

At a recent conference on transfer students, many transfer professionals across the

country talked about the fact that orientation programs were not mandatory for transfer

students. Flaga (2006) highlighted the need for enhanced orientation programs that, in

part, provide opportunities for increased knowledge related to their major, adviser, and

campus. While some of the participants who did participate in orientation had

recommendations to improve the orientation, their perspective would be in line with this

recommendation. Orientation programs can play a key part for getting accurate

information and knowledge of support systems for students before they arrive on campus

for class. Whether the orientation be fully online, fully in-person, or a blending of the

two models, orientation ensures community college transfer students are not

disadvantaged from the beginning of their time at the new institution.

Many students in this study talked about the orientation moment, known at this

university as New Student Enrollment. While the non-traditional students appreciated

being separated from the traditional-aged students for some of the events, it was clear that

all students still need to receive a lot of the information when it comes to available

supports, policies and procedures at the new institution. Most still felt overwhelmed even

after the orientation moment, and many were still confused well into the end of the first

semester.

To ease the feeling of being overwhelmed with information received at the

orientation moment, institutions may consider implementing a transfer orientation course

similar to that recommended by Flaga (2006). While none of the participants in this

study indicated that they participated in the currently existing course at Midwestern

University, they all showed to have a lack of knowledge on some aspects of the college

experience. Considering multiple ways to implement the course may help to increase the

desire to enroll or participate. A recent session at the National Institute for the Study of

Transfer Students conference presented by Von Kaenel (2015) discussed this in more

detail. She highlighted that all transfer students take a module-based transition course

that highlights issues such as technology, Title 9, health and safety, services such as

libraries among others. She noted that there is also a quiz on the transfer guide. This

course could be online or in person depending upon the demographic make-up of the

transfer population for any institution, but having the course be mandatory would allow

for focusing on immediately-crucial details to be covered at the orientation moment.

Later, the additional information that may normally be covered briefly in orientations could be gradually introduced in a timely fashion throughout the first semester.

Participants in this study did not receive long-term value in their peer mentoring program, but many could see the value of an effectively ran mentoring program. If universities strategically develop mentoring programs for their community college transfer students, they may find that these students may have more enriching experiences. In a session at a recent transfer student conference, Heineman (2015) discussed the value of a transfer student network at the University of Minnesota. Many of the participants in my study did not find value in the peer mentoring program, and Heineman discussed ways to address some of these concerns. While admittedly working on a minimal budget, the elaborate process of mentor selection, training, and regular meetings between mentor and mentees have created a program that are serving students effectively. I appreciated the notion that the program was voluntary, but highly recruited for. Not all students need mentors, or want mentors, but those who do should be provided with highly-qualified mentors. As was the case with this program, Heineman (2015) found that their program helped students meet other new students, adjust to the university, and learn about campus resources. In addition to those, there was an increased sense of community and self-efficacy, and students who actively participated in the program had a GPA that was significantly higher than those who did not. Overall, the participants in this study did feel that if the program was more structured that there would have been significantly more benefit to the program beyond the first two weeks or so of the semester. Changes to this university's mentoring program have already began to be implemented as a result of feedback solicited during its first semester of existence.

Universities could consider how they more effectively implement programming

and outreach to non-traditional students. Often times community college transfer students

are older in age. The participants in this study were between 21-41 years old with an

average age of 25. As such, many felt unique or different. They were older, more

mature, had children, or worked full-time. The two participants with children in this

study specifically felt that the university, both in and out of the classroom, does not

provide the necessary involvement opportunities for those with children and families.

They particularly mentioned wishing they would have been able to involve their children

in programming. This would have allowed them to participate more in college activities

early on in their experience. Similarly, some felt like they did stand out in class

experiences. Some mentioned feeling as though assignments and lectures were geared

toward the traditional-aged student, and as such they were left wondering how they were

supposed to complete the assignment, or even how they were supposed to fit into the

classroom environment that even the professor had structured for traditional-aged

students.

Schaefer (2010) discussed the notion that universities need to be "adult-friendly

higher education environments" (p. 87). While they may not explicitly state within the

classroom, the overarching point she makes is that institutions need to provide support for

non-traditional students. They mention mentoring, connecting as a role model for

younger students, and interest groups. While some of these were not explicitly stated by

participants in this study, their statements echoed the importance of the ideas that

universities should work on making non-traditional community college transfer students

feel welcomed and a part of the whole educational experience. By making a concerted

effort to include older students and family-friendly programs, institutions may help provide more opportunities for community college transfer students, like those in this study, the opportunity to get involved and feel connected to the campus.

The recommendations that have been made in this section highlight one of the themes that emerged in this study: the transition takes time. These recommendations, as related to other recommendations in the literature, serve as a way to assist community college transfer students acclimate to campus and feel welcomed throughout the whole transition.

Recommendations on applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory

This study did indeed connect to aspects of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. In the five themes, the notion of the transition taking time relates to the 3-phase model of moving in, moving through, and moving out. 'Support is critical' is directly tied to one of the four coping resources. 'Maturity' and is directly tied to the self coping resource and 'personal responsibility' is directly tied to the strategies coping resource. 'Funding the college experience' is related to the situation coping resource. In looking at the coding in chapter four, many aspects of Schlossberg's Transition Theory surfaced, and as such, I feel it is particularly important to consider the use of the theory when working with community college transfer students.

The Transition Process

The transition process, as described in Schlossberg's Transition Theory is a 3-phase process. As described in earlier chapters, this process includes moving in, moving through, and moving out. Ultimately the cycle of transitions is continual, and as one moves out of a transition, they are subsequently moving into a new transition. This

particular model is important for higher education administrations for multiple reasons, but in large part because understanding the model will allow staff to assess where a student is in the transition and how that can impact their experience.

