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“I Finally Found a Place Where I Feel Like Home”:  
Understanding the Relationship Between a Sense of Belonging and  
the Transfer Student Experience

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business  
Department of Higher Education and Student Development  
Taylor University  
Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

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by

Ashley M. Smith

May 2019

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**Higher Education and Student Development  
Taylor University  
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Ashley M. Smith

entitled

“I Finally Found a Place Where I Feel Like Home”: Understanding the Relationship  
Between a Sense of Belonging and the Transfer Student Experience

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree  
in Higher Education and Student Development

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### Abstract

The rate at which college students transfer from one higher education institution to another is steadily increasing. The purpose of the study was to develop a greater understanding of the relationship between a sense of belonging and the transfer student experience. The study implemented a mixed-methods embedded design. A survey adapted from the Basic Human Needs Scale was administered to participants to produce a Belonging composite score. The survey questions were followed by three open-response questions that allowed participants to explain further the relationship between their sense of belonging and transfer student experiences. Quantitative data revealed an above-average sense of belonging, yet qualitative data demonstrated significant complexity, challenges, and variance within the transfer student experience. While means comparisons demonstrated no statistical significance between participants' gender or previous institution type, participants noted how factors such as on-campus housing, time of transfer, and campus involvement influenced their sense of belonging and overall transfer student experience. Therefore, the significance of recognizing the types of transfer, potential challenges, and complexity of varied experiences serve as the basis for implications discussed.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

As the number of students who choose to depart from an institution increases, so does the need for greater clarity regarding the transfer student experience (Noel-Levitz, 2013). Institutions are receiving an increased number of transfer students, resulting in the need to understand what those students require to succeed. Transfer students, whether from a community college or four-year institution, require different resources to transition successfully and persist to graduation. Most transfer student research focuses on the academic transition of community college transfers, which leaves a significant gap in the literature. The goal of the current research was to understand the concept of belonging within the transfer student experience.

#### **Types of Transfer**

Transfer students are defined as those who begin college at one institution and then enroll at a different institution. For the purposes of the current research, it was necessary to clearly define two types of transfer students. First, vertical transfer students begin their education at a two-year institution and transfer to a four-year institution (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Historically, these students struggle with the academic shift that arises when transitioning to the often-increased academic rigor of a four-year institution. This experience is commonly referred to as “transfer shock” (Coston, Lord,

& Monell, 2013). While this challenge accounts for a significant portion of the transfer experience, further exploration is needed to encompass the needs of transfer students.

The second transfer student group is the lateral transfer. For the purpose of the current research, lateral transfers are those who transfer from a four-year institution to another four-year institution (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). Lateral transfer is especially important, as it is studied less frequently than the vertical transfer, and understanding the differences is essential to designing transition programming properly. While academics may remain a factor for these students, lateral transfers more likely depart an institution due to a lack of institutional fit or relational difficulties (Kranzow, Foote, & Hinkle, 2015). Additionally, these students need social integration and involvement to succeed academically (Astin, 1984). In order for lateral transfers to persist to graduation and avoid another transfer, they must acclimate themselves to the new campus culture.

Both types of transfer students have many causes for departing the original institution. For instance, students depart primarily due to financial, academic, or relational issues (Townsend, 2008), and one in three students transfer at least once within their collegiate career (Hossler et al., 2012). Transfer students are also likely to transfer again, creating a significant need when considering retention efforts (Hossler et al., 2012). With many explanations for student departure, furthering research on what needs exist within all types of transfer is necessary to best inform future practice.

### **Belonging**

Transfer students have specific challenges and needs in their transition yet rarely receive the resources necessary to assimilate well to their new environment (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). The concept of belonging is considered a basic human need;

therefore, achieving a sense of belonging is crucial not only as a transfer student but as a human being in general (Maslow & Lowry, 1968). In a college campus context, sense of belonging is defined as the appearance of acceptance, the need for frequent social interaction, fit, and inclusion (O'Brien, Mars, & Eccleston, 2011; Wilson et al., 2015). This concept is especially important for those attending a primarily residential institution.

Achieving a sense of belonging requires a continued effort throughout the collegiate experience. When a student first arrives on campus, a sense of belonging assists in the adjustment process (Hurtado et al., 2007). Beyond the initial transition, maintaining a sense of belonging most often correlates with a greater level of engagement, allowing for greater academic success (Wilson et al., 2015). Successfully transitioning from one campus to another while maintaining high involvement increases the likelihood that students feel they matter and belong to the campus community.

Many first-year experience programs foster a sense of belonging for first-year students, but such programs are not as prevalent for transfer students. While it is important that transfer students do not simply join first-year students for orientation or first-year experience courses, transitional programming must be in place to equip this student group for success just as first-year students are (Kranzow et al., 2015). Better equipping and assisting transfer students from the beginning of their new campus experience increases the likelihood they will remain at the receiving institution.

### **Purpose of Research**

With the increase of transfer students, understanding their unique needs is necessary to ensure they are equipped to persist to graduation. Transfer students require assistance in transition, but programming must match their needs, which differ from those

of first-year students. While transfer students may struggle academically, the need for social integration cannot be overlooked. Developing a sense of belonging is necessary for human existence; therefore, more efforts must be made to recognize all aspects of the transfer student experience.

The goal of the current research was to understand the relationship between a sense of belonging and the transfer student experience. By filling a gap in the literature by emphasizing the social integration aspect of transition, the study allows for best practice recommendations for supporting transfer students throughout their transition.

### **Research Question**

What is the relationship between a sense of belonging and the transfer student experience?

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The number of college students who transfer from one institution to another is steadily increasing (Adelman, 2006; Hossler et al., 2012; Shapiro, Dunder, Wakhungu, Yuan, & Harrell, 2015; Shaprio et al., 2018). For example, one in three college students transfers at least once within their college career (Shaprio et al., 2015). It is widely understood that an increase in retention and persistence is often related to high levels of student involvement (Astin, 1993; Bean, 2005; Tinto, 1987). Unfortunately, most transfer students are less involved on campus than native students (Kuh, 2003). While levels of involvement can vary based on the type of transfer, transitional programming at four-year institutions is often designed primarily to assist traditional first-year students. While the number of transfer students continues as a rising trend in higher education, the growing student population lacks the necessary support that first-year students receive (Kuh, 2003; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015); therefore, there exists a significant need to better understand this student population and its specific needs (Hossler et al., 2012).

