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Understanding the Academic and Social Experience of a Transfer Student at a Small, Midwest, Residential Institution

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL
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Abstract

Transfer students often struggle to become engaged and involved in higher education. Research is clear that academic and social engagement in transfer students is lower than non-transfer (native) students (Kuh, 2003; Townsend, 2008). Furthermore, literature emphasizes the importance students being engaged and involved (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2001). The present study connected the theories of engagement and involvement to the framework of student departure (Tinto, 1988) to understand how engagement and involvement fit in academic and social integration. The study attempted to understand how transfer students engage academically and socially at a small, Midwest, residential institution. Practically, the research combined an analysis of three data sets from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) with eight qualitative interviews while following a case study design. Results from the quantitative study reported that the transfer population was as engaged with faculty as native students, although transfer students felt less supported by the campus environment. The qualitative component yielded that transfer students were academically engaged in their major courses and through their professor's personal interest, care, and accommodation. Transfer students were socially engaged by their floor communities; involvement in clubs, leadership opportunities, and athletics; and through all-campus programming. Recommendations for practice include creating a transfer student mentoring program, increasing attention to mid-year transfer students, and housing transfer students together.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Transfer student populations are consistently on the rise in higher education,

becoming an even larger group than native (non-transfer) students at some institutions

(Kuh, 2003). This trend shows no indication of slowing or stopping (Kuh, 2003). These

students rarely receive the attention or support needed to make a smooth transition to new

institutions (Laanan, 2007). Moreover, few researchers study this group, which prevents

the creation of best practices (Laanan, 2007). The goal of the present research was to

understand the transfer student experience at a small, Midwest university, and ultimately

to make several suggestions for how to improve the transfer student experience at similar

institutions.

Transfers as a Rising Trend

Reasons for transferring are abundant, but the most common rationale is financial.

The government has reacted to the critical financial state of higher education by

implementing gainful employment legislature, regulation evaluating the cost of college

against graduate employment payment. Institutions are being expected to equip their

students with sufficiently high paying jobs to off-set the cost of their undergraduate

experience (PBS, 2010). In the near future, gainful employment legislature is also likely

to affect four-year institutions, not only for-profit institutions (PBS, 2010). This

legislature addresses the hopelessness many college graduates feel regarding their student

debt, which has increased to over one trillion dollars nationwide (Martin & Lehren, 2012).

Until such changes are made, the economic solution devised by most students is to transfer from an inexpensive community college, so that less time is spent at a more costly four-year institution. In fact, "roughly half of all students in postsecondary education start at a community college" (Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011, p.265). Community college students are not the only population transferring. For reasons other than tuition costs, some college students are transferring from one four-year to another four-year institution (Bahr, 2009; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). In 2004, 40% of the college seniors participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) began their post-secondary education at a different institution (Kuh, 2003). Some universities have a staggeringly high population of over 70% transfer students in their graduating class (Kuh, 2003).

Transfer Student Struggles

The necessity to research transfer students derives from several factors. First, transfer students' transitions are complex (Laanan, 2007). Little is known about the transfer experience, but studies show transfer students to be less engaged than their native counterparts (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Kuh, 2003). Transfer students struggle to adjust to new college settings both academically and socially (Ishitani, 2008; Kuh, 2003; Laanan, 2007; Li, 2010; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend, 2008). More specifically, transfer students are often ill-equipped to handle the culture, expectations, and academic challenges of their new institutions (Carter, Coyle, & Leslie, 2007; Ishitani, 2008; Kuh, 2003).

Importance of Transfer Student Retention

Studying the transfer student experience can provide valuable retention information for institutions. The following implications are made based on the premise that socially- and academically-engaged students graduate (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Pragmatically, a more complete understanding of the transfer experience yields better practices for supporting this growing student population; consequently, transfer retention rates should improve due to enhanced student care. Ideally, improving transfer students' ability to integrate academically and socially will encourage them to remain at the institution and graduate (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Institutions with improved retention can use transfer student tuition to continue to support the institution's mission, as well as assist these transitioning students.

Gap in the Literature

Institutionally, colleges and universities desire to support their students, and best practice literature is often foundational in this effort. Much research investigates engagement patterns in lateral and vertical transfer students (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007), the "transfer shock" phenomena (Hillis, 1965; Ishitani, 2008), and involvement differences between native and transfer students (Wang & Wharton, 2010). In addition, research has been conducted at a variety of institution types, including community colleges (Adelman, 2005; Glass & Harrington, 2002) and large state institutions (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). However, few researchers have studied the transfer student experience at a small, residential institution. The current study sought to fill some of the gap in this literature.

Description of Study

The current study evaluated the transfer student experience on the basis of academic and social engagement. The research was a mixed-methods case study, combining quantitative results from relevant NSSE benchmarks with qualitative transfer student interviews. Research demonstrates the positive relationship between engagement and student learning (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006). For this reason, NSSE results were used to provide an institutional background presenting the past engagement levels of transfer students compared to native students. Using NSSE results enhanced transfer student interviews and increased the depth and understanding of the present research. The institution's historical background informed survey questions specifically to address areas of proficiency or deficiency in institutional transfer student engagement.

Purpose of Study

The goal of the current research was to form recommendations for a better transfer student experience and to make suggestions for other small, residential institutions. Ideally, many of the recommendations could be translated to different-sized institutions and Carnegie classifications. The study sought to understand the experience of transfer students at a small, Midwest, residential institution and enhance the foundation of best practice literature. As with most research, the work follows Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principle of the importance of continuing to improve higher education: "We draw the implications of this research for practice, hoping to help us all do better" (p. 2).

> **Research question.** How do transfer students at a small, Midwest, residential institution experience academic and social engagement?

Hypothesis. If a student at a small, Midwest, residential institution, has transfer

status, the engagement levels for the NSSE benchmarks—student-faculty

interaction and supportive campus environment—will be lower than native

students.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Transfer students represent a sizable population on the modern college campus, yet their experience is poorly understood (Townsend, 2008). Large public institutions and community colleges have recognized this trend and are conducting research to understand the transition (Wang & Wharton, 2010). Kuh (2003) reported, "At master's granting and doctoral institutions, almost half of seniors are transfers—and at some universities, the proportion of graduating seniors who are transfers exceeds 70 percent" (p. 29). Preparing transitional support for transfer students is important considering the size of transfer student populations and their specific transitional need: knowledge of how the new institution works (Townsend, 2008).