Looking at the initial phase, moving in, it is important that we understand the amount of new information being taken in at a given time. Students are learning how to be a student at the new institution, where things are at, how classes are formatted, who they can trust and associate with, and how to socialize among many things. Students used words like confusing, overwhelmed, overloaded, and intimidated among others. For some, it was even the newness of the campus environment that created problems. As such, we can use the model to understand and conceptualize where students are in the process and how to adapt the type of support provided based on their phase of transitioning. A person who is in the moving through phase may have learned the ropes of their new roles, but may have difficulties maintaining their motivation throughout the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). If an advisor or other institutional figure knows that the students is lacking motivation, yet has seemingly adapted to their new role and program, that student may need to be treated differently than the student who has yet to grasp the difference in being a student at the community college and being a student at the university. Nadine understood the importance of learning the ropes of being a university student, but that did not mean it would be easy. She said:

> I just knew I had to take it serious starting here. I think that mindset helped a lot.
> I can still feel my old habits, I want to slack and procrastinate and not go to class,
> but I think I'm making a lot of progress that I wouldn't have normally expected
> just to keep myself motivated and stay on top of it

If the staff member understands that this was Nadine's mentality, the conversation of her struggles would have been different and likely more productive, than if she presumed that Nadine did not understand the academic expectations of the university.

Figure 3 from Anderson et al., (2012) highlights the process. The reader can see the broad aspects of each phase and can conceptualize how a student would have different mentalities at each phase of the transition. The last point that Anderson et al. (2012) make is that the perception of the size of the transition can impact the magnitude of the effects the transition has on the individual. If roles, relationships, or routines are dramatically changed throughout the transition, it could negatively or positively impact the individual's life more drastically. Keeping in mind the phase of the transition the student is in, will undoubtedly positively impact the experience the student has.

FIGURE 2.2
Integrative Model of the Transition Process

<u>**MOVING IN**</u>

New Roles, Relationships,
Routines, Assumptions

Learning the Ropes;
Socialization

Hang-over Identity

<u>**MOVING OUT**</u>

Separation or Endings

Role Exit

Disengagement from Roles,
Relationships, Routines,
Assumptions

<u>**MOVING THROUGH:**</u>
<u>**BETWIXT OR BETWEEN**</u>

Period of Liminality

Groping for New: Roles,
Relationships, Routines,
Assumptions

Neutral Zone: Period of
Emptiness and Confusion

Cycle of Renewal

Hope and Spirituality

Figure 3: Illustrated Model of the three-phase transition process (moving in, moving through, moving out) described in Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Adapted from *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Schlossberg's Theory with Practice in a Diverse World* (p. 56). By M.L. Anderson, J. Goodman, and N. K. Schlossberg, 2012, New York: Springer. Copyright 2012 by Springer Publishing Company, LLC. Adapted with permission.

The 4-S Coping Resources

In a previous article, a colleague of mine and I talked extensively about the application of the 4-S Coping resources within advising. This study had many aspects that tied into this. All four of the coping resource categories (situation, self, support, and

strategies) came out within the axial coding phase of the data analysis. I want to connect some of the points made in McGill and Lazarowicz (2012) into this section.

Within the situation coping resource, there are a number of different characteristics. Timing, is one that refers to the student's perception of whether the timing was right. For instance, was the student admitted during their first application, or deferred? Were they transferring because they had to move for a partner, or were they transferring because they completed an associate degree? How does their perception of the timing impact their overall transition and view of the transition? Similarly, how big of a change are the environments for the participants? As McGill and Lazarowicz (2012) pointed out

> Assessing differences between pre- and posttransition environments can help advisors gauge the impact of the transition on the student (Goodman et al., 2006). Understanding these elements will help advisors tailor their approaches and referrals to meet the needs of individual students (p. 132).

As the root of the value of the 4-S model is the statement "this approach partially answers the question of why different individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 63). As the reader can see looking at Figure 4, if any one of those aspects are different (i.e. there is a lack of family support in the transition, or the triggering event of the transition is different), the transition can be different.
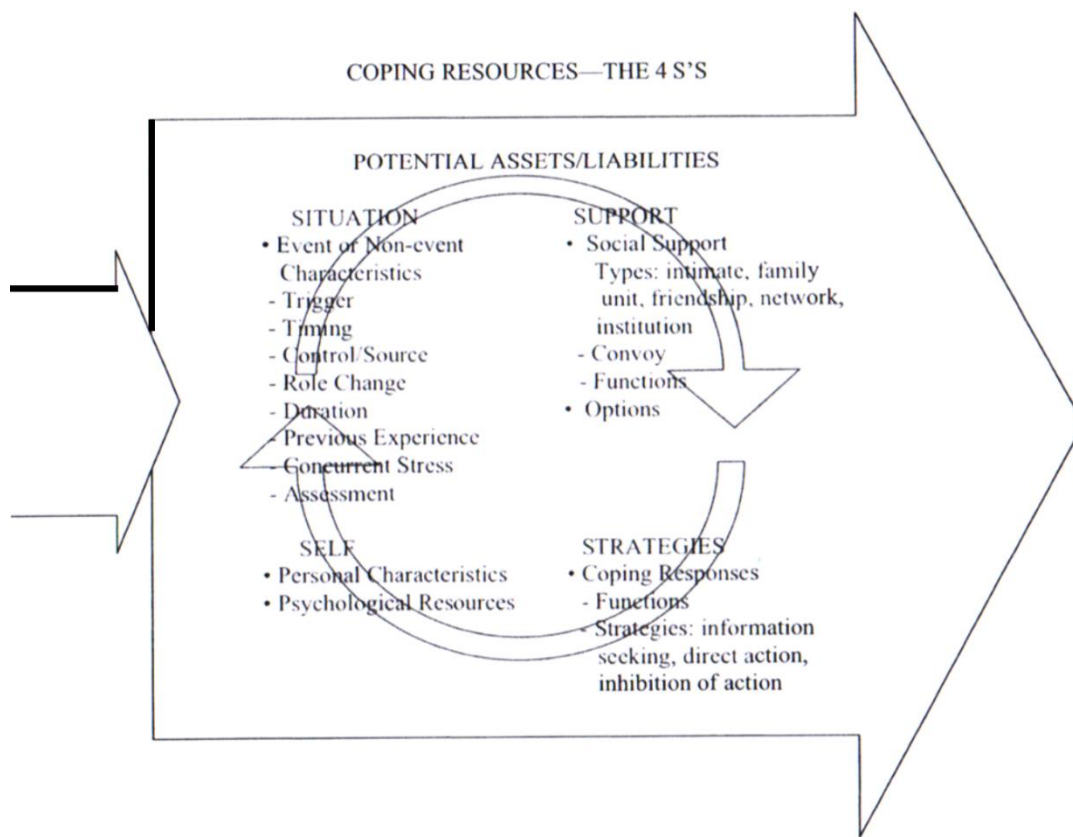
COPING RESOURCES—THE 4 S'S

