

ABSTRACT

Belonging through Transition: Understanding the Role of Transfer Students' Sense of Belonging in their Transition Experience

Annelise K. Hardegree, M.S.Ed.

Mentor: Nathan F. Alleman, Ph.D.

Research on transfer students is growing, but studies have not looked into the phenomenon of transfer students' sense of belonging. The following study explores this phenomenon in the lives of recent transfer students participating in a transfer-specific living-learning center, the intentions of which include facilitating the development of sense of belonging. This study provides insight into the necessity of developing a sense of belonging for transfer students, its correlation with a positive transition, and how effectively the living-learning center facilitates belonging among its residents.

Belonging through Transition: Understanding the Role of Transfer Students' Sense of Belonging
in their Transition Experience

by

Annelise K. Hardegree, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Educational Administration

Robert C. Cloud, Ed.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Science in Education

Approved by the Thesis Committee

Nathan F. Alleman, Ph.D., Chairperson

Rishi R. Sriram, Ph.D.

David K. Pooler, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

December 2014

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2014 by Annelise Hardegree

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One	1
Introduction	1
Transfer Students	3
Transfer Students and the Admissions Process	4
Support for Transfer Students	5
Academic Support for Transfer Students	6
Co-Curricular Support for Transfer Students	6
Living-Learning Centers	7
Brief History of Living-Learning Programs	8
Impact of Living-Learning Centers	8
Sense of Belonging	9
Sense of Belonging and Student Subgroups	10
The Importance of Sense of Belonging for Students in Transition	11
Schlossberg's Transition Theory	12
Students in Transition	12
Statement of the Problem	13
Significance	14
Chapter Two	15
Review of the Literature	15
Transfer Students and Sense of Belonging	16
Transfer Students and Schlossberg's Transition Theory	19
A Qualitative Study of Transfer Students' Sense of Belonging	22
Chapter Three	23
The Conceptual Framework	23
Methodology	28
Methods	28
Data Collection	28
Participant Selection	29
Participant Protection and Ethical Considerations	30
Data Analysis	31
Trustworthiness	32
Chapter Four	34
Data Analysis and Interpretation	34
The Importance of a Sense of Belonging	35
Belonging to Different Communities	36
Factors Contributing to the Desire to Belong	38

We Are Different	41
Role of the Living-Learning Center	44
Determination, Positivity, and Hope	48
Self – Determined to Succeed	48
Strategies – Positivity and Hopefulness	51
Age and Situation	52
Sense of Belonging and Support	56
Sense of Belonging and a Positive Transition Experience	58
Chapter Five	60
Discussion	60
Conclusions	60
A Desire to Belong	61
Different Levels of Belonging	63
Making Connections with Fellow Transfer Students	66
Sense of Belonging and Schlossberg’s Transition Theory	67
Self	68
Situation	70
Strategies	72
Support	72
Limitations	74
Implications	75
Future Research	75
Practice	77
Appendices	80
A – Statement of Positionality	81
B – Interview Protocol	83
References	88

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) Transition Process	23
Figure 2. The Integration of Sense of Belonging and the 4 S's	25
Figure 3. Necessary Elements of Belonging for a Positive Transfer Transition	64
Figure 4. The Integration of Sense of Belonging and the 4 S's	67

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Starting college and becoming a member of a new community can be a daunting experience for many first-year students. To help ease the transition, most four-year higher education institutions have developed extensive programming that encourages positive entry experiences and inclusivity. Oftentimes however, transfer students find that these programs do not meet their needs. Because of their experience at a previous institution, some colleges and universities may assume that transfer students have a low interest in participating in campus activities, especially those created for new students. Other institutions may neglect special programs for transfer students because they do not comprise a significant part of the incoming class. Though this may mean that transfer students are more than welcome to participate in traditional new student programming, the students themselves may not feel comfortable enough or motivated to do so. This mentality on the part of colleges and universities has the potential to leave transfer students feeling left out, forgotten, or insignificant to the campus community (Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

As a new student and recent transfer from a community college, I experienced similar feelings of disconnection as I made the transition into my university. Despite the fact that there were programs in place during the first few days after moving in that were specifically designed for transfer students, I felt that they were small and comparatively less exciting than the events being attended by a few of my friends who were true first

year students. I eventually stopped attending these events altogether because I felt like an after-thought. Additionally, I was unaware of how the policies for first year students applied to me. For example, while all first year students were required to live on campus their first year, I perceived the requirement for transfer students to be ambiguous. It seemed to me that we were loosely required to live on campus, but once on-campus housing was full, transfer students not yet placed on campus had to find housing elsewhere.

Fortunately, in recent years, some higher education institutions have begun to see the value of the needs of the growing population of transfer students and have started initiating programs to help these students transition smoothly into their new college life. The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, The University of Kentucky, the University of Minnesota, the University of Northern Iowa, Baylor University, and many other institutions offer living-learning centers specifically designed for transfer students. These colleges and universities have taken a holistic approach to transfer students and have placed emphasis on both the academic transition, as well as supporting the student's feeling of connectedness to the institution.