With a rising number of transfers also comes a variety of needs to meet. There are many reasons students make an institutional change, and these reasons must be understood so higher education professionals can aid in the transitional and developmental processes while these students at the new institution (Laanan, 2001; Tinto, 1987; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). While vertical transfer students, or those who transfer

from a two-year institution to a four-year institution, have been heavily researched, there remains a lack of understanding for those who transfer laterally, or from a four-year institution to another four-year institution (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). While lateral transfers can experience academic difficulties just as vertical transfers, there appears little understanding of the need for these students to socially integrate and belong on campus. This review discusses the differences in types of transfer students and explains the specific needs of each type of transfer and the role of a sense of belonging within a successful transition.

### **Transfer Students**

Transfer students are those who begin their education at one postsecondary institution but complete their degree at another institution (Cuseo, 1998). While most transfer students arrive at the receiving institution with both social and academic needs, the prevalence of those needs is dependent on the type of transfer (Kuh, 2003; Noel-Levitz, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). The most commonly researched transfer group is the vertical transfer (Weiss, McKelfresh, & Yang, 2006). Since these students begin at a community college, this group recognizes the need to transfer in order to obtain a bachelor's degree. These students are provided with resources and often have at least one to two years to anticipate the transfer (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Since this transfer group changes institutional type, research has focused on academic and social integration at the new institution. While this type of transfer is significant, not all transfer students moving to a four-year institution begin at a community college.

The other transfer group is the lateral transfer. Lateral transfer students transition from one four-year institution to another four-year institution (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015).



Lateral transfers encounter some challenges not commonly faced by vertical transfers. A student who chooses to transfer laterally has often come to the decision less from logistical necessity in comparison to a vertical transfer (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kurwaye, 2007). For instance, vertical transfers more likely anticipate a transfer, including the expected academic and social changes. Instead, lateral transfer students more likely have anticipated graduating from their original institution (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). This student group is on the rise, yet much of the research surrounding transfer students focuses on vertical transfers, leaving a gap in the literature regarding unique challenges associated with lateral transfers (Hossler et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2015; Shapiro et al., 2018).

**Reasons students transfer.** Often, a transfer occurs when students' expectations of a particular college, campus environment, or academic program are not met (Strauss, 2017). Colleges have become a brand attempting to sell an experience, and if one institution does not meet original expectations, students are encouraged to search until they experience a greater fit. This is a common explanation for the lateral transfer. More so than a vertical transfer, the experiences that lead to a lateral transfer can be more complex and varied. Some clear reasons come from a family move, change in academic plans, or financial difficulties (Rinehart, 1977).

The more difficult factor to measure is the lack of social integration or belonging on campus. While it is possible for financial or academic reasons to also contribute to a move based on how a student feels he or she belongs on campus, it is likely the decision to transfer can become solely about the lack of campus social integration (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). If a student does not believe he or she belongs in a particular campus

environment, academic performance will likely also suffer, leading to the necessary search for a better institutional fit.

One of the most significant differences between vertical and lateral transfer students is what causes the transfer. Since lateral transfers are rarely anticipated from the beginning, there are usually significant reasons as to why a transfer is made to a similar institutional type. While academic struggles need to be addressed, the social integration process is crucial for a lateral transfer's success (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). According to Tinto (1987), many components lead students to depart, so understanding these situations and perspectives is essential to retain students and foster transfer student success.

**Theory of student departure.** Tinto's theory of student departure describes the various aspects that contribute to a student leaving an institution. Tinto (1987) noted many roots of departure, describing these roots as four events that lead to departure: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation.

Adjustment refers to the necessity of students to become socially and intellectually integrated to their campuses. For a transfer student, this adjustment process begins again once at the receiving institution. It is important to note the period of adjustment is different for each student, and varying student groups require unique support. Understanding what this support must look like for each student group is essential for retaining students (Tinto, 1987).

Difficulty most often relates to a student's academic performance. Each institution has specific standards, and failure to meet those standards often leads to a forced enrollment withdrawal. While academic struggle is a factor in student departure,

fewer than 15% of students who leave an institution do so because of an academic dismissal (Tinto, 1987). In other words, a significant majority of departures are voluntary.

Incongruence describes students who voluntarily depart from an institution due to academic needs or personal preferences. In many cases, students leave an institution that does not meet their needs or due to a general lack of fit. This is often based on fear of poor academic performance but can also develop through unmet social needs and desires. According to Tinto (1987), “. . . when that perception leads the person to perceive him/herself as being substantially at odds with the dominant culture of the institution and/or with significant groups of faculty and student peers, then withdrawal may follow” (p. 53). In many situations, students’ inability to tolerate a low sense of belonging on campus results in an institutional transfer.

Isolation describes how students who choose to separate themselves from the campus community often depart from their institution. It is not uncommon for students who experience incongruence to progress toward isolation. This category of departure stems from a lack of belonging as it relates to relationships in the college community. These interactions are crucial for overall success and persistence; therefore, a student who does not develop a sense of belonging much more likely leaves an institution. Most students who experience this level of isolation are within their first semester at the institution due to the sometimes-debilitating demands of transition (Tinto, 1987).

**The lateral transition.** It is widely understood from a theoretical and practical standpoint that college students undergo many transitions which affect their development (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Transfer students possess unique transitional challenges in comparison to first-year students (Townsend, 2008). One

unique challenge is a shift in academic expectations. Each type of transfer brings different challenges and needs but often includes a change in academic expectations. While a lateral transfer would not necessarily have a significant academic shift, academic programs vary by institution, and transfers often struggle to adapt without the direction first-year students receive (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). While the change in academics may differ, each transfer has the possibility of experiencing difficulty throughout their transitional experience.

Often overlooked, certain aspects of the transfer experience may prompt upperclassman new students to feel as if they are a freshman again (Townsend, 2008). First, the adjustment to a new physical space can be difficult. Many have compared entering a new learning environment to culture shock due to the significant implications that come with a new campus culture (Laanan, 2000). The new campus brings new teachers, social norms, different classroom sizes, and overall expectations of what it means to be a student at that specific institution. When education is considered holistically, many transitional difficulties regarding levels of student engagement and involvement define a transfer student's success on a new campus (Kranzow et al., 2015). The social experience of a college campus affects academic success, and it can be difficult for a transfer student to achieve a high level of involvement without the programming that traditional first-year students receive.

Even as research involving community college transfers has increased, a clear gap in the literature exists regarding lateral transfer students. These students arrive at receiving institutions often with different needs than vertical transfers, and these needs must be understood to best acclimate them during the transition. Efforts need to be made

so these new students are satisfied with their receiving institution without a lack of support resources or feeling like a freshman for the second time.