POTENTIAL ASSETS/LIABILITIES

SITUATION
• Event or Non-event
  Characteristics
  - Trigger
  - Timing
  - Control/Source
  - Role Change
  - Duration
  - Previous Experience
  - Concurrent Stress
  - Assessment

SUPPORT
• Social Support
  Types: intimate, family
  unit, friendship, network,
  institution
  - Convoy
  - Functions
• Options

SELF
• Personal Characteristics
• Psychological Resources

STRATEGIES
• Coping Responses
  - Functions
  - Strategies: information
    seeking, direct action,
    inhibition of action

Figure 4: Illustrated outline of the potential assets and liabilities within each of the four coping resources. Adapted from *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Schlossberg's Theory with Practice in a Diverse World* (p. 62). By M.L. Anderson, J. Goodman, and N. K. Schlossberg, 2012, New York: Springer. Copyright 2012 by Springer Publishing Company, LLC. Adapted with permission.

I highlight a brief passage from our work that illustrates this point:

For example, one student began pre-requisite nursing classes at one institution

knowing he would need to complete the curriculum elsewhere; another student's

institution suddenly closed down due to financial hardships and she had only one

month to find a new institution; a third student graduated with a bachelor's

degree, was not accepted into law school, and is taking classes in a

postbaccalaureate program at another institution (McGill & Lazarowicz, 2012,

p.131-32).

By understanding the varying experiences students have with their transition with respects to their views of their assets and liabilities of the 4-S coping resources, students can be better served and overall improve the transition the student experiences. Some of the things advisers, or other staff members, can do to utilize this model in their work with students is tailoring their questions to ensure they can best understand the students perceptions of their assets and liabilities within each area. For instance, asking a student how the student has experienced the transition will give the adviser a strong indication of further probing questions to ask, while conceptualizing how to provide opportunities to add assets to their students' mindsets. Knowing their outlook can impact the amount of effort a student may be exerting in making the transition successful. Knowing the types of supports a student has or does not have can allow staff to better help co-construct "concrete strategies that bolster existing support systems" (McGill & Lazarowicz, 2012, p.133). While my professional work has focused around academic advising, this following quote, although originally intended for an advising audience, highlights the importance of any faculty and staff member in higher education using this theory and applying it to work with community college transfer students:

> By applying the tenets of the model to individual life situations, advisors can increase retention and improve the experience of transfer students. The advising process provides a powerful opportunity for transfer students to be educated, support, and understood during their transition. When students feel an adviser is concerned and know where to find the resources they need, they are more likely to succeed in their new academic environment (McGill & Lazarowicz, 2012, p. 133).

Recommendations for future research

There is a significant amount of literature on transfer students. There are multiple types of transfer students and the amount of community college transfer students will only continue to increase with the increased federal spotlight on the importance of community college education. As such, the scope of research with community college transfer students needs to continue to increase.

Institutions all over the country are admitting transfer students, but for some institutions it is more prevalent. For instance, take the University of California- Los Angeles (UCLA). During the 2013-2014 academic year, 33.1% of all new enrolled students at UCLA were transfer students, 25% of all UCLA undergraduate students, and 41% of all bachelor degree seeking recipients that year had entered as transfer students (University of California- Los Angeles, 2014). Meanwhile, only 12.5% of newly enrolled students at the University of Michigan in 2014 were transfer students (University of Michigan, 2014). Anecdotally one may think that institutions with higher rates of transfer students in their admitted classes would provide better support and thus a better transition for community college transfer students, but there is a lack of research that would indicate this.

As a qualitative study, this data was not meant to be generalizable to other institutions, I only used one institution in this setting, an institution where transfer students made up 17.4% of its entering new student population. In conversations with my adviser and other university colleagues, there is some agreement that this institution's state tends to be viewed as a "transfer-unfriendly" state, in part because there are no articulation agreements, there is not common-course numbering, and there are less

services directed toward transfer students in comparison to other states such as Texas, California and Florida. As such, research could compare student's transitional experiences between institutions and determine similarities and differences among institutional strategies and supports as well as understanding the differences in experiences between institutions who enroll higher percentages of transfer students versus those with lower admitted numbers, as well as comparing experiences for students who attend institutions in states with legislation on transfer articulations and those who do not.

I found little research that has used quantitative scales that measure Schlossberg's Transition Theory. Schlossberg and Kay developed a self-assessment tool and this tool related to the 4-S transition model (Archambault, 2010). According to Archambault (2010) the guide was meant to provide guidance to those with low scores. Archambault's (2010) dissertation modified this scale to be used with community college transfer students. Further work should be conducted with the Transfer Guide Modified (TGM) tool that Archambault (2010) utilized. Research should focus on assessing academic engagement, persistence, and graduation of students with varying differences within this self-assessment tool.