Programs and initiatives designed for transfer students manifest in many different ways, ranging from intentional advising and mentoring programs, to orientation sessions and student interest groups (Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wang, 2008). Just as some of these programs set out to aid students academically, others aim to create a sense of belonging among transfer student populations. However, little is known about transfer students' sense of belonging – if they develop it and how it can affect them. This study focused on transfer students' sense of belonging, specifically considering how it

affected the transition process of transfer students involved in a living-learning program intentionally designed to enhance their social experience. In order to better understand transfer students' sense of belonging and its affect on transition, it is important to understand current research on the transfer student experience, college student sense of belonging, living-learning centers, and the transition process.

Transfer Students

Transfer students, or students who start their college career at one institution and then move to another, make up a swiftly growing population on college campuses, both at the two-year and four-year level. In fact, about one-third of all students in post-secondary education transfer from one institution to another during their journey to graduation (Gonzalez, 2012), and the number of transfer students in higher education continues to increase every year (Newbaker, 2014). Despite these increases however, transfer students still compose a minority population on four-year campuses, because, while they make up a third of all postsecondary students, many transfer students find themselves landing at two-year institutions, rather than four-year colleges and universities (Gonzalez, 2012). As such, while the population of transfer students grows, it still comprises a relatively small percentage of students on university and college campuses.

Research on the transfer student experience shows that their path to graduation can often be a tough one. Probably the most well-known and foundational study on transfer students discusses the idea of transfer shock, a drop in grades believed to be experienced by many students during the semester immediately after their transfer to their new institution that is a direct result of a lack of preparedness for the transition to a new, and sometimes more demanding, institution (Hills, 1965). Since this initial study took

place, many researchers have delved deeper into different aspects of the transfer student experience in the hopes of better understanding not only how their experience differs from that of native students, but also what colleges and universities can do to ameliorate the negative effects of such an experience.

Transfer Students and the Admissions Process

In today's economic climate, the courting of transfer students by four-year institutions for their tuition potential has become commonplace. Because transfer students do not typically qualify for the same scholarships that incoming first year students are able to receive, they are often viewed as a great way to make money for the university, especially if that institution is tuition-driven. Ott and Cooper (2013) reported that some universities will go so far as to only provide transfer credit information after the prospective transfer student pays a non-refundable deposit. This means that in order for transfer students to find out how many of their class credits will transfer to their new institution, they have to pay a deposit of up to \$250 (Ott & Cooper, 2013). In their provocatively titled article, "They're Transfer Students, Not Cash Cows," Ott and Cooper (2013) join a large chorus of researchers arguing for more supportive treatment of transfer students (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003; Laanan, 2004; Townsend & Wilson, 2006), starting with the admissions process.

Research on this subject has revealed conflicting information about the experience of transfer students in the admissions process of the receiving institution. Some studies found that the transfer process is generally frustrating and confusing for many students due to the lack of resources provided by the receiving institution, or difficulty in finding those resources (Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008; Davies & Casey, 1999). On the

other hand, Townsend (1995) found that, contrary to her hypothesis, many students felt the transfer process itself to be easy and that the university representatives were more helpful than their community college counterparts. Despite this difference in findings however, many studies indicate a need for improvement in the admissions process.

Ott and Cooper (2013) suggest a more open, user-friendly admissions process that allows students to better compare their potential new institutions before transferring by having an informed perspective regarding transfer credits and overall expectations.

Townsend (1995) takes this suggestion a step further and asserts that “four-year institutions are increasingly being viewed as also responsible for students’ successful transfer and transition” (p. 439). This means that not only should receiving institutions be forthright with their information for transfer students, but that they are also responsible for their successful transition into their new environment.

Support for Transfer Students

Researchers have uniformly found that, once they arrive at their receiving institution, transfer students experience difficulty in their adjustment to their new college or university. A plethora of studies focus on academic adjustment, spurred on by the foundational “transfer shock” theory (Hills, 1965) and using degree attainment as the measure of student success (Alfonso, 2006; Dennis, et. al., 2008; Ishitani, 2008; Lee, Olson, Locke, & Michelson, 2009; Quanty, Dixon, & Ridley, 2010; Townsend, 1995; Wang, 2008). Other studies look at a wide range of adjustment struggles experienced by transfer students, such as finding a community to fit into, the experience of culture shock, or learning to balance new and competing priorities (Davies & Dickman, 1998; Dennis, et. al., 2008; Flaga, 2006; Jones & Lee, 1992; Laanan, 1996, 2004; Townsend & Wilson,

2006; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). These studies all find commonality in their push for more support for transfer student success, either through academic support programs or co-curricular groups and activities.