Several student development theories offer a framework to study the challenges facing transfer students. The theory of student departure (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), student involvement theory (Astin, 1984), and student engagement theory (Kuh, 2001) provide such a framework for this research. Student departure theory offers a schema for understanding the academic and social settings of transfer student experience, while student involvement theory and student engagement theory provide a framework for evaluating a student's effort in the transition.

Theoretical Framework

       Student departure theory. Tinto's theory of student departure is a longitudinal model that explains the process college students go through before deciding to remain at or depart from an institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1988). Identifying the steps students take before their departure decision allows institutions to better support their students and decrease the likelihood that the student would leave the school. Tinto's model provides two systems—academic and social integration—which promote retention when used proactively to address the student's transitional challenges (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1988). Integration refers to the extent to which an individual grows to share and practice in the community's normative attitudes, values, and structural requirements (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1988). These norms, originally shared by peers and faculty of the new institution, should be communicated to the transfer student to ensure a positive experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1988). Tinto's student departure model provides institutional goals for a student's experience to generate retention. Working backward, Tinto's model explains that students who become academically and socially integrated more often remain at the same institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This process can be challenging and difficult to observe because integration is largely internalized and subjective.

       Academic and social integration experiences are either negative or positive. Negative experiences typically outweigh any positive experiences. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), "Negative interactions and experiences tend to reduce integration, to distance the individual from the academic and social communities of the institution, promoting the individual's marginality and, ultimately, withdrawal" (pg. 53).

Therefore, because negative experiences can be damaging, the goal of student development professionals in the transfer student experiences should be to provide students with satisfying and positive interactions socially and academically, while equipping students to navigate negative experiences.

Involvement theory. The concept of student involvement—a theory describing the interactions of students during college—was developed by Alexander Astin. Astin (1984) defined student involvement as, "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). This definition is prescriptive for all student activities, whether they include the student meeting with a professor, joining a club, or intentionally spending time with other students. Student involvement even explains why self-isolating students may neglect their academics and struggle with the college experience. Involvement theory views all emotional and physical energy given by a student as a way to produce learning (Astin, 1984).

Involvement manifests itself in behavior (Astin, 1984). Using involvement theory to focus on student actions creates a useful interpretation of motivation. Thus, for a student to be involved, that student must be more than physically present; the student must expend mental and physical energy as well. The theory purposefully incorporates actions because a student's behavior is observable, quantifiable, and understandable.

Other studies have confirmed that the impact of the college experience on individual students is determined by each student's effort and involvement in the academic and social realms (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1984) proposed that the more time a student spends in an activity, the more that student will learn. This concept relates to living situations as well. According to Townsend (2008), transfer

students are more likely to have families and part-time jobs and therefore live off-campus. Because these students have limited physical and psychic time and energy, off-campus living situations put students at a distinct disadvantage in their efforts to integrate (Astin, 1984). Astin (1984) explained, "…the time and energy that the student invests in family, friends, job, and other outside activities represent a reduction in the time and energy the student has to devote to educational purposes" (p. 523). The competition for time often negatively impacts retention (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). For this reason, it is imperative that transfer students be studied because their living situation is often different from that of a native student. How transfer students spend their time can be understood through the framework of involvement theory, which is elaborated and quantified by engagement theory.

Student engagement theory. Kuh's (2001) engagement theory, while impacted by involvement theory, remains distinct (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) explained the divergence between involvement and engagement theory: "Engagement differs from involvement in that it links more directly to desired educational processes and outcomes and emphasizes action that the institution can take to increase student engagement" (p. 414). Kuh (2001) structured the theory to translate easily into academic and institutional practices to support immediate action.

Many practical similarities exist between the two theories; for instance, both theories study student action. However, unlike involvement theory, engagement theory considers the connection between student behavior and institutional practice (Kuh, 2001). The student engagement model provides accountability for the institution, which reinforces the fact that institutions play a specific role in the higher education learning

process. The model also encourages institutional self-assessment and constant improvement of practice and policy (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

NSSE. Student engagement also provides a quantifiable way to study student success. Kuh (2001) created the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to measure, study, and change the ways in which colleges engage their students by assessing aspects of college life that represent educational practices. The purpose of the NSSE is to allow "colleges and universities [to] take immediate action when they determine which areas of student engagement need attention" (Kuh, 2001, p. 12). The NSSE categorizes questions into five different benchmarks: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment (Kuh, 2003; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). In addition, the NSSE empirically explains educational practices that benefit students' college experiences (Kuh, 2001; NSSE, 2000).

Benefits. Frequently documented benefits of student engagement are academic achievement, social success, improved retention, and greater student learning (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kuh, 2003). Specifically, student learning is directly connected to student-faculty interaction, which has been associated with gains in cognitive complexity, knowledge, and general academic skills. All of these are key learning outcomes of a liberal arts education (Kuh, 1995). Even though the correlation was lower than hoped for, Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) reported "that student engagement is linked positively to desirable outcomes such as critical thinking and grades" (p. 23). Similar to involvement theory, engagement theory provides a way to assess the interactions of transfer students and explain why these students may not find success.

Theoretical connection. Recognizing the theoretical difference between involvement and engagement is crucial to understanding the literature concerning each theory. For the purpose of the present research, which focused on the time and mental energy given to a task, both terms will be used interchangeably. In addition, because the concepts can be studied individually, not every study will interchange the words *involvement* and *engagement*.

The connections among student departure theory, involvement theory, and engagement theory redefine success in the transfer student experience. Transfer students need opportunities to experience positive social and academic environments. Following these experiences, transfer students can more easily engage and become involved in both systems. The tangible definition of success is challenging to achieve but important in order to offset the academic and social challenges faced by transfer students.

Transfer Students

Among higher education practitioners, a widely accepted definition of a transfer student is a student who begins his or her higher education journey at a school different from the one he or she currently attends. The NSSE demographic distinguishes transfer students from native students by asking, "Did you begin college at this institution or elsewhere?" (NSSE, 2013). The transfer student population is sizable because of the broad definition. In 2003, the NSSE reported that 40% of all respondents began college at a different institution (Kuh, 2003), which was consistent with the national average of transfer students (Adelman, 2005). However, operating from a different transfer student definition, a study by Cataldi and Cataldi (2005) reported that 59% of college students transferred from at least one other institution.