Another assessment that has been created is the Career Transition Inventory (CTI) (Heppner, 1998). Heppner discussed that the inventory was developed as a way to measure many of the individual aspects of a transition that Schlossberg's Transition Theory highlighted. This inventory measures the factors of readiness, confidence, personal control, support, and independence. Utilizing this scale, or similar assessment, one could quantitatively capture the CTI scores for each factor and then look to answer a

variety of questions. For instance, a follow-up analysis could look at the success rates of those with high scores in support (or any other factor) versus those with low scores. A mixed-method analysis could be done to capture the experiences of those who score differently within the different factors

An important area that could be modified and thus provide future research potential is narrowing the subset of community college transfer students. This study included both in-state and out-of-state transfer students, traditional and non-traditionally aged students, and those living on- and off-campus. By narrowing the demographic pool of the participants, the results may show some trends and information that would allow for better tailoring of services and support.

Lastly, this research captured student's transition in the moment it was occurring and it did look at multiple points in time as recommended by Anderson et al., (2012). That said, a retroactive analysis of a student's transition after they have graduated could provide a significant amount of useful data. Capturing the student's voice after they graduate, or drop out, could provide a significant amount of data to understand what aspects of Schlossberg's 4-S model were prevalent in their experiences as well as how the experience with transferring impacted their transition from college to the workplace.

Researcher Reflections

Throughout the process of the study, I began to wonder, can I truly make a difference with this study? Will my data mean anything? As I have continued to pour through the vast amount of literature related to transfer students, I have realized that this is truly one of the most important populations of students that large institutions, particularly state institutions, will see through their doors in the next few decades. Yet,

federal funding is not tied to transfer student data. As Grites said in a panel at a 2015

National Conference of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS),

"transfer students tend to be second-class citizens" (Grites et al., 2015). Universities

need to embrace a population that for some institutions may make up nearly 35% of their

incoming new students as is the case with UCLA.

While the data analysis is the most grueling part of the process, and I used

multiple methods to validate the data, I still could not stop thinking "is this data truly

accurate? I only interviewed 12 people. Can it really tell the story?" Then as I attended

the 2015 NISTS conference in February 2015 and was visiting with colleagues from

around the country and listening to two other former doctoral students share the results of

their dissertations, I came to realize that each institution will have different experiences.

The value of a qualitative study is that you can capture the lived experience for that group

and hope to make an impact, if anything, at that institution. Nevertheless, the results of

these other dissertations, some of which are mentioned in this paper, provide strikingly

similar results, indicating that indeed there are many common experiences that transfer

students are facing throughout the country.

One of the things that I really came to appreciate by the end of the study was the

participation by these students in my study. As I came to learn through the study, these

students do not have a lot of time for other activities, so if they do pick to be involved

with something, it has to be meaningful to them. Some made the point that they wanted

to let others know what their experiences were like so that the institution and future

students could hear their stories. Clark said "the school can learn what they're doing

wrong, what they're doing right…" Some really shared a lot about the value for

themselves in participating in the study, having the opportunity to reflect back on their

transition. Max pointed out that he does not really reflect a lot, "so this has been nice

because every couple of months I get to reflect on what I've been doing which is actually

helpful and a good thing to do." Meanwhile, Elizabeth said:

> it's nice to see that I have progressed…I feel like I was a little intimidated with
>
> the whole, coming into this and coming into the interview so it was kind of nice to
>
> see that I have gained confidence and grown as a person and as an academic
>
> student. I definitely feel like the interview has been kind of a nice way to see how
>
> I have progressed and how I have changed.

Nadine appreciated the opportunity to get involved in something and also reflect. "I

made another connection too. It's nice to do something outside of class that's on

campus… I never have enough time, to ever reflect on really anything in my life so it's

nice to be able to do it here …"

Jefferson noted he wanted to read the study when I was done. Mya even

highlighted that she was so excited to know the results of this study would be used and

published. They truly valued the time spent to help me out, and it has become my

responsibility to ensure that their experiences are heard and that I take what I have

learned from the study and try to implement what changes I am able to within this

particular institution.

When they shared these comments in the final interview, I could only then realize

that not only had the students impacted my personal educational goals and helped me, but

that I was indeed having the opportunity to subsequently help them. At the beginning I

was so focused on finding participants for my study to complete my program and impact

the university that I failed to appreciate the value that the students who participated would feel from the study.

As always, we will be our worst critics, and I certainly know there are many things that I could go back and do differently, or have adjusted to this study. Yet, research is a constant process, one that anyone in higher education should continually be engaged in. As Creswell (2008) pointed out, research provides many benefits including adding to our knowledge, improving practice, and informs policy debates. My hope is that this study will help add to the body of knowledge of community college transfer students, at least at this institution and help inform the practices happening there. As I continue my professional career, it is my hope to continue to add to the body of research and contribute to the literature on improving the transfer students' experiences.

I have learned a lot through this process, not only about a group of students, but about myself. Perhaps that is a large part of the process of the dissertation. As Bryant (2004) concluded his book:

> Once you have finished climbing your mountain, you will understand the truthfulness of what Daumal says to us. You will know more about yourself and others. You will know more about how things work. I encourage you to reflect on what you have seen during your climb and to remember this knowledge as you move into the next chapter of your life and career (p. 150).

I have learned much, but have more to learn. I will keep my mind open and always step back to reflect and ask "what can I learn from this and where can it take me?"

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Appendix A- IRB Approval Letter

University of Nebraska Lincoln

March 20, 2014

Tony Lazarowicz
Department of Educational Administration
107 OLDH, UNL, 68588-0330

Brent Cejda
Department of Educational Administration
141C TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20140314125EX
Project ID: 14125
Project Title: Exploring Transitions for Community College Transfer Students at UNL

Dear Tony:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46). Your project has been approved as an exempt protocol, category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 03/20/2014.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Becky R. Freeman

Sincerely,
Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB

Appendix B- Recruitment Materials to Potential Participants

E-mail #1 Header: Research Participation Request- Community College Transfer Students Needed

Good morning,

      I am sending the email message below on behalf of Tony Lazarowicz, who is a doctoral student at ▇▇▇▇ and my advisee. The policy of ▇▇▇▇ is not to provide email addresses to students who are completing their dissertation studies. Rather, the advisor receives the addresses and sends the message. Please read the message below and consider participating. Your participation will not only assist Tony, but will help ▇▇▇▇ and future transfer students. Please respond to Tony at Tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or you may reach him by telephone at (712)490-8458. Thank you for your consideration. BC

Hello student,

      My name is Tony Lazarowicz and I am PhD student in Educational Leadership and Higher Education here at ▇▇▇▇. I am currently completing my dissertation to better understand the transition that community college transfer students have as they transfer to ▇▇▇▇. This dissertation has the potential to assist higher education professionals in our understanding about the transition you experienced here to ▇▇▇▇, and give us better information about how to assist you through the transition from your previous institution to ▇▇▇▇.