Academic support for transfer students. Research that explores the transfer student experience from an academic perspective typically supports the idea of instituting academic interventions to help support the significant number of transfer students who struggle in this area. Specifically concerning community college transfer students, researchers suggest that community colleges work to improve their students' academic preparedness through the implementation of study skills courses and, in some cases, more rigorous coursework (Quanty, et. al., 2010). Additionally, some regions have piloted transition programs that pair a community college with a four-year institution in the same area. These programs allow students to gradually transition into the four-year institution by taking courses at both locations (Lannan, 1996). Finally, some researchers call on the receiving institution to create academic interventions that support struggling transfer students (Dennis, et. al., 2008).

Co-curricular support for transfer students. In addition to academic support programs and initiatives, studies suggest that transfer students may benefit from co-curricular interventions as well (Laanan, 1996; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In order to make the transfer process easier, some studies suggest instituting community-building or support programs for transfer students in the hopes that the students will become involved in their new institution and persist to graduation (Laanan, 1996; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Dennis, et. al., 2008; Wang,

2008). Suggestions for social support initiatives range from peer mentoring programs (Laanan, 1996; Dennis, et. al., 2008), to more transfer-focused orientation programs (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003), and events that help transfer students network with each other and develop a positive self-concept (Wang, 2008; Dennis, et. al., 2008). Townsend and Wilson (2006) encourage student affairs staff on four-year college campuses to take the lead in creating these programs for transfer students, working from the belief that these interventions will provide the support needed by many transfer students.

One suggestion for long-term support of transfer students on the co-curricular level is through the creation of living-learning centers. Flaga (2006) suggests that transfer students specifically would benefit from engaging in an on-campus living-learning center for many reasons, namely that living-learning centers help orient students to campus. When considering community college transfer students, “living-learning options provide student services [in a way that] is closer to that of the centralized service models at community colleges,” meaning that the transition could be less of a culture shock (Flaga, 2006, p. 16). By creating a residential community for transfer students, colleges and universities provide transfer students with the resources they need to have a smooth transition and become part of the larger campus community.

Living-Learning Centers

According to Brower and Inkelas (2010), Living-Learning Programs (LLPs), “are residential housing programs that incorporate academically based themes and build community through common learning” (p. 36). As a type of LLP, Living-Learning Centers (LLCs) are “typically defined as student living space with intentional academic

programming and services, such as in-hall tutoring, ongoing lecture series, and academic advising” (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 36). This means that LLCs incorporate community building through organized programming and shared living spaces into an environment created through shared interest.

Brief History of Living-Learning Programs

Originally created with the college models of Oxford and Cambridge in mind, LLPs with specific learning outcomes first began in the 1920s and 30s at the University of Wisconsin (Brower & Inkelas, 2010). The founder of what became known as the experimental college, Alexander Meiklejohn suggested that “student social life and student education might profit greatly if the thirty-six hundred first year students and sophomores were divided into fifteen or twenty smaller colleges, each with its own social organization and social interests” (1932, p. 246). Though the experimental college at the University of Wisconsin was eventually shut down, the popularity of these programs has since grown. Notable expansions in their use occurred in the 1950s and 60s, and then again in the early 2000s (Brower & Inkelas, 2010).

Impact of Living-Learning Centers

Brower and Inkelas (2010) describe successful LLPs as being microcosms of what a university as a whole should aspire to be: “intentionally designed learning environments that work doggedly to maximize student learning, and particularly student learning related to high-order skills and abilities that allow students to become citizens and leaders of the world” (p. 43). In fact, research indicates that LLCs promote a higher level of student satisfaction (Li, McCoy, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005), higher levels of

faculty interaction (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Wawrzynski, Madden, & Jensen, 2012), higher levels of intellectual conversations with peers (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, Owen, & Johnson, 2006; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010; Wawrzynski, et. al., 2012), higher levels of academic and intellectual engagement (Stassen, 2003; Pasque & Murphy, 2005; Inkelas, et. al., 2006), and a smoother transition into the new college environment (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas, et. al., 2007). Additionally, Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, and Leonard (2008) found that LLPs are typically successful in promoting their learning outcomes, regardless of their size, budget, or strength of relationship between residence life and academic partners.

With all of these proven outcomes, it is clear that LLCs can serve as a beneficial, community-building tool among transfer students. In fact, Flaga (2006) argues, “living-learning options are an ideal way for transfer students to be introduced to the overall campus and become a virtually instant member of a subset of the campus community” (p. 16). Additionally, Townsend and Wilson (2006) suggest that intentional programs, like living-learning centers, are “required to help community college transfer students develop a sense of belonging to the university” (p. 454). It is this intended outcome that is of particular importance to this study.

Sense of Belonging

In their foundational study, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) explain that:

Sense of belonging comprises both cognitive and affective elements. At the cognitive level, judgments of belonging include accumulated information about experiences with the group as a whole and with other group members. At the affective level, judgments of belonging include feelings that reflect the

individuals' appraisal of their experiences with the group and group membership (pp. 482-83).