Types of transfer students. By nature of its complexity, the transfer student population creates unique challenges for research and for student development theories. First, transfer students are difficult to categorize; Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) explained: "Transfer students are an incredibly varied student population. Like all student cohorts, transfer students can be a traditional age or older, attending part-time or full-time, commuting or living on campus, and working full- or part-time" (p. 390). Secondly, transfer students frequently have different backgrounds. Research often labels transfer students as either vertical or lateral transfers, and both are present at each institution (Bahr, 2009; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Li, 2010). "Lateral transfer" refers to students who transfer between similar types of institutions. In contrast, a vertical transfer is a student who transfers between a community college and a four-year institution. Lateral and vertical transfer students can be categorized further by their diverse motivations for transferring: financial need, changes in chosen field of study, disciplinary action, or relational problems (Townsend, 2008).

Academic struggles. Significant documentation highlights the academic challenges first-year transfer students encounter (Hillis, 1965; Ishitani, 2006; Laanan, 2007; Lou, Williams, & Vieweg, 2007; Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011; Nutting, 2011; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend, 2008). Hillis's (1965) foundational research on students transferring from junior college used the term "transfer shock" to refer to "the temporary dip in transfer students' academic performance in the first or second semester after transferring" (Laanan, 2007, p. 38). Other research found an opposing result. Transfer students had higher GPAs than native students in one study, a rare phenomenon labeled "transfer ecstasy" (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 2001). For transfer

students who struggle scholastically, intentional learning communities are often beneficial to the students' academic success; however, transfer students are significantly less likely to participate (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Unfortunately, while academic challenges are well documented, colleges and universities have been slow to implement progressive responses (Nutting, 2011; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

Faculty involvement. Transfer students' academic struggles are also observed in their graduation timeline. The average transfer student graduates after 5.1 years, compared to the 4.4-year timeline commonly taken by native students (Enzi, Boehner, & McKeon, 2005). Vertical transfers take even longer to graduate, needing an average of 5.4 years (Enzi et al., 2005). One possible reason for transfer student graduation delays is that faculty often have difficulty understanding and assisting students with multiple and varied college experiences (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). Nonetheless, Fee, Prolman, and Thomas (2009) suggested that faculty interaction was important in helping transfer students engage and succeed. However, a barrier to such interaction, specifically for community college transfers, is the often indifferent attitude of faculty at four-year institutions; frequently, the faculty fail to recognize and address the unique academic needs of this population (Townsend, 2008). Also, low faculty-to-student interaction often perpetuates academic engagement struggles, which can lead to poor performance and potential failure. This background, in combination with a lack of institution-to-institution consistency in block curriculum and transferable course credit, can lead to transfer student academic struggles (Carter, Coyle, & Leslie, 2011).

Social struggles. In addition to struggling academically, transfer students frequently face many social challenges. For example, lack of social integration, as part of

student departure theory, can contribute to the decision of transfer students to leave. Several other social struggles are identified by the literature, most notably "transfer tremor" (Kuh, 2003, p. 30) and "feel[ing] like a freshman again" (Townsend, 2008, p. 73).

Kuh (2003) described "transfer tremor" as "managing the challenges that come with learning how to negotiate the cultural pathways of their new institutions" (p. 30). Any cultural change requires time to learn new social norms, places, people, icons, and activities, but the transition to a new institution can be inhibited by feelings of "stress and sense of loss and bewilderment, if not desolation" (Tinto, 1988, p. 444). Disruption for a transfer student can come from comparing the previous and current institutions and encountering dissonance. Understandably, not all transfer students experience the same transitional struggles, as some are helped through the adjustment by orientation programs, residential living environments, and special seminars (Kuh, 2003). Unfortunately, some institutions offer little to no support through the transfer process (Kuh, 2003). Overall, the newness of campus culture and the variability of institutional support make social adaptation a challenge for many transfer students (Kuh, 2003).

Townsend's (2008) qualitative study also suggested that, while the new culture is a barrier, the transfer student's perceptions of the new school and other students are more pertinent. Transfer students still lack knowledge of their new schools—knowledge gleaned through time spent at an institution—and therefore feel confined by inappropriate labels (2008). Additionally, transfer students are often housed with freshmen and can struggle to build friendships because they lack shared experiences (2008). Since most

student friendships have already formed during the freshman year, transfer students often struggle to enter social groups or find new friends (2008).

Conclusion

The combination of academic and social challenges put transfer students at a disadvantage to succeed in college and remain at the institution. For this reason, strides must be taken to promote involvement and positive encounters in academic and social situations. Assessing the quality of social interactions between transfer and native students, as well as academic interactions between transfer students and faculty, should provide specific feedback for improvement. Using involvement and engagement theory can provide descriptions and evaluations of these interactions, as well as the energy put forth by transfer students. Therefore, the goal of the current research was to understand the transfer student experience at a small, Midwest, residential institution and, ultimately, to make several practical suggestions for how to improve the transfer student experience at similar colleges.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Problem Statement

The present study sought to understand the effectiveness of a small, Midwest, residential institution's transfer student experience, which included an orientation program, residential living environment, and ongoing programming. Data was collected through interviews regarding the transfer student experience. The study focused specifically on how students become academically and socially engaged and successful.

Case Study Context

A case study, as defined in the parameters of ethnographic research by Creswell (2008), is an "in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection" (p. 476). Specifically, the study's purpose was to understand the transfer student experience, making the study an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2008). The case study utilized both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The combined methodologies provided deeper understanding to the phenomena than could be offered by a single-method approach. Creswell (2008) recommended "collect[ing] quantitative and qualitative data separately in two phases so that data from one source could enhance, elaborate, or complement data from the other source" (p. 554-555). The current research collected and analyzed the quantitative data first, followed by phenomenological qualitative interviews.

Quantitative Components of Case Study

The first part of the study was a quantitative survey design, observing the transfer student engagement levels and then comparing these results to native student engagement levels. The institution surveyed had an approximate undergraduate enrollment of 2,000, a ratio of 54% female to 46% male, 89% white, and was classified as a residential college.

Participants for survey. The study used archival data collected by the college in the 2005, 2008, and 2011 NSSE surveys. Data from 108 transfer students was used in the study. Informed consent had been obtained prior as part of the original NSSE research. Consequently, informed consent for this particular research project was not necessary.