      I are asking that you would sit with me for 3-1 hour long interviews (1 in September 2014; 1 in October 2014; and 1 in December 2014) in which you will have the opportunity to share with me your experience through your transition from the community college to the ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇. You may also volunteer to enhance our understanding of your transition by completing journaling about your experience between the interview sessions. Participation will take place at a location that is co-selected by the researcher and yourself that is quiet with minimal distractions and convenient for you (i.e. study lounge within the library, an office on campus, or other similar location within the ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ campus).

      At all times during this research your confidentiality will be respected. Those who choose to participate will be entered into a drawing for 1 of 2- $50 gift cards to either Amazon.com or ITunes. This research will also allow you to have the unique opportunity to share your own story about your transition and help shape the experience of future transfer students here at ▇▇▇▇.

      This project has been approved by the Institutional Research Board of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Project Number 20140314125EX).

　　　　If you would be interested in willing to participate in this study, please contact me by September 12 to set up a time to meet with me. My e-mail is Tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or you may reach me by telephone at (712)490-8458.

　　　　Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will be willing to become a collaborator in this research with me by sharing your own story about your experience. Have a great day!

Tony Lazarowicz
PhD Student in Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Dr. Brent Cejda
Professor and Department Chair of Educational Administration

E-mail #2 Header: Follow Up- Share Your Story- Community College Transfer Students Needed

Good morning,

I am sending a follow-up to the email from last week. Tony is looking for additional community college transfer students to participate in his dissertation study. Please read the email below and consider participating. You can help Tony, ███, and future transfer students! Pay it forward.

Please respond to Tony at Tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or you may reach him by telephone at (712)490-8458. Thanks and have a good weekend.
BC

Hello student,

      Last week, I sent you an e-mail asking you to consider joining me in my dissertation project to help better understand the transition experience you have had to ███. As I said in my previous e-mail, my name is Tony Lazarowicz and I am PhD student in Educational Leadership and Higher Education here at ███. I feel this dissertation has the potential to assist higher education professionals in our understanding about the transition you experienced here to ███, and give us better information about how to assist you through the transition from your previous institution to ███.

      If you are willing to participate, I are asking that you would sit with me for 3-1 hour long interviews (1 in September 2014; 1 in October 2014; and 1 in December 2014) in which you will have the opportunity to share with me your experience through your transition from the community college to the ██████████████████. You may also volunteer to enhance our understanding of your transition by completing journaling about your experience between the interview sessions.

      Those who choose to participate will be entered into a drawing for 1 of 2- $50 gift cards to either Amazon.com or ITunes. This research will also allow you to have the unique opportunity to share your own story about your transition and help shape the experience of future transfer students here at ███.

      This project has been approved by the Institutional Research Board of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Project Number 20140314125EX).

      If you would be interested in willing to participate in this study, please contact me by September 19 to set up a time to meet with me. My e-mail is Tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or you may reach me by telephone at (712)490-8458.

      Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will be willing to become a collaborator in this research with me by sharing your own story about your experience. Have a great day!

Tony Lazarowicz
PhD Student in Educational Leadership and Higher Education
Dr. Brent Cejda
Professor and Department Chair of Educational Administration

E-mail #3 Header: Seeking Additional Participants for my Community College Transfer Study

Hello,

First off, I want to thank you again for your help with my study on the transition of community college transfer students. I am learning so much about the experiences so far through the interviews I have done and I look forward to the upcoming interviews I have as well.

I'll be sending another e-mail out later this week to begin setting up times for the October interview, but in the meantime I am trying to find a few more participants for the study to document as many community college transfer student experiences as possible. Do you know of anyone you have met or went to your previous institution with that transferred to ███ this semester as well? If you think they may be interested, I'd love if you would be willing to forward my information on to them. It would be great to get to speak with as many people as possible. If someone you forward this to or you know would like to visit about their experience, please have them contact me at tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or on my phone at 712-490-8458.

As a reminder, the participants would need to be

    A. 19 years old or order
    B. A community college transfer student with at least 12 semester hours of credit
    C. Full-time student here at ███ in the fall 2014 semester

I again want to thank you for helping with this study. Have a great week.

Flyer Distributed at New Student Enrollment

███ is a Division I Research Institution

- Will you be at least 19 years old when you arrive this fall?
  - Want to get involved in research going on right now?

Tony Lazarowicz is a PhD Student in Educational Leadership and Higher Education is completing his dissertation on the experience of community college transfer students to the ████████████████████.

If you have transferred at least 12 credit hours, are planning to attend ████ full-time, and your previously attended institution was a community college, please consider participating in this study this upcoming fall to help better understand what your experience is like as you transition to ███.

More detailed information will be mailed to your e-mail address on university record. For more information, contact Tony at Tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or by phone at (712)490-8458.

Appendix C- Informed Consent Form

IRB# 20140314125EX
Date Approved: 03/20/2014
Valid Until: 03/20/2019

UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Lincoln®

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Title of Research:
Exploring Transitions for Community College Transfer Students at ▮

Purpose of Research:
This study will explore the transition experience of community college transfer students who transferred to a large research I institution. You must be 19 years of age or older and have transferred from a community college during the fall 2014 semester in order to participate in this research.

Procedures:
Participation in this study will require approximately 3 hours of your time for the interview procedure. You will be asked to participate in three tape-recorded interviews that will include one in September and October, and a follow-up interview in December. Participation will take place at a location that is co-selected by the researcher and the participant that is quiet with minimal distractions and convenient for the participant (i.e. study lounge within the library, an office on campus, or other similar location within the ▮ campus).