In other words, in order for students to have a strong sense of belonging, they must feel that they are part of a group, both through their actual experiences with other group members and their interpretation of those experiences. Specifically, contributors to a student's sense of belonging include "feelings of being cared about, treated in a caring way, valued as an individual, and accepted as a part of community" (Cheng, 2004, p. 227). Students "need to feel at home in the institution," free to express themselves and be respected and supported for who they are (Cheng, 2004, p. 227). Studying sense of belonging among different student groups enables the researcher to "further enhance students' affiliation and identity with their colleges," a goal of many student affairs professionals (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 328).

Sense of Belonging and Student Subgroups

Research on sense of belonging for under-represented student subgroups has found that the development of sense of belonging is not uniform for all students. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that connections to religious and social-community organizations increase Latino student sense of belonging, despite the fact that these organizations typically have higher levels of off-campus connections. Museus and Maramba (2011) found that Filipino students differed from the larger Asian subgroup in their challenges during college, and therefore in their development of sense of belonging. Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, and Alvarez (2007) found that racial groups develop sense of belonging in different ways that sometimes conflict with one another, but that some factors affect all racial groups in the same way. Additionally, Johnson (2012) found in

her study on minority female students in STEM fields that being under-represented in multiple ways, especially those pertaining to race and ethnicity, can have an overwhelmingly negative effect on sense of belonging. Overall, research indicates that different subgroups experience sense of belonging in different ways, some of which may be unexpected.

The Importance of Sense of Belonging for Students in Transition

As these studies reveal, being a member of an under-represented group on college campuses can result in experiencing sense of belonging differently than the majority (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, & Alvarez, 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011), and can even have a negative effect on sense of belonging (Johnson, 2012). This information is important when thinking about transfer students because of their unique experience as they transition into their new college environment. Research indicates that transfer students have a myriad of struggles as they move from one institution to another (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Dennis, et. al., 2008). Additionally, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) argue that when people experience transition, they receive support from four major sources: “intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the people are a part” (p. 67). As sense of belonging is an essential part of an individual’s need for perceived cohesion within a group (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), and as a number of the sources of support are group oriented, it is clear that sense of belonging ought to be a part of the conversation about students in transition. One would not feel supported by his or her institution, community, or friend group, without feeling a connection to one or all of

these groups. Understanding transfer students' sense of belonging would enable colleges and universities to better provide the type of support that they need to be successful.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

In order to gain a better understanding of how sense of belonging impacts the transfer student experience, it is important to recognize that these students are experiencing a unique form of transition. In their theory on adults in transition, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) explain that while life is full of transitions, the impact of those transitions depends on many factors. These factors include whether the transition was anticipated, unanticipated, a chronic hassle, or nonevent; the degree to which the transition alters one's way of life; and pre- and post-transition environments (Schlossberg, et. al., 1995). Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) argue that it is not the transition itself that is most important so much as it is the impact of the transition, or "the degree to which the transition alters one's daily life" (p. 33). This can be discovered by assessing the "transition's impact on relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Schlossberg, et. al., 1995, p. 35). Understanding that transfer students are in transition, it is important to evaluate how that transition impacts their lives.

Students in Transition

Studies utilizing Schlossberg's transition theory tend to examine marginalized or high-risk student groups. Powers (2010) looked at nontraditional male students who did not complete their bachelor's degree to gain an understanding of their perceptions of several different elements of their transition into, through, and out of higher education. Pendleton (2007) examined welfare recipients as they transitioned through their college

experience in order to identify barriers to persistence. Additionally, Coccarelli (2010) looked at the transition of high school students with learning disabilities into college in order to help institutions better program for these students upon their entrance into post-secondary education. Besides the use of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995), these studies have a common goal of gaining understanding of a unique subset of college students who typically have lower levels of persistence or who lack the proper levels of support upon entry.

Statement of the Problem

A considerable amount of research focuses on the negative effects of the transfer process, as well as the overall rate of success and retention of transfer students. Additionally, a few studies argue for student affairs staff to take more action to help make the transfer experience more positive overall. It seems generally understood that transfer students need support both in (Volkwein, King, & Terenzini, 1986; Laanan, 1996; Dennis, et. al., 2008) and out of the classroom (Laanan, 1996; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wang, 2008; Lee, et. al., 2009), to help create a smooth transition. Despite this knowledge however, familiarity with transfer students' sense of belonging is limited. Knowing that a student's sense of belonging can impact their collegiate success and persistence (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004), indicates how important it is to explore transfer student's sense of belonging in the context of their transition. This study endeavored to do just that, by asking the following question: *Do transfer students develop a sense of belonging and how does their sense of belonging, or lack thereof, impact the process of transitioning into their receiving institution?* This question was further refined by the following sub-questions:

- What factors impact transfer students' desire for, or disinterest in developing a sense of belonging at their new institution?
- What role does a transfer student living-learning center play in its residents' development of a sense of belonging?
- Is sense of belonging related to a positive transfer experience, and if so, how?
- How does the presence or absence of a sense of belonging impact participants' perceptions of self, situation, support, and strategies?