Instruments. Data was collected by the NSSE, and the present study utilized only two of its five benchmark areas: supportive campus environment and student-faculty interaction. These two benchmarks supplied an appropriate way to assess the landscape of transfer student experience's two goals. The data was used to evaluate the transfer student experience and determine if transfer students were similar, proficient, or deficient in areas of student-faculty engagement. The data also evaluated if the students felt supported by the campus environment more, less, or at the same level as native students. The NSSE Institution-Level Temporal Stability (2012) has reliability coefficients ranging from .74 to .92 for both the first-years and seniors. The information gained from the NSSE data on social engagement was used to direct the protocol questions.

Procedures. The online survey was administered by NSSE to both freshman and senior students at the Midwest university during the spring semester of the aforementioned distribution years. Permission was given to the researcher by the

institutional review board to access the 2005, 2008, and 2011 data files. The demographic NSSE question that asked "Did you begin college at this institution or elsewhere?" was then used as a filter to separate the transfer student population from the native student population.

Analysis. Transfer student engagement levels in the two identified benchmark areas were compared to results from native students by utilizing an independent samples t-test. Descriptive statistics were compared, and significance testing was used to disprove the null hypothesis. Effect size was calculated when significance testing revealed little.

Qualitative Component of Case Study

Participants for interview and research procedures. Participants for the phenomenological study were chosen from the same institution as the participants from the quantitative survey. Participants were randomly selected from the sample of junior and seniors transfer students. These students were emailed and asked if they would be willing to participate in the research study; incentives were not used. The participant pool included two male and six female transfer students. Of the eight participants, two were juniors and six were seniors. Participants signed an informed consent form prior to being interviewed. This form explained the purpose of the research and that the participant may exit the study at any time.

There was a pilot study of the protocol questions which helped with validity and reliability, but the information gathered from the pilot study was not included in the results. The pilot study confirmed the protocol questions specifically addressed the research question in an unbiased and non-manipulative way. Changes were made after the pilot study to improve the questions. Interviews were structured by a loose protocol.

Protocol questions. Protocol questions targeted the engagement levels in student-faculty interaction and the level of supportive campus environment. Questions evaluated the transfer student experience, recognized positive practices, and identified weaknesses. The protocol questionnaire is located in the Appendix.

Analysis. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were then coded to identify common themes. The transcribed interviews provided additional understanding to the knowledge gained from the NSSE analysis.

Benefits. The research added to early best practices literature on the transfer student experience literature. It also provided insight into how the transfer student experience related to current engagement levels of student-faculty and supportive campus environment. By identifying current institutional practices that support social and academic engagement, the study made suggestions for improvement to the transfer student experience at this select institution and similar colleges and universities.

Chapter 4

Results

The following chapter presents the findings from the mixed-methods case study. The first section presents the analysis of the NSSE data. The results are found in Table 1, and an explanation of the analysis follows.

The second section presents the findings of the qualitative analysis of the case study. Themes were gathered from eight verbatim interview transcripts. Five themes represented the content repeated throughout the interviews. The themes answered the question: "How do transfer students experience academic and social engagement at a small residential institution?" Two themes were developed from responses to questions about transfer student academic engagement, and three themes addressed transfer student social engagement. Themes include direct quotations from different interviews to add depth of understanding.

NSSE Analysis

Administered NSSE data from 2005, 2008, and 2011 was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A comparative means independent samples t-test was used. The following are the results from that analysis.

Table 1

NSSE Analysis: Independent Samples t-test

Comparison of Native and Transfer Student in Supportive Campus Environment and Student Faculty Interaction by Year

Year	Variable	NSSE Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance	Cohen's d	Effect Size-r
2005	Supportive Campus Environment	Started Here (Native)	506	69.6739	15.53107	.924	0.237592*	0.1179668*
		Started Elsewhere (Transfer)	23	65.9420	15.87376			
	Student Faculty Interaction	Started Here (Native)	506	39.2292	17.10480	.941	0.0605357	0.030254
		Started Elsewhere (Transfer)	23	38.1643	18.06463			
2008	Supportive Campus Environment	Started Here (Native)	442	70.2891	16.13483	.905	0.1706429	0.0850126
		Started Elsewhere (Transfer)	41	67.5474	15.99864			
	Student Faculty Interaction	Started Here (Native)	445	41.9251	18.56170	.653	0.0103334	0.0051666
		Started Elsewhere (Transfer)	41	41.7344	18.34688			
2011	Supportive Campus Environment	Started Here (Native)	419	72.8679	16.09898	.943	0.5030444**	0.2439247**
		Started Elsewhere (Transfer)	44	64.7096	16.33586			
	Student Faculty Interaction	Started Here (Native)	420	40.1468	18.46650	.562	0.1282317	0.0639845
		Started Elsewhere (Transfer)	44	37.8788	16.87096			

Note. * indicates weak relationship. ** indicates a medium to strong relationship

An independent samples t-test was used to investigate whether a significant difference existed between the results of native and transfer students. The purpose of the analysis was to better understand the historical climate of student-faculty interaction and

supportive campus environment at the institution. These results give a baseline understanding of the institution and offered background information about the campus climate in which the interview participants have lived.

As indicated in Table 1, significance testing between the transfer and native data did not yield a conclusive result, likely due to the large population difference. Effect size was calculated because the population of native students was much greater than the transfer student population. Using the accepted .2=weak relationship, .4=medium strength relationship, and .6=strong relationship for Cohen's d, only two tests had interpretable differences between the native and transfer populations. In 2005, the supportive campus environment test had a small difference between transfer and native students. In 2011, the difference in the same test was closer to a strong difference between the two samples. Thus, transfer students felt less supported by the campus environment than native students. This result confirmed half of the hypothesis. Although the hypothesis predicted that both benchmark results for transfer students would be lower than native students, only the supportive campus environment benchmark was lower; student-faculty interaction results were inconclusive.

Interview Context

It should be noted that the institution used for the study was a residential university. Ninety percent of students were required to live in on-campus housing. The emphasis on residential housing created a strong floor culture which provided a fraternal or familial atmosphere. Floors had unique cultures and traditions because freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors lived together. The integrated floors developed unique identities because upperclassmen continued the legacy of previous generations. Most

students remained on the same floor for all four years of college, extenuating the atmosphere of legacy. The campus itself had several popular all-campus activities viewed as "must attend" events.

Interview Findings

The following five themes developed from the interview coding process. The themes answered the specific research question: "How do transfer students at a small, Midwest, residential institution experience academic and social engagement?" Transfer students experienced academic engagement through participation in their major courses and through interaction with professors. In addition, the participants experienced social engagement through participation in their floor communities; clubs, leadership opportunities, and athletics; and all-campus events.