Additionally, each participant will be given the option to participate in an additional portion of the research through a journaling experience. I understand that this journaling will be done in a Microsoft Word document and then e-mailed to the primary researcher. I understand that I will have the option to determine what information I will include in these journals such as written commentaries about events; participation in and reaction to individual meetings; and general observations.

Should I choose to participate in journaling, I agree to submit at least one comment on a weekly basis during the data collection phase of the research (3 months). I have been informed that the research investigator will review journaling comments on a weekly basis over the course of the 3 month data collection period. Comments will be retrieved weekly and stored in a secure file maintained by the investigator.

Lastly, I agree to allow the university to provide the primary researcher with university-collected data including my transfer institution name, number of credits completed at the previous institution, transfer GPA, age at transfer, class standing, and gender.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. If any emotional distress arises as a result of the conversations in the interviews, the researcher will refer the participant to available resources for further support.

Benefits:
While there are no financial benefits for this project to the participant, the results of this study will help provide staff at the University with a better understanding of the transition that community college transfer students experience as they arrive at ▮, provide a potential theoretical orientation to guide practitioners in their work with transfer students, and help provide better understanding of the experience, support, and strategies that community college transfer students need and use during their transition to ▮

141 Teachers College Hall / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / P.O. Box 880360
(402) 472-0989

Confidentiality:
Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential. During the pre-study questionnaire, all participants will choose pseudonyms (names that are not your real name, a nickname, or immediate family member's name) which will be used in all aspects of the study. Before the investigator receives any data from the university, all data will have any personally identifiable information removed. With any journals submitted, all data will be transferred into a new document to best protect the electronic footprint of the document. All data will be securely encrypted and stored on a computer. All data will be kept for 3 years after successful completion of the dissertation, and then the raw information will be deleted from the computer, per Health and Human Services research guidelines.

Compensation:
There is no financial compensation for participating in this research. However, All participants will be entered into a random drawing for 1 of 2- $50 gift cards to either Amazon or ITunes, to be selected at the completion of the study. All participants who choose to complete the journaling portion of the study will be entered into an additional random drawing for 1 - $25 gift card to either Amazon or ITunes, to be selected at the completion of the study. The drawings and notification of the winners will occur in January 2015.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research at anytime by contacting Tony Lazarowicz at Tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or by phone at (712)490-8458. You may also contact Dr. Brent Cejda at bcejda2@unl.edu or by phone at (402)472-0989. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6926 or irb@unl.edu.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

_____   _____
Signature of Research Participant   Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)
Tony Lazarowicz, Tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu or (712)490-8458
Coordinator- College of Arts and Sciences

Brent Cejda, Bcejda2@unl.edu or (402)472-0989
Professor and Chair
Department of Educational Administrator

141 Teachers College Hall / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / P.O. Box 880360
(402) 472-0989

Appendix D- Pre-Study Questionnaire

Pre-Study Questionnaire

Choose a Pseudonym (a fictitious name you would like to be referred as throughout the research study for confidentially purposes. This name should not be: a) your real name; b) a nickname that you associate with; or c) the name of an immediate family member).

_____

Personal Demographics Section

1) Please indicate your age at the time you transferred to ██ _____

2) Please indicate your hometown _____

3) Please select your gender
   - ☐ female
   - ☐ male
   - ☐ transgender-female
   - ☐ transgender-male
   - ☐ other: _____
   - ☐ prefer not to answer

4) Please indicate your race (select all that apply)
   - ☐ Hispanic/Latino
   - ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
   - ☐ Asian
   - ☐ Black or African American
   - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Biracial/ multiracial
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

5) Are you currently
   - ☐ Single
   - ☐ Unmarried, living with partner
   - ☐ Married
   - ☐ Separated, divorced, or widowed

6) For how many children are you the primary care taker?
   - ☐ None
   - ☐ 1
   - ☐ 2
   - ☐ 3
   - ☐ 4 or more

7) What is your military status

☐ None

☐ ROTC, cadet, or midshipman at a service academy

☐ In Active Duty, Reserves, or National Guard

☐ A discharge veteran NOT serving in Active Duty, Reserves, or National Guard

8) Is English your native language?

☐ Yes

☐ No

9) Where are you living?

☐ On-campus (residence hall)

☐ On-campus (Greek)

☐ Off-campus

☐ With parents

10) Do you intend to work while you are completing your degree at ████?

☐ Yes, on campus

☐ Yes, off campus

☐ Not at the moment, but may look eventually

☐ No, not intending to work

11) If you are intending to work or do work, how many hours a week on average will you work?

☐ 1-10 hours/ week

☐ 11-20 hours/week

☐ 21-30 hours/ week

☐ 30+ hours / week

☐ Not applicable, not intending to work

12) What is the highest level of formal education obtained by either of your parents? (Mark one)

☐ Junior high/Middle school or less

☐ Some high school

☐ High school graduate

☐ Postsecondary school other than college

☐ Some college

☐ College graduate

☐ Some graduate school

Transfer-Related Questions

1) What type of institution did you last attend?

☐ Community college in Nebraska

☐ Community college outside of Nebraska

2) Had you previously applied to UNL, but were not admitted at that time?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

3) Not including UNL, how many other institutions have you taken college courses at?

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4 or more

4) What was your GPA at your previous institution?

☐ 4.0

☐ 3.50-3.99

☐ 3.00-3.49

☐ 2.50-2.99

☐ 2.00-2.49

☐ Below a 2.0

5) How many credits did you complete at your previous institution?

Note: 1 semester credit = 1.5 quarter credits

☐ 0-11

☐ 12-26

☐ 27-52

☐ 53-88

☐ 89+

6) Did you attend any of the following events prior to arriving at UNL?

☐ How to Transfer Day

☐ Red Letter Day

☐ vidual campus visit

☐ UNL Transfer day at your previous institution

7) How did you participate in New Student Enrollment?