### **Sense of Belonging**

According to social psychologists, belonging is a basic human need requiring frequent social interaction and connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow & Lowry, 1968). A sense of belonging has been associated with social support and physical health (Hale, Hannum, & Espelage, 2005). Within a four-year residential campus setting, a sense of belonging allows students to feel part of the greater campus community (Wilson et al., 2015). Belonging within a college setting is defined as the appearance of acceptance, fit, and inclusion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Museus & Maramba, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2011). This concept of belonging is necessary for students to succeed academically and socially. Specifically, belonging relates to students' ability to adjust, be involved on campus, and persevere with lesser burnout rates (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2007; McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990; Ostrove & Long, 2007). Since a positive sense of belonging correlates with positive levels of engagement, students are more likely to succeed academically and socially (Wilson et al., 2015). Certain student development theories further explain and relate to the need for belonging in practical ways.

**Student involvement theory.** Astin's theory of student involvement is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Involvement theory explains the outcome of a college experience is rooted in the time and energy given by the student. While belonging is associated with self-perception, involvement theory explains that meaningful

outcomes are based on what is first given by the student (Renn & Reason, 2013). The more involved students are, the more engaged they become with others. When students are involved and feel they belong with others, mutual interests create a greater sense of persistence (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012). In summary, levels of involvement and belonging directly affect the productivity and success within a college environment.

**Transition theory.** Schlossberg's theory defines transition, the differences in types of transition, the process, and what influences transitions (Goodman et al., 2006). It is important to note the emphasis on relationships in transitions, which are a direct factor in belonging. In particular, Schlossberg explained how transitions create stress, which can negatively affect the individual's belonging (Goodman et al., 2006).

Within the theoretical framework, support is considered one of the four primary aspects needed to successfully transition (Goodman et al., 2006). Schlossberg posited four types of support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions/communities (Goodman et al., 2006). Transition theory supports the necessity of a student forming relationships and gaining support from the receiving institution's community. If students establish a sense of belonging, they have a greater capacity for successfully transitioning to a new campus community.

**Mattering and marginality theory.** Another theory that aligns with belonging is the concept of mattering and marginality (Schlossberg, 1989). Mattering is defined as "the experience of others depending on us, being interested in us, and being concerned with our fate" (Rayle & Chung, 2007, p. 1). According to Schlossberg, mattering is based on personal perception, regardless of actual validity (Patton, Renn, Guido-DiBrito, & Quaye, 2016). Marginality is a sense of not fitting in or belonging, which often

prompts feelings of “self-consciousness, irritability, and depression” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 36). Feelings of marginality often occur during a transition, role change, or uncertainty (Schlossberg, 1989). This theory relates directly to belonging in that the levels of involvement and investment shown by others dictate a student’s growth and development. In order to belong, students must feel as though they matter.

A clear theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of belonging. Even as a sense of belonging is essential for life, college students need to feel known and valued and know they matter to have a successful college experience. Students who put emotional and physical energy into making the most of their experience are more likely to experience a sense of mattering over marginality and an overall sense of belonging.

**Student departure and student involvement.** To successfully transition to a new campus environment, students must allow for separation to occur from the previous institution (Tinto, 1987). Not only must they separate physically but socially and intellectually as well. Each institution has unique culture, academic expectations, and traditions. A student’s involvement is crucial to their overall success in college (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A transfer student cannot fully adjust, or develop a sense of belonging, without first separating from the previous environment, and this is accomplished by increasing involvement at the receiving institution. While many aspects of Tinto’s theory of student departure explain what leads to the decision to leave an institution, these concepts also allude to challenges departed students may experience at the receiving institution. Transfer students likely leave an institution due to issues with adjustment, incongruence, or isolation.

As a basic human need, a sense of belonging allows students to socially integrate to their campus community, more effectively transition to their new environment, and build relationships that promote overall success at the institution. Achieving a sense of belonging decreases the likelihood of institutional departure. A sense of belonging creates benefits not only for students but also for institution retention efforts. Without experiencing this basic human need, transfer students are likely to transfer again, struggle academically, and have an overall negative college experience.

### **Conclusion**

With the rate of transfer on the rise, it is important to understand not only what circumstances lead to a transfer but also how these affect the overall transfer student experience. Often, first-year students receive with ample opportunities to assimilate quickly to their college campus. Transfer students, however, often lack the same amount of guidance as they learn to navigate a new campus, culture, academic program, and relationships. A sense of belonging is a basic human need, allowing transfer students to increase their success both academically and socially. Knowing this, higher education institutions must work to meet the needs of transfer students as they struggle to discover their place and belonging at the new institution. Therefore, the goal of the current research was to understand the relationship between a sense of belonging and the transfer student experience, as well as make suggestions for how higher education institutions can better assist students in transition and improve retention efforts.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The current study implemented a mixed-methods approach. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data collection, the researcher obtained an understanding of the relationship between sense of belonging and the transfer student experience. The quantitative portion demonstrated a self-reported sense of belonging, while the qualitative portion supplemented the data by explaining the relationship between sense of belonging and the overall transfer student experience.

#### **Embedded Design**

The use of a mixed-methods approach through an embedded design allows for a more thorough quantitative understanding of not only the reported sense of belonging but a qualitative understanding of belonging and the transfer student experience. Creswell (2012) described this mixed-methods approach by stating, “The purpose of the embedded design is to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously or sequentially, but to have one form of data play a supportive role to the other form of data” (p. 544). For the current study, the researcher implemented a quantitative descriptive survey with open-response protocol questions to fulfill the qualitative support role. Because of this, the embedded design allowed for simultaneous data collection. This method best suited the research question because the participants had the opportunity to supplement what was reported on the survey through the open-response portion.

**Context and participants.** The research instrument was distributed at a small, private, faith-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwest. This primarily residential institution has an approximate enrollment of 2,000 students. Currently, transitional programming at the institution consists of summer orientation, Welcome Weekend, and a first-year experience program. Both transfer and freshmen students attend summer orientation, and transfers are encouraged to participate in Welcome Weekend activities. While transfer students may participate in events or programs created for freshmen, the institution lacks programming specific to transfer students.

The researcher obtained a roster of all currently enrolled students with transfer status at the chosen institution from a university research analyst. Via email, the researcher invited all 161 transfer students on the roster to participate. Overall, 72 students agreed to participate (a response rate of 44%). All types of transfer students were surveyed, and each participant selected the type of institution previously attended on the instrument to determine transfer type.