Participant demographics. The demographic information of the interview participants is located in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Year	Type of Institution Transferred From	Major
Marshall	Senior	Large Public	Business marketing
Ryan	Junior	Australian	Accounting and pre-law minor
Stephanie	Junior	Christian liberal arts	Social Work
Theresa	Senior	Community college	Theatre Arts
Amy	Senior	Christian liberal arts	Elementary Education
Tiffany	Senior	Large Public	Psychology
Helen	Senior	Christian liberal arts	Professional Writing
Rachel	Senior	Small, urban, private university	Educational studies and special education

Academic theme 1: Major courses. Seven out of eight participants felt engaged in their major courses and expressed their engagement in similar ways. Marshall noted the reason for his high engagement: "Since it is my major and something I'm passionate about, it is a lot easier to stay involved and participate…" Participants identified many different areas in which they put forth mental and physical energy: reading, writing papers, participating in class, preparing for practicum, daily homework, and tests, to name a few. Seven participants described feeling comfortable in the classroom setting, but several noted that their comfort took a semester to develop. Two participants expressed discomfort with the age difference between themselves and the freshmen students who comprised their first semester's classes. Another two participants mentioned their discomfort was caused by pre-existing and initially exclusive relationships among other classmates in their courses. However, all four of these participants felt engaged after one semester. Participants also noted that course expectations were high but fair, which motivated them to achieve, put forth more time and energy, and become more engaged.

All eight participants felt more engaged in their major courses than in general education classes. Several participants, but not the majority, described their experiences with general education courses as unnecessary or confusing. Theresa articulated her confusion in the following way: "[General education courses]…is where I have the most [confusion]. Some of them are very important and others – why are we taking this class? Maybe like COS 104 [a computer science course], do we really need this class?" However, two participants mentioned that their general education courses provided a strong liberal arts education. Understanding the purpose of the general education courses

seemed to motivate these participants. Helen described her experiences by saying, "I like it. I understand the point of [the liberal arts education] and I…worked hard in those classes even though they weren't part of my major."

Academic theme 2: Professor care and accommodation. All eight participants credited their professors with helping them engage in the academic setting. Each participant described their professors as being more important to their learning and engagement than the content of the courses. Transfer students emphasized two distinct ways professors engaged them academically: professors took personal interest in their students and were academically accommodating.

Personal interest and care. Seven of the participants said the majority of their professors took a personal interest in the students' lives. These participants felt comfortable talking about their personal lives with their professors. Participants described professors who knew about the students' families, attended intramural sports games, checked in when students were sick, and would meet for coffee and talk. Half of the participants mentioned currently being mentored by a professor. Marshall, who came from a large public institution, described the small classroom setting being initially intimidating because he could no longer blend in with the crowd. As time progressed, being known by the professor encouraged Marshall's success, because he was no longer anonymous in a lecture hall of 300 students. He described professors in this way: "I mean, even the ones that I don't have that close relationship with – I know they care about me and they are going to do what they can to make sure [the classroom experience] works for me."

In contrast, Theresa described class size as a barrier to becoming engaged in general education courses. She said,

Maybe [it is] because the class sizes are larger in some of them that I feel less personal connection. Those would be the classes where the professor wouldn't know if my grandpa was sick…because there are so many more people. So some of – if they are the ones where you don't have a choice to take like COS 104, I'm a little less – not less pleased, but just less invested or less connected.

This quotation reiterated a previous result: relationships with professors appeared to be more important for student engagement than course content.

Accommodation and flexibility. Seven participants described the measures professors would take in order for students to succeed academically. Participants mentioned additional feedback, help outside the classroom, flexible schedules, extra credit opportunities, emergency meetings, and assignment extensions as ways professors accommodated student success. These efforts by professors encouraged students to submit their best work because learning was prioritized over rigidity of schedules and syllabi. When explaining the reasons professors were accommodating, Ryan said, "They definitely want you to learn and gain these concepts." Helen added, "…I know that my success matters to them." She described a professor who "always tried to go above and beyond for his students. He even recommends me to editors for book reviews and devotionals…and that has gotten me a lot of publication outside of the school…"

However, two participants with unique circumstances did not feel accommodated by professors. A commuter student felt little to no grace for her traveling troubles, and a student with learning disabilities explained that only certain professors were

accommodating from the start. The student with learning disabilities said the experience improved after she communicated with academic support services.

Social theme 1: Floor involvement. The most emphasized component of social engagement among participant responses was floor involvement. As mentioned earlier, the institution's residential emphasis generated individual floor cultures. Five participants said their closest friends lived on their floors; Amy and Stephanie both said that residents on their floors were now their best friends. Three of the eight participants, in contrast, never embraced or never were embraced by their floors. As a result, these three found their campus identity and social involvement elsewhere (see "Social theme 2: Club, sport, and leadership involvement").

Relationships and expectations. All eight participants explained their initial social involvement was experienced by the relationships on their floor. Several participants recognized the meaningfulness of excited orientation leaders on their floors, though most commented on the lack of transfer orientation support. All eight participants mentioned the socio-cultural expectation to be continually engaged in floor life, which most students embraced. Helen described the expectations in the following way: "So coming to [the institution] and kind of that expectation of hanging out with your [floor] was new to me but I liked it because I didn't know anyone at school." Five participants noted how the relationships and the expectation of presence drew them into community. Amy described her experience in the following way: "I felt like I was placed in the right dorm, with other girls who have my same kind of outgoing personality and kind of enjoyed the same things that I enjoy. So I felt at home."

Culture and programming. Every participant described the culture of their floors, as well as the programs created by the floors, as a way they experienced social engagement. While floors were known for different stereotypes (as alluded to in the previous quotation), many cultural overlaps existed throughout the residential program. For example, all participants mentioned being involved in at least one of the following activities: floor dinners, "pick-a-dates," floor worship, and floor traditions. Seven participants stated that understanding the culture initially challenged their transition and social engagement. Marshall described his experience of the new culture by saying, "Definitely when I came in I thought it was weird. There is no doubt about that. I was like this is totally different than anything I have ever experienced or seen or …heard of."

Another participant, Rachel, described her experiences with the new culture in a different way:

> [Smith Hall] is a very strange dorm…If you ask an outsider about [Smith Hall], they say they are weird and crazy. But I would say, coming from living in a dorm and apartment and then coming to [Smith Hall], probably hands down one of the most loving places I have ever been. Just unconditional. Doesn't matter what I said, did, anything.