- ☐ In person
- ☐ Mail-in
- ☐ Came after NSE days were over and did late NSE registration

8) How many credits are you enrolled in for your first semester at ███? _____

9) Are you receiving any form of financial aid here at ███? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Yes - grants or scholarships (university or government granted)
- ☐ Yes- scholarships (private)
- ☐ Yes - Federal Work Study
- ☐ Yes- loans (Perkins, Stafford, Direct PLUS, private)
- ☐ No - paying all out of pocket
- ☐ Unsure

10) Please circle whether you are participating in any of the following transfer student related opportunities:

- ☐ Tau Sigma
- ☐ Transfer Learning Community
- ☐ Transfer Advantage CEHS 10 course
- ☐ None

11) What is the highest degree that you intend to obtain at any institution (not just at ███)? (Mark one)

- ☐ None
- ☐ Vocational certificate
- ☐ Associate (A.A. or equivalent)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
- ☐ Master's degree (M.A., M.S., etc.)
- ☐ Ph.D. or Ed.D.
- ☐ M.D., D.O., D.D.S., or D.V.M.
- ☐ J.D. (Law)
- ☐ B.D. or M.DIV. (Divinity)
- ☐ Other

Thank you very much for taking time to complete this survey. It will help me to best represent the students who participated in this study.

Appendix E- Interview Protocols

First Interview

Interview Overview (repeated each time):
Name: _____
Date, Time, and Location: _____
Other Observations: _____

Interview Purpose:
1. To establish trust and rapport with the participant
2. To introduce the topic and get initial thoughts on their transition experience.
3. To understand the situation that led up to the transition to ████

Interview Procedure:
Before the interview: Ask the participant for permission to tape record the interview. Set up a time that allows for the interview to go long if need be. Set up a place that is quiet with minimal distractions and convenient to the participant, such as a study lounge within the library, an office on campus, or other similar location within the ████████ ████████████ campus.

1. Welcome participant.
2. Introduce myself and the research study.
3. Explain the interview process.
      a. The interview will take approximately one-hour.
      b. The conversation will be kept confidential.
      c. I will be tape recording the interview and taking notes, but individual identity will be kept confidential.
      d. Participant will be provided with a transcript of the interview in order to clarify, add, or edit our interview.
      e. Participant should select a pseudonym to keep this as confidential as possible.
4. Have participant review and sign the informed consent form.
5. Clarify and review if they have any questions.
6. Begin interview.
7. At end of interview, stop recorder.
8. Thank participant and confirm next interview

Potential Questions/Topics:
1. Introductions/describe the study.
Note: the following questions are geared toward a more broad understanding of their experience at the previous institution. A more detailed review of their experience at the previous institution will occur in interview two.
2. What school did you transfer from?

Experience at previous institution

1. Talk about your college background leading up to your enrollment at █████
2. What types of things were you involved with at your community college?
    a. How did you decide to get involved in these things?
3. How did you feel about your experience at your previous institution(s)?

Note: the following questions are geared toward a more broad understanding of their experience in transitioning. A more detailed review of their transition will occur in interview two.

Experience transitioning from previous institution to transfer institution

1. What is your major?
    a. How did you decide on your current major?
    b. Was this your intended major at your previous institution?
2. Which courses did you take for your major at the previous institution?
    a. How did these courses match with the courses needed at █████ for graduation?
    b. Are you satisfied with how your credits transferred in?
3. At what point did you start preparing for your transfer to the new institution and how much time did you devote?
    a. Was the timing right for you to transfer?
    b. What was your initial view of the transfer? Was it negative, positive, neutral?
4. What steps did you take in preparing for your transfer?
5. How did you decide that this was the institution to transfer to?
    a. Did you share your plans with family/friends/ or significant others? If so, how did they feel about your decision?
    b. How much input did you receive from them while making your decision?
    c. Did you have any conversations with your professors, advisers, or mentors about your plans to transfer?
6. Did you receive any assistance or guidance regarding transferring?
    a. How important was it to receive assistance or guidance?
    b. If receiving guidance is important, who did you want to receive assistance or guidance from?
7. What did you look forward to as you prepared to transfer?
8. What did you dread as you prepared to transfer?
9. What significant people, places, or events (good and/or bad) have been critical throughout your transition?
10. Outside of school, how did you spend your time?

Final Question

1. Is there anything that I did not ask regarding your transition leading up to arriving at █████, that you would like me to know?

Second Interview

Interview Overview (repeated each time):

Name: _____

Date, Time, and Location: _____

Other Observations: _____

Interview Purpose:
1. To establish a more clear understanding of the transition
2. To understand the participant's knowledge and use of resources
3. To understand the participants perceived support systems
4. To understand the meaning and importance the students places within each aspect of the transition and identify the perceived assets and liabilities of each as determined by the participants.

Interview Procedure:
Before the interview: Ask the participant for permission to tape record the interview. Set up a time that allows for the interview to go long if need be. Set up a place that is quiet with minimal distractions and convenient to the participant, such as a study lounge within the library, an office on campus, or other similar location within the ███████ ███████████ campus.

1. Welcome participant and thank them for their continued participation.
2. Explain the interview process for the second interview.
   a. The interview will take approximately one-hour.
   b. The conversation will be kept confidential.
3. Clarify and review if they have any questions about the study.
4. Begin interview.
   a. Before starting new questions, ask whether they had anything they wanted to clarify from the first interview with regards to any of their responses
   b. Continued interview with new questions
5. At end of interview, stop recorder.
6. Thank participant and confirm final interview

Potential Questions/Topics:
High Impact Practices at ████
1. What types of things have you heard about that exist at ████?
   a. What things have you chosen to participate in?
   b. Why have you chosen to participate in/ not participate in those things?
2. Did you consider joining the Transfer Student Learning Community?
   a. If you are participating, why did you decide to enroll in this learning community?
   b. If not, why did you choose not to enroll in this learning community?
3. Did you consider participating in the Transfer Student- Transitions course?
   a. If you are participating, why did you decide to enroll in this course?
   b. If not, why did you choose not to enroll in this course?