Significance

This study contributed to the growing body of literature around the transfer student experience not only by providing information about a specific type of intervention being used to aid transfer students, but more importantly by shedding light on the concept of transfer students' sense of belonging. Although this study took place in a specific institutional context, the existence of living-learning centers is not an anomaly. The findings of this study could not only impact the practices of the university in question, but could provide other colleges and universities with a foundation of information to help aid in their decision making regarding transfer student programming.

More importantly, this study provides pertinent information about the transfer student experience, contributing to an area that still needs significant exploring, namely how transfer students' sense of belonging affects their transition process. A better understanding of transfer student sense of belonging could allow colleges and universities to shape, or reshape, programs to better suit the needs of the growing population of transfer students, creating a more positive experience that unifies them with the campus community.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The following chapter examines the literature on transfer students, sense of belonging, and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995), demonstrating the need to study these aspects of the transfer experience. Research on transfer students indicates that they are a unique subgroup of students on four-year college campuses with their own challenges, strengths, and needs. Because they experience college differently than native students, it is important to explore transfer students' sense of belonging and how it impacts their transition into their new institution. Despite the fact that the literature suggests that transfer students may benefit from intentional interventions and tailored support programs, only limited or cursory research has been conducted to understand how these programs and interventions affect transfer students' sense of belonging. Specifically, research on transfer students neglects to consider both the students' sense of belonging, and how it affects their transition.

In this chapter, I will identify four major gaps in the literature. First is the lack of research on transfer students' sense of belonging. Knowing that transfer students experience college differently, it is important to recognize that they most likely find a sense of belonging in different ways than native students as well. Second, the literature will show that transfer students have not been studied through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995). Schlossberg's (1995) theory can provide useful insights into the transfer student experience through its emphasis on transition and support. By

viewing transfer students as individuals in transition, faculty and university administrators can not only gain a better understanding of the needs of the population as a whole, but they can create more effective programs to help transfer students successfully move in, move through, and move out (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995). Additionally, researchers have not looked at the intersection of a student's sense of belonging and how it impacts that student's transition process, specifically using Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995). Research on sense of belonging can contribute to the understanding of individuals in transition, like transfer students. Finally, as the majority of research on transfer students and sense of belonging is quantitative, this qualitative study will provide a different perspective to the body of literature.

Transfer Students and Sense of Belonging

In order to provide a supportive college environment that encourages student success, one must recognize that college students do not constitute a homogenous group, but are rather a collection of unique individuals, all of whom experience college life differently. Transfer students exemplify this fact. Because each student comes from another institution, rather than from high school like their native student peers, they have to adjust to a different set of changes. Though they have experience in a college setting, transferring "requires numerous adjustments to the new environment and institutional culture," such as meeting new friends, getting used to different class sizes, handling a change in academic rigor, settling into new living arrangements, and learning to navigate a new campus (Laanan, 2004, p.332).

In addition to these adjustments, transfer students can also experience culture shock as they transition from their old institution to their new one (Laanan, 2007).

Laanan (2007) argues that viewing the transfer student experience as a shift in cultural environments is helpful in understanding why the transition can be difficult. If one views a transfer student's initial institution as their home culture, and their new institution as a foreign culture, as Laanan (2007) claims, then it is clear that their journey will involve numerous adjustments.

In their article, "A Hand Hold for a Little Bit': Factors Facilitating the Success of Community College Transfer Students to a Large Research University," Townsend and Wilson (2006) argue that transfer students need more support than they are typically given. Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that transfer students typically do not seek support from their initial institution, but instead look to their new college or university for help and guidance through the transfer process. Even though many of the students in the study participated in the transfer student orientation programs provided by their receiving institution, several of them felt that more needed to be done to help familiarize them with both the campus and the different services offered (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Additionally, several of the students felt that it was difficult to make friends at the university because they were not connected to the other students through residence life or established social networks that were fostered during integrative programs for first year students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). This information demonstrates that not only are transfer students in greater need of assistance than what has traditionally been assumed, but they also ought to be considered as a separate group with different needs.

Many of the studies conducted on transfer students show the difficulties of the transfer process and indicate that more or different programs should be put in place to better support them (Laanan, 1996; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Dennis, et.

al., 2008; Wang, 2008). Understanding that the transfer student experience is different is paramount. However, without also understanding what specifically would benefit or support transfer students, little can be accomplished. Now that we know their experience differs, the next logical step is to figure out how these differences impact their experience and what can be done to support them.

One way to begin understanding how to best support transfer students is to consider them as a marginalized or under-represented group on college campuses. Although they do not fall into this category due to inherent characteristics and should not therefore be considered equivalent to under-represented racial or ethnic groups, the fact that they are in the minority on college campuses and that they experience college differently than native students places them into a marginalized category. Similar to other marginalized groups who typically have lower persistence rates (Swail, 2003), transfer students, especially if they transfer earlier in their college career, or if they take longer to graduate than four years, have lower rates of persistence than native students (Ishitani, 2008). Researchers have found that developing a sense of belonging can positively impact persistence for marginalized groups, potentially ameliorating the retention deficit mentioned above (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, & Alvarez, 2007). Studies have been conducted to better understand the transfer student experience, and research has also been conducted to gain information about how different marginalized groups develop a sense of belonging, but research focusing on transfer student sense of belonging is nonexistent. This study looked at the transfer student experience in order to determine whether, and if so, how these

students developed a sense of belonging while completing their college degree at their receiving institution.