Even though she was challenged by the culture of her residence hall, she found great support from the people in her floor community. As a final note, most participants mentioned they sought upperclassmen to explain the quirks of the new culture, especially the halls and floor cultures. Participants noted the residential nature of the institution provided avenues for social integration, or at least, an awareness of the social culture.

Ryan made the following observation about the value of initial impressions: "I think when you come to a new place, your first impression matters so much and everybody is kind of looking for either a way to engage you positively or engage you negatively. That judgment can set the stage." Only one participant mentioned initially disliking the floor culture, but grew to value it. The others either loved or hated the community from the beginning and continued in this mindset.

Social theme 2: Club, sport, and leadership involvement. All eight participants described their involvement in a club, sport, or leadership opportunity as a way they expanded their social engagement both within and beyond their daily floor life. Several participants were involved with on-floor leadership, either as a personnel (resident) assistant or a small group leader. Outside of the floor community, one participant played on a varsity sports team, while another competed on a club team, and multiple participants mentioned being involved with intramural sports. Club involvement varied from the Black Student Union, Middle East Collegiate Association, Latino Student Union, a children's ministry, and a dance team. Helen described what she learned from being in a club: "I think being involved [in a club] is a really important aspect of making a good transition, especially for a transfer student. That would be my tip I guess – get involved – cause it makes it a lot easier." Participants noted that their club, sports, and leadership involvement gave them an opportunity to meet people outside of their floors and to create a broader campus identity.

Social theme 3: Campus activities. As another avenue for social engagement, seven participants explained that they attended many all-campus activities. The institution had several long-standing traditions, including a lip-sync contest, several

student concerts, and a costume-themed basketball game. All participants attended at least one of the events, and six participants said they attended as many as they could. Participants' motivation for attending these activities related to talented performers, high energy, and the fun environment. Marshall described his reason for attending the lip-sync event and concerts: "I think everyone here is extremely talented and I like to see people flourish in their environment and I think to see people that comfortable—for example to be on stage—I think that is phenomenal." However, because events only occur every other month, the participants did not experience most of their social engagement in this way.

Other significant findings. The following two findings did not directly answer the research question, but the researcher considered the results and perspectives important to acknowledge.

A different experience. As an ethnic student, Tiffany responded differently to almost all questions. Her interview revealed several unmet expectations. For instance, she felt unsupported and unaccommodated by most professors and found no social connection with peers in the classroom. As a result, she rarely attended classes during her initial transition. She described this aspect in the following way: "I still didn't feel the need to go to classes because …I wasn't having that personal interaction with the students." Tiffany explained her academic qualms were the consequence of little to no social engagement or support. She described her residential living experience as a "nightmare," and, after a while of trying to become friends with the women on her floor, she withdrew. She noted several pressures of the residential experience: "They feel like they have to [get to know you]—it is an obligation to have that intentional community."

This was a socio-cultural expectation she struggled to embrace. She said, "I needed to maintain me and it is hard to do that when you are trying to conform and just fit in and just be accepted." When describing her perception change of the women on her floor, Tiffany said, "…if you are not going to accept me; that is fine. But I'm not going to give you any more room to reject me either." Her negative experience of the institution, while seemingly uncommon, offered a different, yet important perspective.

Not wanting to be grouped with freshmen. Again, while not specifically addressing the research question, several participants described the challenge of being grouped with freshmen. The participants mentioned the difference in maturity being the most challenging element of sharing classes, discussion groups, and housing situations with freshmen. Townsend (2008) described transfer students' experiences as very similar to those of freshman. The present study supported that claim while adding that, although the experiences were similar, the transfer participants were frustrated by the way they were categorized. Most participants desired to be treated like upperclassmen, not freshmen. They acknowledged their lack of socio-cultural understanding but disliked always being put in groups with freshmen.

Chapter 5

Discussion

According to Tinto (1988), students who persist at an institution integrate academically and socially into that institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This concept was reinforced by the conclusions of the current study, viewed through the framework of involvement and engagement. The following discussion begins with a description of the institution's recent transfer student climate as revealed by NSSE data. The discussion then addresses the connection between the results of the study and the ideas of academic and social integration as described in Tinto's model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Several of Astin's (1984) and Kuh's (2003) ideas for a successful higher education experience, based on involvement and engagement theories, are connected to the present study. This discussion is followed by a section on the implications of the research on current practices, implications for further research, and the limitations of the study.

Institutional Background

According to the analyzed NSSE data, several observations can be made regarding the campus climate into which the interviewed transfer students entered. First, a descriptive difference existed between the native and transfer student reports of a supportive campus environment. Although significance testing was not helpful because the sample sizes were very different, Cohen's d and effect size calculations were helpful.

Transfer students reported descriptively lower scores for supportive campus environment in all three years. Cohen's d calculations implied a minor difference between native and transfer scores in 2005 and a medium difference in 2011. Thus, transfer students have historically found the institution to be a less supportive environment than native students. The conclusion was consistent with several of the participant interviews.

The selected academic benchmark on the NSSE, student-faculty interaction, focused only on one aspect of the academic landscape and was therefore less descriptive of the broad academic environment than the supportive campus environment benchmark. The results of the three NSSE tests suggested that transfer students and native students had almost the same student-faculty interaction. As with campus environment, the conclusion was consistent with most of the participant interviews.

Professor Interaction and Care

Participants in the study reported feeling actively engaged by their professors through the interaction, accommodation, and care the professors showed. Several students identified that being known in the classroom encouraged them to put forth more effort. This finding affirms the finding of Fee et al. (2009) that academic involvement, in the form of faculty interaction, is important for transfer success. Kuh (2003) said, "What is clear is that student-faculty interaction matters most to learning when it encourages students to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college. The key is substantive contact" (p. 29). Most participants mentioned the helpfulness of warm and approachable professors, even with little meaningful interaction. This observation did not conflict with, but rather supplemented, Kuh's (2003) message. While substantive contact may be the most meaningful, simply creating the availability

for substantive contact was also important. Several participants did recognize the value

in substantive contact, explaining the importance of faculty members in a mentoring role.

Only one participant experienced the indifferent faculty attitude toward transfer students

that Townsend (2008) described. Overwhelmingly, the institution's professors were

accommodating and caring, which led to a higher level of engagement in academics by

transfer students.

Social Integration

Participants' experiences with social integration and engagement were the most

complicated and diverse result of the study. The experiences brought about questions of

identity, assimilation, and effort.