Survey responses were later separated by previous institution type and gender to understand better the various types of transfer experiences. Of the participants, 47 were female, and 25 were male. Additionally, 21 participants transferred from public four-year institutions, 21 from public two-year institutions, 16 from private faith-based institutions, and 9 from private non-faith-based institutions. The remaining four participants reported their previous institution as “other.” Eight participants were freshmen, 12 sophomores, 32 juniors, and 20 seniors. Fifty participants transferred to their current institution during a fall semester, and 22 transferred during a spring semester.

**Procedure and instrumentation.** The proposal was approved by the institutional review board at the chosen institution. Prior to distribution, the researcher piloted the instrument with two transfer students. The pilots ensured the instrument was valid and appropriate for the research question. Following the pilots, the researcher distributed the instrument to all transfer students as an electronic link via email. The researcher used an adaptation of the Basic Human Needs survey, originally developed by Lasater (1983) and Ossorio (1983). The researcher obtained permission to alter the instrument to fit the research question better. This instrument has been used to understand better how belonging, mattering, and marginality can affect various student groups. For example, the instrument was adapted previously to answer questions regarding transfer student marginality (Weiss et al., 2006). The authors of the instrument noted a limitation to their study was the length of the instrument after using both the Basic Human Needs scale alongside a second survey (Weiss et al., 2006). For this reason, the researcher decided to only implement the Basic Human Needs scale.

The instrument included questions that assess basic human needs, such as safety and security, self-esteem and worth, love and affection, agency and autonomy, adequacy and competency, identity, belonging and acceptance, disengagement, order and understanding, personal and social legitimacy, meaning hope and significance, and extension of self. Participants responded to each statement based on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “Very Untrue for Me” to “Very True for Me.” Furthermore, based on previous work by Weiss et al. (2006), survey items were adapted to relate more closely to the college campus experience. For the purpose of the current study, some survey items

were modified from Weiss et al.'s (2006) adaptation to bring clarity as they relate to the current research question without compromising the integrity of the instrument.

After completing the survey, participants responded to protocol questions to explain further how a sense of belonging relates to their experience at the receiving institution. The questions allowed participants the opportunity to connect their sense of belonging to their experiences as transfer students more thoroughly than the survey alone could allow.

### **Data Analysis**

**Quantitative research analysis.** The researcher collected the majority of the data from the quantitative survey. Creswell (2012) stated survey research “describe[s] the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population” (p. 376). The current study implemented a cross-sectional design survey, a design which allows the researcher to collect all data that “measures current attitudes and practices” at one time (Creswell, 2012, p. 377). The survey provided the necessary information to determine the sense of belonging of transfer students on the campus where data collection occurred.

The survey closed after two weeks, and data were transferred to a spreadsheet. The dataset was cleansed to account for any missing data. The researcher then scored and coded the data for organization. A numeric value was added to each response within each question. The researcher generated descriptive statistics for each variable to determine central tendency, variability, and relative standing. Overall, the data analysis produced a sense of belonging score. To determine the belonging score, 14 of the 32 survey items were selected for data analysis. Of the 14 items, 7 were reverse questions,

and each item specifically targeted a sense of belonging. The results were then analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistical analysis and pattern recognition.

After generating the descriptive statistics, the researcher separated means by gender and previous institution type. Using SPSS, the means of females and males were compared using an independent t-test. Additionally, an ANOVA compared the means of previous institution types. Following these results, the quantitative analysis concluded.

**Qualitative research analysis.** The study concluded with a phenomenological design through open-ended response protocol questions. Creswell (2013) explained, “. . . a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). Participants had the chance through protocol questions to explore further the relationship between their reported sense of belonging and the overall experience as a transfer student, which could not be fully understood through survey response alone. The phenomenological design allowed the data to represent the shared experience of transfer students. Through the use of an embedded design, the open-response questions were collected within the same instrument as the survey.

The researcher read through protocol responses for a general understanding of the data. Once organized, the researcher coded the open-ended protocol question responses to generate themes through frequency, magnitude, and pattern recognition. Coding is used to “make sense out of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes” (Creswell, 2012, p. 243). With this process, the researcher made sense of the qualitative data as the supplementary portion to the quantitative data.

### **Mixed-Methods Analysis**

Because of the nature of the embedded design, the quantitative and qualitative datasets were analyzed first separately, then together. Both quantitative and qualitative data produced separate results due to the different types of questions (Creswell, 2012). Through this process, the quantitative survey was first analyzed using descriptive statistics apart from the qualitative analysis of the protocol questions using coding, theming, and pattern recognition.

This process provided the opportunity to discover any contrary evidence between the two data sets, as well as what reinforced or complemented the data (Creswell, 2012). To ensure accuracy of the data, the process of triangulation was implemented. According to Creswell (2012), this process “ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes” (p. 259). The use of mixed methods allowed for greater accuracy in developing and understanding how a sense of belonging relates to the transfer student experience.

The researcher also had previous experience with transferring institutions. As a former transfer student, the researcher recognized many challenges and had considered how a sense of belonging impacts the experience prior to conducting the research (Creswell, 2013). By clarifying the researcher bias, the researcher’s position, biases, and assumptions are clear when considering the validity of the data analysis process.

### **Benefits**

While research surrounding transfer students has increased in recent years, the focus is often on specific transfer students or a specific aspect of the transition. A majority of research also emphasizes the academic transition over social integration.

Studying how a sense of belonging relates to the transfer student experience, whether vertical or lateral, fills a gap in research by providing insight to risk factors and difficulties faced by these students during the transition, as well as factors that contributed to the sense of belonging. Developing a greater understanding of this student population greatly contributes to higher education, specifically within transitional programming, support services, and persistence. Since 25% of transfer students transfer more than once (Hossler et al., 2012), understanding the transitional and social support necessary for success would also contribute to best practices in retention.

Since the rate at which students are transferring is steadily increasing, it is essential to understand better what support is necessary, both socially and academically, once these students arrive at the receiving institutions (Hossler et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2018). Common factors leading to student departure are academic, financial, or social in nature (Cuseo, 1998; Hossler et al., 2012; Tinto, 1987). Transfer students arrive at an institution with unique needs, and the need to integrate and belong is essential for academic and social success (Noel-Levitz, 2013; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). Unfortunately, many transfer students experience a lack of institutional support when the majority of transitional programming focuses on first-time freshmen (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). Studying how a basic human need, such as a sense of belonging, relates to various transfer student experiences provides the necessary information to understand challenges these students face. This knowledge in the current study allows for thoughtful and accurate recommendations for higher educational professionals who interact with and support transfer students.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The results consist of a quantitative analysis of the belonging score of transfer students. Calculations include descriptive statistics and means comparisons. The qualitative results further explain quantitative findings by providing a greater essence of the transfer student experience. Themes emerging from open-ended protocol questions allowed greater clarity regarding belonging as it relates to the transfer student experience. Ultimately, the essence of the research stems from considering both quantitative and qualitative data together within the mixed analysis.