Transfer Students and Schlossberg's Transition Theory

In addition to conceptualizing transfer students as a marginalized group, it is also important to understand transfer students as being in a state of transition. As with any college student, transitioning into a new institution can be stressful. However, unlike their approach to native students, college and university administrators often assume that transfer students need very little support, leading many institutions to ignore them in both retention efforts (Kuh, Kinzie, Shuh, Whitt, et. al., 2005) and orientation programming (Herman & Lewis, 2004). As such, researchers studying transfer students have found that this group needs more attention than they currently receive (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Laanan, 2007; Dennis, et. al., 2008). Knowing that transfer students need more support, and understanding that they are experiencing a unique transition upon their entrance into their receiving institution, it makes sense to study these students through the lens of Schlossberg's (1995) Transition Theory.

Additionally, research has shown that transfer students experience adjustment issues that can lead to "psychological distress including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and somatic distress" (Lee, Olson, Locke, & Michelson, 2009, p. 306). Understanding transfer students in light of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) can not only enable university administrators and staff to identify areas of the transition process that are particularly difficult for transfer students, it can provide a framework for taking appropriate action to help diminish the negative effects listed above. However, despite the benefits of using this framework, studies about transfer students, while briefly

addressing the issue of transition and individuality of experience, have not utilized Schlossberg's (1995) Transition Theory as a means to make sense of the transfer student experience. This study addresses this gap by utilizing Schlossberg's (1995) Transition Theory as its conceptual framework.

Sense of Belonging and Schlossberg's Transition Theory

In discussing the use of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) in practice, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) examine the importance of group counseling in providing support for individuals experiencing stressful transitions. They describe the type of group counseling most often found in the educational setting as "guidance groups" or groups that provide their members with information and opportunities for growth. As a type of group counseling, facilitated dissemination of information can also provide participants with feelings of hope, altruism, and cohesion. Specifically, they argue that "being part of a cohesive group can...supply the support and motivation that people in transition need in order to take constructive action on their own behalf" (Schlossberg, et. al., 1995, p. 207).

Similar to Schlossberg's take on cohesion, Dion (2000), in talking about the history of research on the topic, describes cohesion as having an effect on several elements of group dynamics, including the therapeutic change of its members. He also notes that "Lewin believed that cohesiveness – the willingness to stick together – was an essential property of groups, without which they could not exist" (Dion, 2000, p. 8). Bollen and Hoyle (1990) attribute this fact to a person's need for *perceived cohesion*. Bollen and Hoyle (1990) define perceived cohesion as "an individual's sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale associated with

membership in the group” (p. 482). This information indicates that cohesion, and therefore sense of belonging, are essential to the effectiveness and existence of group guidance and counseling. The group counseling aspect of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1995), which refers to groups that provide information and support, is especially important when thinking about college students in transition as they can not only benefit from this form of counseling, but they are also in an environment that is conducive to it. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) describe group counseling as having curative benefits because such groups provide information to ease the transition, engender feelings of universality in its members as they realize they are not alone in their transition, instill feelings of hope as members meet others who are further along in their transition and therefore realize that it is temporary, and help members develop valuable social skills that will benefit them as they move through their transition. College and university campuses generally provide settings akin to group guidance or counseling through student interest groups and organizations, as well as living-learning programs. With these programs already in place, applying Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1995) is logical.

Based on the fundamental need for a sense of belonging in effective support for individuals in transition, it is clear that the concept of sense of belonging ought to be included in this discussion as well. Developing a sense of belonging can help marginalized student groups cope with the stress of being under-represented, leading them to persist through to graduation, (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, & Alvarez, 2007). Combining this concept with the benefit of group guidance for individuals in transition could result in a more thorough understanding of college students. This study combined these two concepts in

an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the effect of transfer students' sense of belonging on their transition experience.

A Qualitative Study of Transfer Students' Sense of Belonging

Finally, much of the research conducted on transfer students and on the sense of belonging of marginalized student groups applies a quantitative approach. Although this approach is extremely important, it is equally valuable to look at both of these issues qualitatively in order to gain knowledge about student perceptions and specific experiences. Taking a qualitative approach to this issue will enable student affairs professionals to understand how transfer students make meaning of their situation and specifically will provide insight into how they construct a sense of belonging. Knowing that transfer students are diverse, looking at their individual experiences in greater detail enabled this study to place value on each student's unique transition experience. Simultaneously, this study also provided insight into what transfer students feel they need to be successful by gathering information that shed light on the transfer student experience at large.