Most of the participants experienced a strong level of social engagement with

their floor communities. Several described their socio-cultural experiences in the

following stages: confusion, understanding, acceptance, and, finally, social thriving.

These participants appeared to lose any semblance of a transfer identity by the end of the

process. This observation drew several theoretical and practical questions. Such as, does

a transfer identity exist? Townsend's (2008) work suggested core experiential

similarities among transfer students, as represented by most of the participants in the

current study. Participants noted all of the following similarities Townsend (2008)

described: facing culture barriers, lacking knowledge of the new institution, feeling

confined by inappropriate labels, having trouble finding similar interests with freshmen

roommates, and struggling to integrate into established friend groups.

While these similarities were common among participants, the transfer students in

the present study who socially integrated best said they no longer identified with the

transfer label. Instead, within the larger campus community, these students identified with their smaller floor communities. A few participants noted that native students did not engage with the transfer students' full story (the time at a previous institution), and therefore full assimilation to the new institution appeared to result in the loss of transfer student identity. While these students did not indicate negative attitudes toward this loss, the fact prompted a question of identity: Is it healthier for transfer students either to maintain a transfer student identity and possibly prevent complete social assimilation, or to set aside all transfer student identity in favor of possible full assimilation? Further research is necessary to answer this question in its entirety, but the current study suggested transfer students must choose for themselves whether maintaining a transfer identity was in their best personal interest.

Three participants did not fully associate with their floor cultures and, therefore, became less engaged socially. Their rejection of the floor cultures and expectations possibly created an alienating environment. Therefore, it seemed that strong floor cultures could be the most exclusive to students with different backgrounds or values. Instead of integrating into their floor cultures, the three students found their social identities in their activities. Marshall identified with the athletic team, Theresa found acceptance in her major, and Tiffany found identity and engagement in an ethnic club. A possible conclusion from this result was that social integration was necessary on the floor level, not the campus level, for a student to feel socially engaged. Since floor identities held arbitrary attitudes, values, and events, students wanting to find a more activity-based community struggled to socially engage at the residential level.

When asked about their social and academic success, several participants said it was a direct result of their actions. They put effort and time into their academics and social involvement. Amy, when talking about her social acceptance, said, "I do think that I did have to put forth effort. But I think once you show that you are willing to or that you want to be a part of something then I think people…accept you." This theme reiterated Astin's (1984) involvement theory well. To some extent, many participants found the more activities they participated in, the greater their academic and social success.

In contrast, Astin's (1984) theory seemed somewhat idealistic and simplistic in light of Tiffany's experiences. Tiffany's challenges, both social and academic, epitomized Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) description of Tinto's (1988) student departure model: "Negative interactions and experiences tend to reduce integration, to distance the individual from the academic and social communities of the institution, promoting the individual's marginality and, ultimately, withdrawal" (p. 53). Withdrawal, in Tiffany's case, was not at an institutional level but rather at a social level.

Implications for Practice

Several implications for practice emerged from the interviews. Most of the implications followed suggestions from literature on improving engagement. One recommendation for institutions is to provide mentors or "buddy connections" for transfer students upon their entrance into the new institution. Several participants noted that their previous social connections, either with a sibling, professor, or high school friend, aided their transition. Participants with existing connections more readily found support, answers, and counsel. A few participants expressed confusion over the

institution's scholastic structure; therefore, it would be helpful to have an academic advisor for all transfer students. If this recommendation is not feasible, individual advisors should be more aware of the unique needs of their transfer advisees. Additionally, professors should be encouraged to seek out transfer students in each course and make sure the students have the support and explanations they need in order to succeed. A more intentional faculty could prevent or minimize the initial "transfer shock" Hillis (1965) researched.

While academic support is necessary, it was overwhelmingly evident in the current study that social support was more desired by the participating transfer students. These transfer students made comments about a lack of similarities between roommates and not having any transfer friends with whom to attend events. The research recommends transfer students be immediately connected with other transfer students in their residence halls, if not housed with transfer roommates. Several students mentioned the challenges in understanding and connecting with their freshmen roommates, a struggle that would be addressed by housing transfer students together. Likewise, Marshall described the problem he faced when being invited to transfer activities: "I wasn't about to put myself out there, drive to this event alone, show up, you know, and walk up. That is an extremely hostile environment…" Intentionally creating connections among transfer students would empower the students to engage their community and should ultimately improve transfer student support.

On both residential and campus levels, the two participants who transferred during the second semester initially felt much less engaged than the other participants. These participants described a lack of programming and attention given to their mid-year

arrival. Institutionally, fewer new students arrive mid-year, which traditionally has implied less transitional support. An implication of this finding is to raise residence life leader's awareness about mid-year transitioning students. Increased awareness should inspire programmatic efforts that would ideally bring the new group of transfer students into community with the older, previous group. This unique transition time provides an excellent opportunity for mentoring between pre-existing and new transfer students. A mentoring program would benefit transfer students because it would not only help cultural transitions and awareness, but it would also provide students with a community.

Another implication from the study was the use of more inclusive language during all transitional time periods. Some institutions use the term "first-years" to describe international students, transfer students, gap-year students, and traditional freshmen. When asked about a potential institutional change, Stephanie said,

I think just not forgetting about the transfers. It [orientation] was all very rooted in the freshmen. I understand. It's the biggest [population]. It was definitely a smaller group of us [transfer students]. But it felt like lots of the time we were forgotten.

Clearly, inclusive language entails not merging all new student groups together. As mentioned previously, most participants struggled to relate to younger freshmen. Inclusive language would represent the institution's recognition of many student groups new to campus each semester. In addition, through the use of inclusive language, transitioning students (particularly transfer students) would feel recognized and valued.

Another suggestion of the current research was to create specialized transfer student discussion courses as part of mandatory general education curriculum. Several

participants expressed frustration at being treated like freshmen in the classroom. A transfer student discussion section for mandatory courses would provide a social and academic opportunity for transfer students to interact. This recommendation should be considered by faculty members in light of the previous discussion on maintaining transfer student identity. However, if a discussion group is created, transfer students should have the option of joining the specific transfer student discussion group or the freshmen discussion group. The choice would protect the transfer student from being forced to maintain an unwanted transfer identity but also would allow the autonomy of maintaining that identity.