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

The Basic Human Needs survey was used to answer the research question using statistical analysis. After compiling the survey items to create the belonging score, the results were used to initially answer the research question: “What is the relationship between a sense of belonging and the transfer student experience?” Considering the literature, the researcher anticipated previous institution type could impact the sense of belonging and overall experience of transfer students.

**Descriptive statistics.** The survey data was collected, and descriptive statistics (Table 1) were used to make meaning of responses. Descriptive statistics were generated for the overall sample and the following variables: Gender (1=Female, 2=Male) and Previous Institution Type (1=Public 4-Year Institution, 2=Public 2-Year Institution,



3=Private Faith-Based 4-Year, 4=Private Non-Faith Based 4-Year). The five participants who listed their previous institution type as “other” are represented in the overall Belonging Composite, but the researcher did not consider the five as a separate comparison group due to size and inconsistent previous institutional experiences.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Belonging	72	2.86	6.00	4.78	.821
Composite					
Female	47	2.86	6.00	4.72	.883
Male	25	3.29	5.86	4.90	.690
Public 4-Year	21	2.86	5.86	4.69	.882
Public 2-Year	21	3.29	5.86	4.80	.701
Private Faith Based	16	3.00	6.00	4.95	.971
Private Non-Faith Based	9	4.07	5.71	4.87	.683

When considering the belonging composite score, Table 1 demonstrates participants identified above average in belonging ( $M = 4.78$ ) within the 6-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics seemed to indicate no noticeable differences among the variables, leading to the conclusion that previous institution type has little to no impact on the transfer student experience in the context of the current research.

**Means comparisons.** The researcher searched for statistical significance between the means of gender, as well as previous institution type. As seen in Table 2, an Independent Samples t-Test revealed no statistically significant difference between female and male transfer students. Additionally, Table 3 demonstrated no statistical significance between previous institution types.

Table 2

*Independent t-Test for Gender Belonging Composite Means*

t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval Lower	Upper
-.905	70	.368	-.184	.203	-.590	.222

Table 3

*ANOVA*

Source	df	SS	MS	F	P
Between groups	3	.632	.211	.307	.820
Within groups	63	43.292	.687		
Total	66	43.924			

In summary, the descriptive statistics demonstrated no difference between gender nor previous institution type. Furthermore, an independent t-Test and an ANOVA confirmed these results, as means within females and males, as well as previous institution types, were compared and revealed no statistical significance.

## Qualitative Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative open-response questions led to further clarity of how a sense of belonging relates to the transfer student experience. With the protocol questions providing the essence of the transfer student experience more specifically, the qualitative data can provide greater depth to the quantitative results. Especially without statistically different results between institution type, the open-response questions allowed participants to explain how belonging relates to their transfer experience and the challenges caused through the transfer student experience. Many participants who scored above average or higher on the belonging composite identified specific challenges that may have been more present earlier in the transfer experience, leading the researcher to believe a sense of belonging is experienced through a combination of time spent and various types of involvement at the receiving institution. Based on the three questions asked, themes emerged based on participants' satisfaction with decision to transfer, overall experience with belonging, and specific challenges experienced.

**Satisfaction with transfer student experience.** When asked if participants were satisfied with their decision to transfer to their current institution, 72 out of 75 responses revealed moderate to significant satisfaction with their transfer. Coding the data containing factors behind the satisfaction revealed two themes.

***Theme 1: Christ-centered community.*** Since the research was conducted at a small faith-based institution, "Christ-centered community" describes relationships with peers, faculty, and staff as they relate to a common faith. The purpose of this type of community is to cultivate a sense of belonging among faith-based beliefs and standards. Of 75 responses, 34 statements indicated the community found within the institution

pointed participants to satisfaction in their transfer student experience. Participants mentioned the significance of establishing relationships, campus community involvement, and the spiritual formation experienced within the community. One participant noted,

At my previous college, I did not feel as though I could truly express myself in the ways that the Lord has created me to express myself. At [this university], though, I am so well supported and loved; for the first time in a long time, I am able to breathe freely and feel like myself.

This participant identified an experience that was not present at the previous institution. Clearly, belonging allows students a greater transfer student experience.

***Theme 2: Satisfaction with time.*** For many transfer students, it was difficult to know if the decision to transfer was the right one early in the experience. Since a variety of factors result in institutional departure, it can take time for a student to decide if the receiving institution is a better fit. While only seven participants described this experience, the magnitude of what was said was significant. One participant explained,

In the beginning, I had a hard time understanding the culture and really felt myself in denial about what I had just done (transferring). But, since J-term and second semester I have found less resentment and more acceptance with my peers. I have really loved getting to meet new people along with the education and opportunity [this university] provides.

This theme emphasizes the significance of time and patience in the transfer student experience. It takes time for students to immerse themselves and adjust to a new community.

**Effect of belonging.** Within the next open-response question, participants had the opportunity to explain how their sense of belonging at the receiving institution affects their transfer student experience. Participants identified many formational experiences and factors, including housing, involvement, isolation, and various campus identities. After coding, two themes emerged.

***Theme 1: Residence life culture.*** Social identity at this institution is based significantly on housing. Each residence hall—even specific floors or wings—maintains traditions and a unique culture. Much of the student experience at this institution revolves around residence hall occupancy, with many students choosing to remain on the same hall or wing for their entire college experience. Since transfer students often are randomly placed in housing or choose to commute, it can be difficult to assimilate fully into the campus culture as a new upperclassman student. Some noted the difficulty, and others explained how the significance of on-campus housing led to an easier transition.

While only 8 of 71 responses explicitly noted a negative or difficult housing experience, there is magnitude in this example. One participant wrote:

There isn't really a spot for transfers to fit in other than the wing, and other transfers, and if you don't fit in with your wing, you are pretty much out of luck until you can find a new place to live.

Additionally, some participants described the richness of their residence life experiences. While only five participants mentioned their wing or residence hall specifically influenced their experience positively, their words came with great magnitude. One participant noted,

My wing has been very supportive and involved with my campus experience since first coming to [this university]. They are the primary reason why I feel a sense of belonging here. Feeling like I belong on my floor has made me feel like I belong on this campus and has encouraged me to branch out and be involved in many campus events that I otherwise would not have entertained.

Overall, housing plays a critical role in the integration of a transfer student to his or her new campus environment.