CHAPTER THREE

The Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) served as the conceptual framework for this study. The theory is based on the conglomeration of several studies concerning adults in transition and highlights ways to both understand and counsel individuals experiencing transition-related stress. In order to understand and help support individuals in transition, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) argue that one must first discern how the individual is experiencing their transition by considering The Four S's: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies (Fig. 1). *Situation* entails a large number of considerations that affect a person's transition process, including what triggered the transition, the timing of the transition, how much of the transition is under the person's control, whether or not the transition involves a role change, how long the transition or change will last, previous experience with similar transitions, concurrent stress, and how the person assesses their own transition (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). *Self* refers to a person's characteristics that affect how they experience their transition. These characteristics may include personality traits, ethnicity, health, gender, social status, developmental level, and psychological resources such as outlook, commitment, values, and ego development, among other things (Schlossberg, et. al., 1995). *Support* includes the type of support a person receives, including that which comes from "intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the [person is] a

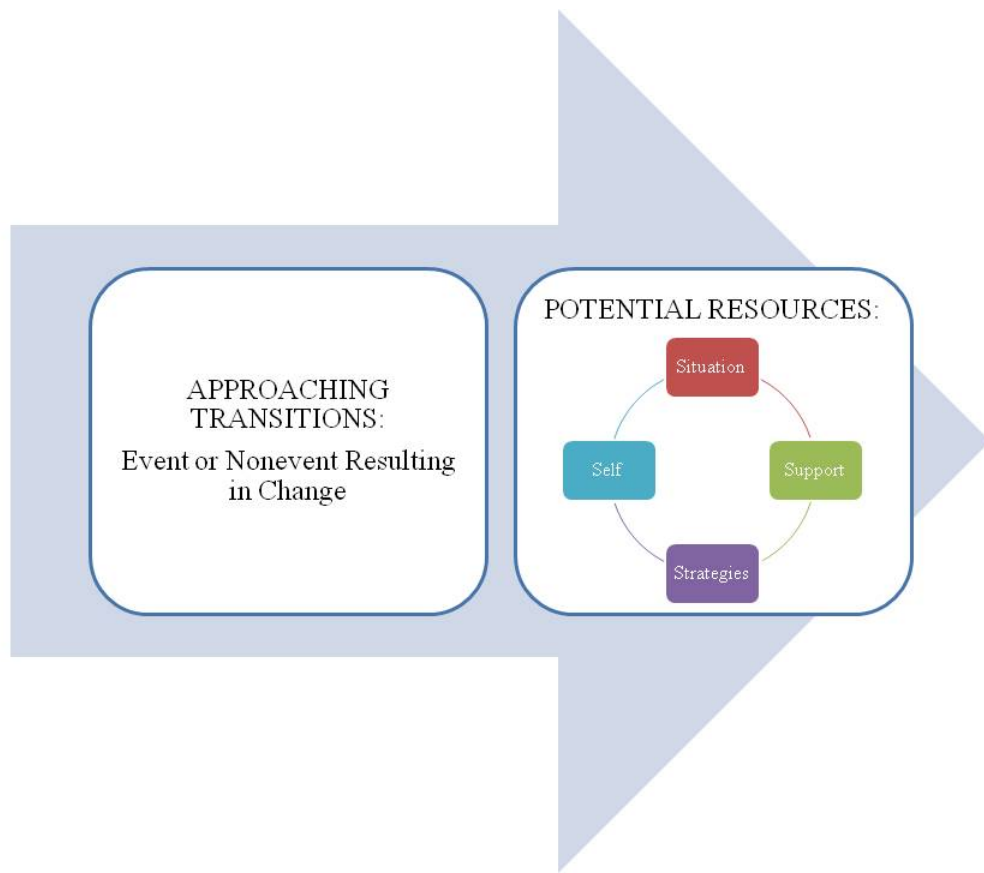


Figure 1. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) Transition Process

part" (Schlossberg, et. al., 1995, p. 67). Finally, *strategies* refers to the different coping mechanisms that an individual utilizes to handle stressful situations (Schlossberg, et. al., 1995).

In this study, I combined the concept of sense of belonging with the Four S's described by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) in an effort to create a holistic approach to understanding transfer students specifically (Fig. 2). Although Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) is useful for gaining insight into the unique experience of individuals in transition, the addition of considering a person's sense of belonging provided a deeper knowledge of an individual's situation, self, support, and strategies. Because the source and features of a sense of belonging varies for every individual, and

because the groups to which individuals may belong also vary, the exploration of this intersection further clarified the variety of experiences and relationships that relate to it.