Implications for Future Research

Future research is necessary to evaluate the ongoing changes made to practices regarding transfer students. Of the participants, only Tiffany represented an ethnic minority, a proportion which captured the institution's on-campus ethnic ratio fairly well. Nonetheless, Tiffany presented a radically different transfer experience from others interviewed and thus raised critical questions: Do ethnic transfer student struggle to become academically and socially engaged? Do most ethnic students struggle to engage academically and socially at a small, residential institution? Research focusing on these two questions would provide clarity to understand if Tiffany's experience was an outlier, or if ethnicity played a large role.

Also, as mentioned previously, each residence hall and floor had a unique culture. Two of the three participants from one residence hall struggled to socially engage. Research into the acceptance and encouragement of these micro-communities

would explain if these two students had unique experiences, or if the values of the residence hall influenced their struggle to socially engage.

Another implication of future research is to study integration and transfer identity. As mentioned previously, Tinto's (1988) theory examining student retention emphasized social and academic integration into the new culture. In the present study, the participants who appeared to be most socially and academically engaged also appeared to have assimilated best into the new culture. Clearly, academic integration is necessary for success, but does social integration imply the loss of a transfer identity? Further research explaining the creation and retention of a transfer identity would assist in the understanding of the current study's results.

The last suggestion for future research would be to continue to administer the NSSE, remembering to focus on the transfer student population. Calculations on transfer student engagement yielded no statistical significance because the population size difference between transfer and native students was so large. Understandably, a larger pool of data would yield a richer analysis. In addition, if a larger population of transfer students was surveyed, significance testing would yield stronger results.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of the study was the selection bias of participants, though efforts were made to select a random population of transfer students. Students were contacted at random, but not every transfer student who was contacted chose to respond. Several students actively expressed their excitement for the study, saying they desired to impact the institution's transfer policy. This comment revealed some participant bias, which was likely not shared by all transfer students at the institution.

The favorable attitude of certain participants likely added a richness of description to the interviews, but may have poorly represented the entire population.

Another limitation to the study was the lack of male participants. Efforts were taken to create an equal gender distribution, or at least a distribution representative of the institution (54% female, 46% male). Unfortunately, male students did not express interest in being a part of the study. The largest implication of this unresponsiveness was that the male transfer student experience may not have been adequately depicted.

Quantitatively, a large limitation existed due to the population differences between native and transfer students. While effect size was calculated, significance testing was of limited use for large population differences. Another limitation of the small surveyed transfer population was that students who took the NSSE likely could not have represented the whole transfer student experience. The surveyed population of 23 transfer students in 2005, compared to the 44 surveyed in 2011, may explain some of the differences in results. It is possible that the 44 students in 2011 represented a more holistic picture of the transfer environment than the 23 students surveyed in 2005. Even if this was the case, the inconclusive result from 2008 was still unexplained. No reason existed for why transfer students would feel slightly unsupported in 2005, very unsupported in 2011, but express the same level of support as native students in 2008.

Summary

The study was guided by the following research question: How do transfer students at a small, residential institution experience academic and social engagement? The results of the study were largely anticipated by the literature, but with several nuances. Transfer students experienced academic engagement by participating in their

courses, especially their major courses. Caring and accommodating faculty interaction also helped transfer students become academically engaged. In addition, transfer students experienced the most social engagement from the relationships on their floors; although some participants experienced engagement through involvement in clubs, athletics, and activities. Even though all participants attended most all-campus events, they experienced the lowest amount of social engagement through this avenue. For the participants who struggled to become involved on their floors, campus activities in the form of clubs, organizations, and athletics became their primary avenue of social engagement.

The culture of the residence halls, particularly the individual floor cultures, provided several unique implications. Transfer students who did not assimilate or integrate with the floor cultures struggled to become socially engaged, and, in some cases, even academically engaged. Effort and time put forth by transfer students did not always predict involvement in the campus culture. This was particularly true in strong, potentially exclusive cultures.

Further research is necessary to support transfer students in their transition to new institutions, including best-practice research for transfer students, the impact of ethnicity on a transfer student, and a better understanding of transfer student identity. The transfer student population appears to remain a large population in higher education for the foreseeable future. For this reason, institutions must show integrity and responsibility by providing academic and social support to transfer students. Support to transfer students, in the form of academic and social engagement, displays an institution's desire for these students to succeed.

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Appendix

Protocol Questions

1. Introduction
   a. Welcome/Greeting
   b. Informed Consent
      i. Nature and purpose of the study
      ii. Interview procedure (45-60 minutes)
      iii. Potential risks and anticipated results
      iv. Confidentiality (digital recording of the interview)
      v. Freedom to withdraw from the interview or decline to answer
      vi. Space for questions regarding the study/researcher (signed consent form)

2. Interview
   a. Warm up question
      i. What type of institution did you transfer from?
      ii. Since coming to this institution, what has your transfer experience been like?
   b. Specific open-ended questions
      i. How involved in your academics do you feel at this university?
      ii. How much mental and physical energy do you put into your academics? Where does most of it go toward?
         1. How would you describe your relationship with your professors?
         2. How comfortable do you feel with your professors?
         3. Do you feel cared for by your professors? Why?

        4. How far would your professors go to help you academically succeed?

iii. How satisfied do you feel with your classes?

        1. Do you enjoy your major classes? Why?

        2. Do you enjoy your general education classes? Why?

        3. How comfortable do you feel in your classes?

iv. Do you feel like you are succeeding academically?

        1. Did you feel academically prepared for your classes? Why?

        2. Do you feel comfortable with the academic expectations here? Why?

v. What barriers have prevented you from becoming more academically involved?

        1. What has confused you about this institutions' academics?

        2. What would have helped you become more involved/engaged?

vi. How socially engaged do you feel on your floor?

        1. How involved do you feel with student life and communal activities in your residence hall?

        2. How well do feel you know the people on your floor?

        3. How well do you understand the culture of your hall/floor?

        4. How well do you feel like you fit in?

        5. If not to any of the above, what are the barriers to your involvement?

vii. How involved do you feel around campus?

        1. Do you feel like you belong on campus? Why?

        2. Do you participate in all campus activities? Why?

        3. Have you gotten involved in a group or club outside your floor? How has that helped your experience?

viii. How would you describe your relationships with people at this institution?

        1. Have you felt cared for? Why or why not?

        ix. How could the experience be improved to foster better social engagement?

            1. What could the institution have done to aid in your social transition and now involvement?

    c. Are you glad you transferred? Why or why not?

3. Closing
   a. Gratitude
   b. Open request—"Do you have any questions for me?"
   c. Respondent feedback
   d. Reiteration of gratitude