***Theme 2: Starting over, isolation, and missing out.*** As a transfer student enters a new campus environment, it can be difficult to find a place to belong. For instance, some participants described feelings of isolation and overall confusion regarding where they fit into the campus environment. Others explained even as friend groups are formed, it is difficult to look past the semesters lost and what they missed out on during the initial semesters of the college experience. Out of 71 responses, 17 statements referenced challenges associated with overcoming isolation as participants sought belonging yet recognized the reality of missing the initial semester(s). One participant explained, “Sometimes I felt like an outsider because I didn’t experience the previous years with those in my class.” Participants explained, even as involvement increased during their experience, it was challenging not to focus on what could have been if they had been at the institution for the entirety of their college experience.

**Transfer student challenges.** In the final open-response question, participants were asked to specify challenges directly associated to their transfer status. While a variety of challenges were described, the majority encompassed the social experience.

***Theme 1: Feeling like a freshman.*** Many transfer students, regardless of whether or not separate transfer orientation programming exists, experience feeling like a freshman for a second time as they enter a new campus environment. Since transfer students are new to the campus but not the college experience, this can add additional difficulties present in any transition. Of 71 responses, 11 described various situations or factors that led to feeling like a freshman. For example, a participant noted, “There wasn’t a community for transfers. I was considered a freshman and felt like a freshman.” This participant’s experience demonstrates how transfer students are naturally displaced in a student body. They are not first-time freshmen, yet they lack the institutional experiences of those within their academic class.

Another participant discussed how institutional programming produced feeling like a freshman:

One thing is that the FYE program didn’t really cover transfer students. We met once during welcome weekend, and then never again. I’m glad I didn’t have to go through another FYE group again, but I felt like I lost out on some information other students were getting about the University.

Transfer students do not want to feel like freshmen during their transition process, yet they may desire guidance as they assimilate to a new campus community.

***Theme 2: Social integration.*** Socially integrating to a new campus culture is essential for transfer students to experience a sense of belonging. While integration to a college campus requires time and effort, transfer students lack the same support first-time freshmen receive throughout orientation and first-year experience programs. Forty-two of 71 responses mentioned struggling socially on campus in a variety of ways. Many

participants noted the difficulty of breaking into pre-established friend groups and building relationships on campus where academic class is heavily emphasized. One participant explained this reality:

Wing-culture is very unique to [this institution]. My wing especially is very clique-ish, so when I feel alone on my wing, there seems to be far fewer options for me to connect with anyone. Freshmen are easily welcomed, embraced, and have each other. Transfers are in a far more difficult position.

Participants demonstrated the significant need to belong by emphasizing the struggle to acclimate socially to the new campus community as a transfer student.

### **Mixed Analysis**

Allowing the qualitative data to supplement the quantitative belonging score created the opportunity for a more complete understanding of the transfer student experience. Although the mean belonging score represented an above-average sense of belonging ( $M=4.78$ ), the data from the open-response questions provided more detailed challenges and reasons transfer students struggle to establish a sense of belonging at their receiving institution.

Specifically, the second open-response question allowed participants to explain how their sense of belonging affected their transfer experience. These results demonstrated how students may report an above-average sense of belonging according to the quantitative data, yet their open-responses further explained how transfer students often maintain their status as an identity, separating them from native students. For example, one participant stated,



It was hard in the beginning to meet [upperclassmen] and not be grouped with the freshmen all the time. It took a long time and a lot of effort for me to start meeting people that actually care for me and want to be friends.

Transfer students may report a sense of belonging over time, but often certain factors, especially in the beginning of the transition, isolate these students from native students.

It seems transfer students do not always believe they experience a complete lack of belonging, yet they can articulate factors that separate them from the native student population and experience. For example, one participant explained, “It is truly difficult to transfer, especially during the spring semester. While things socially are not exactly what I would hope currently, I realize that it is [a] difficult process and [I] continue to put effort into it.” The data shows a clear tension between the imminent challenges within the transfer student experience and the role of optimism in making the most of the experience through consistent effort to belong.

Additionally, some participants made note of the timing of the survey, explaining how their responses would be different earlier in their transfer experience.

Acknowledging the role of time in the transition process is crucial to make sense of both sets of data together. For example, one participant noted,

I definitely would have answered some of the previous questions very differently, more pessimistically in my first semester at [this institution]. Now I am leaving [this institution] with a great education, some of the best friends I could ask for, and a fiancé. I loved my time at [this institution], but I am ready for the next step.

Transfer students recognize the differences in their experiences compared to native students, and those who belong can maintain a positive, yet realistic perspective.

**Theme: Variance in the transfer student experience.** With the culmination of both quantitative and qualitative data sets, a final theme of Variance in the Transfer Student Experience emerged. While the quantitative data revealed an above-average sense of belonging, qualitative responses demonstrated significant variety within transfer student experiences. Among the clear themes in the qualitative data, many were based on magnitude rather than frequency, leading to the conclusion transfer students maintain unique experiences not only when compared to native students but among other transfer students as well. The variety of responses regarding challenges, what has led to experiencing a sense of belonging, and the general perception of the transfer student experience demonstrated the complexities of this student population.

### **Essence of Findings**

Both the quantitative and qualitative data clearly present the variety and complexity of the transfer student experience. Transfer students reported an above-average sense of belonging, and responses regarding specific challenges led to a greater understanding of the transfer student experience. Qualitative themes supplemented the belonging score, providing insight to the complexity of varying challenges transfer students experience. Overall, data concludes that, while students report an above-average belonging, there are clear challenges improved over time through campus involvement. Chapter 5 discusses the complexity of the relationship between a sense of belonging and the transfer student experience.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Considering the results, it is vital to recognize the variation and complexity within the transfer student experience. As seen in the literature and the current research, not all transfer experiences are the same (Shapiro et al., 2018). While the transfer student experience is complex and varied, clear factors promote a sense of belonging in students. These factors may vary depending on the student, previous experiences, the culture of the departed campus, and the receiving institution's campus environment. Within the current research, both the quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate the relationship between a sense of belonging and the transfer student experience. The discussion below first addresses challenges seen in all types of transfer students as compared to the literature. Explored next are aspects of belonging such as, housing, involvement, and isolation as they appear in literature. Additionally, literature further explains how transfer students can feel like freshmen again. Finally, discussion concludes with implications regarding how higher education professionals can better care for and support transfer students.

Acknowledging both lateral and vertical transfer students while focusing primarily on the social transition fills a gap in the literature. Previous research often compartmentalizes the types of transfer and specific challenges (Kuh, 2003; Noel-Levitz, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Weiss et al., 2006), while the current study allowed for a more complete understanding of the various student experiences possible. For example,

the literature primarily focuses on the academic transition of transfer students, especially within vertical transfers (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). The current study encouraged a more holistic approach to understanding the transfer student experience.