4. In any of your classes, have you formed or participated in any group projects or developed any study groups?
    a. If so, how did you form these study groups?
    b. Did your experience in these groups impact your overall experience at ███? If so, how?
5. Have you had the opportunity to participate in any research (in class or individually)?
    a. If so, how did this experience come about?
    b. If not, why have you chosen not to participate in research?
6. Have you participated in any service learning or volunteering while in college either individually or part of a class, student group, or otherwise?
    a. If so, how did you learn of these opportunities?
7. Have you participated in or plan on participating in any internships?
    a. If yes, how did you learn about this opportunity? Why did you decide to participate in this opportunity?
    b. If you plan to participate, how do you intend to determine what internship you will participate in?
8. Is there anything you wish you could have the opportunity to do here at ███ that is not available to you?

Institutional Support Systems
1. What types of assistance do you need to be successful (as a student, family member, employee, etc)
2. What services exist at ███ to help transfer students?
    a. Where do you most often go for assistance?
3. What services did you find most useful? Please elaborate.
4. What services did you not find useful? Please elaborate.
5. Who do you most often consult with for academic guidance? Please elaborate

Other Support Systems
1. What most important forms of support (needs, types, and functions) do community college transfer students perceive they need for a successful transition?
1. What is the role and influence of your family as you have transitioned? Friends?
2. Whom do you spend your time?
3. Can you share with me anything about your social life and hobbies.
4. Do you work? If so, how has work impacted your transition at ███?

View of Self as a Community College Transfer Student
1. Looking back on your transition to ███, do you wish you would have done anything differently?
2. How do you feel being a transfer student will impact your college experience at ███?
3. Do you think being a transfer student provides any advantages that students who started at ███ do not have?
4. Do you think being a transfer student provides any limitations on you in any ways?

5. Do you think being a transfer student will help you or hinder you in any ways in your future career path?

Strategies Implemented by Community College Transfer Students
1. What strategies have you engaged in throughout your transition?
    a. Were any of these particularly useful?
    b. Were there any strategies that you found to be ineffective?
    c. Do you feel that students who started here at █████ have used different strategies in navigating the university in comparison to yourself?
    d. Did you have to adjust any roles, or assume any new roles, as you transferred?
        i. How have you changed roles since transitioning to █████?
        ii. Did you give up/ leave behind any roles you had while attending your community college? What did this mean for you?
        iii. How has your life been different since you transferred?
    e. In looking back as your transition, is there anything you wish you would have done differently?

Final Questions
1. Overall, how would you describe your experience at █████ so far and the transition you have had in coming to █████?
2. Is there anything that I did not ask your transition while being here at █████ that you would like me to know?

Third Interview

Interview Overview (repeated each time):
Name: _____
Date, Time, and Location: _____
Other Observations: _____

Interview Purpose:
1. To clarify any gaps in information identified over the past two interviews
2. To follow up on any information and topics left unanswered

Interview Procedure:
Before the interview: Ask the participant for permission to tape record the interview. Set up a time that allows for the interview to go long if need be. Set up a place that is quiet with minimal distractions and convenient to the participant, such as a study lounge within the library, an office on campus, or other similar location within the ███████ ████████████ campus.

1. Welcome participant and thank them for their continued participation.
2. Explain the interview process for the third interview.
    a. The interview will take approximately one-hour.
    b. The conversation will be kept confidential.
3. Clarify and review if they have any questions about the study.
4. Begin interview.
    a. Before starting the discussion, ask whether they had anything they wanted to clarify from the second interview with regards to any of their responses
5. At end of interview, stop recorder.
6. Thank participant. Will provide a copy of the transcript for their review and I will solicit any feedback at one point before the final review of data is complete.

Potential Questions/Topics:
1. Discuss themes and categories that emerged as a result of analyzing the data and interpreting concepts and themes from the first two interviews.
    a. Do these themes seem to make sense?
    b. Do you feel the overall account is accurate?
2. Were there other events, experiences, or meanings that we have not previously discussed?
3. Follow-Up: Ask remaining questions that arose from the previous interview.
4. We have discussed many areas relating to your experience as a transfer student. As you have reflected on your experience, looking back, what meaning has this transition had on you?
5. How was this interview experience for you?
6. Do you feel there is something that I should have asked but didn't?
7. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix F: Journal Entry Document

Journal Entry

Please make sure to only include your pseudonym in this document. E-mail it to
tonylaz@huskers.unl.edu. Upon receiving this e-mail, the researcher will upload the entry
into the secure folder and delete the original e-mail. If you have questions, please contact
Tony Lazarowicz at the e-mail above.

Note: Please make sure to not include your actual name in any of the text within the
journal entry.

Psyeduonym : _____

Date:_____

Appendix G: Transcription Confidentiality Agreement

UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Lincoln

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Exploring Transitions for Community College Transfer Students at █
IRB Project Number: 20140314125EX

This research is being undertaken by Tony Lazarowicz, PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The purpose of the research is to explore the experience that community college transfer students have as they transition to the █████████████

As a transcriber of this research, I understand that I will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews. The information on these recordings has been revealed by interviewees who agreed to participate in this research on the condition that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentially agreement.

I agree not to share any information on these recordings, about any party, with anyone except the Researcher of this project. Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I confirm that I will adhere to the agreement in full.

I, _____ Nicole A. Effle _____ agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the content of the interviews in any form or format (e.g. mp3 files, CDs, transcripts) with anyone other than the Researcher.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g. mp3 files, CDs, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g. mp3 files, CDs, transcripts) to the Researcher when I have completed the transcription tasks.
4. After consulting with the Researcher, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher (e.g. CDs, information stored on my computer hard drive).

Transcriber:

Nicole A. Effle	*(signature)*	9/15/14
(print name)	(signature)	(date)

Researcher:

Tony Lazarowicz	*(signature)*	9/17/2014
(print name)	(signature)	(date)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.