A prominent theme, feeling like a freshman, connects directly to common transfer student challenges in the literature (Townsend, 2008). Townsend (2008) mentioned the significance of adjusting to a new environment, noting the similarities native first-year students experience. While transfer students are not entering the college environment for the first time, it is important to recognize the differences present within the receiving institution. The qualitative data in the current study aligns with the time and support needed for students to adjust fully from the departed campus to the receiving institution (Goodman et al., 2006; Tinto, 1987). Overall, as students seek to assimilate to the new campus environment, successful transition through time and support (Goodman et al., 2006) is necessary for higher education institutions to establish pathways for this to occur without leaving transfer students feeling like freshmen again.

Additionally, the magnitude of participants' residence life culture experience further emphasized the role of housing within the transfer student transition (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). Participants noted both positive and negative experiences with on-campus housing, which aligns with the claim by Utter and DeAngelo (2015) that transfer students in a positive, healthy living environment have greater success assimilating to the new campus environment. Since college students spend more time outside the classroom than inside, providing a stable living environment is essential for transfer students to develop a sense of belonging.

In addition to the role of housing, overall student involvement assists in cultivating a sense of belonging in transfer students (Astin 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013). Many participants who included examples of their involvement while explaining their transfer experience were able to connect how they also developed a sense of belonging from those areas. For example, participants noted athletic teams, residence halls, leadership involvement, and student support services as areas on campus that fostered a sense of belonging for a variety of reasons. To succeed, transfer students must have their basic human needs met. Increased belonging relates directly with the involvement of the student, demonstrated both in the current research and literature.

Overall, participating in a healthy community is essential to establishing a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow & Lowry, 1968; Wilson et al., 2015). The magnitude of responses related to involvement in the campus community further emphasizes the importance of fostering a safe learning environment for all students, especially those in transition. Not only did participants mention involvement in different aspects of the campus community, but they articulated how the involvement led to developing their sense of belonging. When students recognize and believe they matter because others depend on them, are interested in them, and are concerned about them, their marginality decreases, allowing for a better overall student experience (Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989). A sense of belonging requires great investment and effort by the receiving institution as well as by the transfer student. A sense of belonging may promote greater student success, and students must first feel as though they matter to experience success.

## **Implications for Practice**

While the findings display the great variety in the transfer student experience, higher education practitioners should make certain steps toward improving transfer student support practices. Broadly, transfer students require support similar to first-year students, but this support must prove distinct from traditional first-year experience programs.

Because of this, the first implication for practice is a first-year experience program designed specifically for transfer students. While transfer students should not be required to participate in orientation as if they are repeating freshman year, these students need the option to participate in programming targeted to their unique needs. This Transfer Success Seminar program could be carried out by offering elective credit to transfer students who choose to enroll, differentiating from the program most often required of traditional first-year students. This would allow transfers the opportunity to better understand the resources, expectations, and opportunities available at their receiving institution, while emphasizing the capacity for connections to form.

Since most students receive basic college success information in first-year experience seminars or orientation, this program has the opportunity to focus more on fostering a sense of belonging based on their academic college rather than their academic class. This focus would hopefully reduce the chance of transfers feeling like freshmen again by instead providing more intentional space for them to integrate to the new campus community, both academically and socially. Ideally, support would come through various student affairs offices and more experienced transfer students, allowing new students to increase their campus involvement and improve their sense of belonging.

Secondly, institutions could serve their transfer student population through implementing a peer-mentorship program. This program would build community, provide an opportunity for leadership, and offer a unique space for transfer students that is positive, not isolating. Transfer students would benefit from this program in two ways. First, transfer students at the beginning of their experience would have the opportunity to connect with a transfer peer mentor who understands challenges they may face on their new campus. With consistent interaction throughout the first semester, the transfer student leader can serve as a resource for questions, provide advice for where to get involved, and in general, become a safe space for the new transfer student as they assimilate to the new campus.

Additionally, more experienced transfer students would have the opportunity to be more involved on campus in this student leadership role. This partnership between two transfer students would develop and empower student leaders, provide a sense of ownership for encouraging and assisting peers, and allow for greater connections within the campus community. While transfer students tend to be less involved than native students, new transfer students would be introduced to this exclusive opportunity, allowing them to have a positive experience unlike that of a native student.

The final implication for practice involves residential housing. Students need to feel safe, have their basic human needs met, and develop a sense of belonging in order to have greater success at their receiving institution. While not all college students, and especially transfer students, live on campus, encouraging transfer students to live on campus initially proves valuable during their transition process. The positives involved

with on-campus housing could be communicated to students during the admissions process as they begin making plans for the year.

Transfer students can be placed in on-campus housing more intentionally in two specific ways. In both situations, the important factor is limiting feelings of isolation among transfer students. If at all possible, placing transfer students should include an effort to place them either in a living environment of all transfer students or in a group of transfer students intermingled with native students, not simply filling open-bed space.

Since residence life is distinctive and specifically structured at all types of institutions, the practical application may look different. For instance, if residence halls are designed for students based on class, transfers should reside with their academic year, not the first-time freshman class with which they entered. This should assist in preventing feeling like a freshman again. Ideally, if residence halls are not assigned based on academic year, transfer students could greatly benefit from living with other transfer students and native students. In essence, transfer students should not be randomly placed in an isolated hall of upperclassmen or traditional first-year students, and the ideal situation allows transfer students to live with others in the same transfer process as well as native students so that a variety of campus-wide connections can form.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Considering the limited research available regarding how a sense of belonging directly relates to the transfer student experience, there are clear suggestions for future research. With the present study conducted at a small faith-based institution, there could be a greater fullness in the research by including a variety of institutional types. The



research would then allow for institutional comparison, leading to more specific implications for practice for a variety of institutional types.

Additionally, creation of a stronger, more precise instrument would produce greater clarity when measuring belonging in future research. Of the few current belonging scales, the intended context differs from the transfer student experience. The use of a belonging instrument created specifically for the college environment would lead to greater validity and reliability.

Finally, conducting a longitudinal study would lead to greater understanding of more specific factors that, overtime, affect belonging throughout the transfer student experience. For instance, the study would begin with the initial transfer and conclude within the final semester to note the growth and experiences that explain the relationship between the transfer student experience and a sense of belonging over time.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation present within the research is researcher bias. While this is present in all research in some capacity, especially when interpreting qualitative results, the researcher was also previously an undergraduate transfer student. To reduce this bias, the researcher implemented the clarifying validation strategy to ensure readers understand experiences that may have influenced the data analysis. Since the data was interpreted through the lens of a transfer student experience, this bias may be present.

Another limitation is institutional type. Since the research was conducted at a small faith-based institution, results may not accurately portray how transfer students experience a sense of belonging in different types of institutional communities. For instance, fostering community is important to the institution where the research took

place, as it is for many faith-based institutions, yet this may look different within other institutional type contexts.

An additional limitation was the voluntary nature of the study. Since participants chose to respond to the survey and open-response questions, it is possible they possessed an investment and specific interest in the topic. Participants may have been motivated to respond based on largely positive or largely negative experiences, potentially missing data representative of average transfer experiences.

### **Conclusion**

The rising number of transfer students in higher education necessitates understanding the unique aspects of the transfer student experience. Transfer students arrive on campuses with various experiences, differing previous institutional types, and preconceived notions about the college experience. While these students are not new to the college experience, the adjustment to a new campus culture, academic program, and varying expectations is significant.

A growing amount of research addresses the transfer student experience, yet studies most often focus strictly on a single type of transfer or a specific aspect of the transfer experience. The current study allowed for a holistic understanding of the transfer student experience and how it relates to their sense of belonging at the receiving institution. With the significant variety in amount of previous transfers, prior experiences and expectations, allowing data to inform practice can prove challenging, but continuing to ask questions and listen to voices of transfer students can lead to greater best practice strategies.

The clear variety and complexities within transfer student experiences is a significant factor explaining the relationship with a sense of belonging. When considering transfer student support practices, it is crucial to recognize the various types of transfer, variety in previous experiences, and complex challenges relating to a sense of belonging. Overall, developing a sense of belonging clearly produces great benefits within not only the transition process but college students' overall academic and social success. As higher education professionals seek to best serve and care for transfer students, understanding the variance and complexity of transfer student challenges is vital for properly informing practice. Though a challenging task, the benefits of implementing transfer student specific programming and resources not only demonstrate deep care for the student population but offer greater opportunities for student retention and persistence.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Questions

1. I would feel as though I belong more if I could express my thoughts more clearly.
2. **On this campus, I am not of much use to anyone.\***
3. **There are people on this campus who really care for me.**
4. I feel things are out of my control.
5. Although I am doing all that I can, it still isn't enough.
6. **On this campus, there is no place where I really belong.\***
7. It is difficult for me to relax and forget about my problems on this campus.
8. **Life on this campus is confusing.\***
9. **I am respected by my campus community.**
10. A person has to look after him- or herself, because you cannot depend on other people.
11. I have truly helped some people on this campus.
12. **I do not have enough good friends on this campus.\***
13. Nobody else decides for me what I should do.
14. I am confident of being able to make a living.
15. I wish I could just blend in with other students on this campus.
16. **I feel really comfortable and natural with people on this campus.**
17. I have enough chance to be alone and have peace and quiet.
18. **I have a good understanding of people on this campus and how they think.**
19. **On this campus, I am misunderstood and different.\***
20. What I do today will make life better for me in the future.
21. **There is someone on this campus I love or like very much.**
22. **On average, I feel safe and secure on this campus.**
23. I am proud of what I have accomplished.
24. **I do not get enough affection from other people on this campus.\***
25. I am able to improve my life through my own efforts.
26. I know how to do the things that will get me what I want.
27. I understand myself very well.
28. **There is a group of people on this campus who like and accept me.**
29. I do some very enjoyable things just because I want to.
30. Things are so unpredictable that it is hard for me to plan ahead.
31. **Nobody on this campus listens to what I have to say.\***
32. My religion and spirituality give meaning to my life.

Bolded items produced belonging composite score

\*indicates reverse questions

## **Appendix B**

### **Survey Open-ended Response Items**

1. Are you satisfied with your decision to transfer to [this institution]? Why or why not?
2. How has your sense of belonging at [this institution] affected your experience as a transfer student?
3. What challenges have you encountered as a transfer student at [this institution]?

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study of how a sense of belonging affects the transfer student experience. You were selected as a possible subject because of your transfer status at (this university). We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is being conducted by Ashley Smith to fulfill the thesis requirement of Taylor University's Master of Higher Education and Student Development program.

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact that a sense of belonging has on the transfer student experience.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete the following survey. The survey has 45 questions in total. Completing the survey should take approximately 15 minutes. Questions will ask you about your perception of sense of belonging and then how this affects the college experience as a transfer student.

**Risk and benefits:** The researcher does not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. You are free to stop the survey at any time, and incomplete surveys will not be used in this project. You may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on how you perceive your sense of belonging and how it affects your experience as a transfer student. The researcher will notify all participants when the results of this study will be announced. You may benefit from hearing the results of the findings from this study.

**Your answers will be confidential:** The records of this study will be stored in password protected files until the conclusion of the research, at which point they will be deleted. In any public report or presentation of the research findings, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to stop the survey at any time, and incomplete surveys will not be used in this project. If you decide not to take part, it will not affect your relationship with Taylor University.

**If you have questions:** Please contact the principal investigator, Ashley Smith, Graduate Student, at ashley\_smith3@taylor.edu or 765.998.4373. You may also contact Scott Gaier, Faculty Advisor, at sgaier@tayloru.edu or 765.998.5391. Additionally, you may contact Taylor University's Institutional Review Board at IRB@taylor.edu or the Chair of IRB, Sue Gavin, at ssgavin@tayloru.edu or 765.998.5188.

#### SUBJECT'S CONSENT

Please note: You must be 18 years of age to provide your own consent and to participate in this survey.

By ticking this box, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

## Appendix D

### Permission to Use and Adapt Basic Human Needs Survey

Dear Ashley,

Dr. Hap Cox forwarded your inquiry to me via Dr. Tee Roberts regarding utilizing an instrument that I originally developed with Dr. Peter Ossorio's assistance in the early 1970s to assess Basic Human Need satisfaction in a Western Colorado Coal mining community. That publication is not available in electronic form but the reference to the book chapter is below.

Lasater, Lane (1983) "Stress and Health in a Colorado Coal Mining Community." In Davis, Keith A. (ed.,) *Advances in Descriptive Psychology*, University of South Carolina Press. (SC: Columbia).

I attach an electronic copy of a brief questionnaire that I developed which was published in my book in 1988 below:

Lasater, Lane. (1988) *Recovery from Compulsive Behavior*. Health Communications (FL: Deerfield Beach).

You are free to utilize the questionnaire in whole or in part with attribution to the above references and to modify it in any way that works for your purposes.

Best wishes with your project,

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