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) explain that sense of belonging is a primary human need, which indicates that not having a sense of belonging could have negative effects on an individual. Although this does not imply that an individual needs to have a sense of belonging to every group with which they interact, it does imply that individuals need to have a sense of belonging somewhere. Additionally, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) point out that, although it is possible for social support to exist when an individual is only weakly

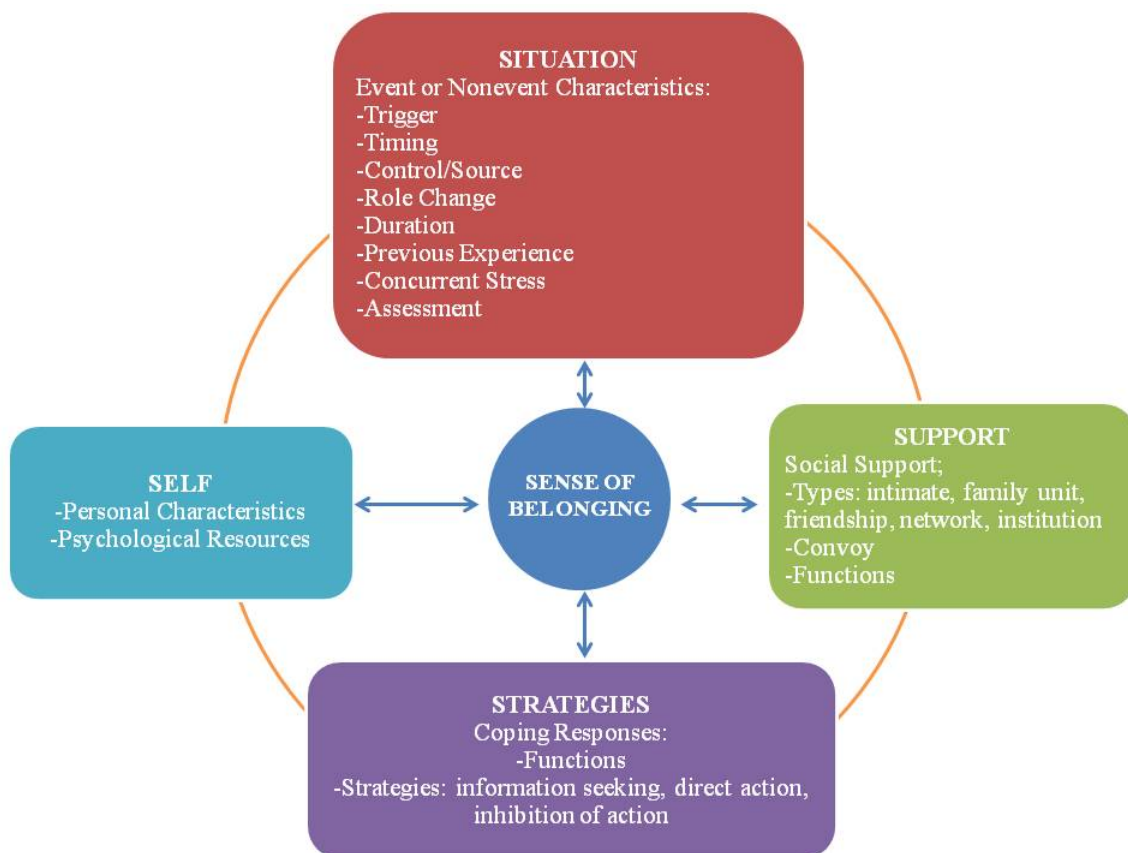


Figure 2. The integration of sense of belonging and the four S's.

connected to the group in question, “social support is usually associated with groups with which individuals are strongly connected” (p. 499). In other words, individuals need to

have a sense of belonging to a group not only to fulfill basic human needs, but also to derive support from the group in question. Finally, Bollen and Hoyle (1990) also explain that gauging a person's sense of belonging to a certain group allows researchers to evaluate the impact that the group has on the individual. Therefore, if we understand an individual's sense of belonging, we can see how the groups to which they feel they belong affect them.

Based on previous research on the impact of sense of belonging (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007), having a sense of belonging can affect a person's self concept, including their outlook, commitments, and values, all of which Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) consider to be psychological resources utilized during transition. Furthermore, examining the sense of belonging of individuals in transition will show how elements such as group norms and values can have an effect on their "situation," (i.e. control, role change, concurrent stress, and assessment) and how they form strategies for coping with stress. Finally, based on Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995), support for individuals in transition comes from different external individuals and groups. In order for groups to function as forms of support however, the individual must feel a strong sense of belonging to them (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990). Because of the numerous intersections between sense of belonging and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) already identified, this study explored the sense of belonging of transfer students as they experienced transition, understanding that a person's sense of belonging could be an affective force on the elements of Schlossberg's (1995) model. It is this impact that this study worked to uncover.

In addition to providing the basic theory for this study, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) also make several suggestions for practices that help support people through their transition. Specifically for the use of this study, I focused on their discussion of the benefits and practice of group counseling. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) argue that “adults in transition need information and support, both of which can often be provided most effectively through group counseling” (p. 204). The benefits or functions of group counseling include the dissemination of information about one’s transition, the instillation of hope through meeting others who have successfully moved through a similar transition, universality through meeting others currently experiencing a similar transition, the development of socializing techniques that are helpful in moving through transition, and cohesiveness (Schlossberg, et. al., 1995). Additionally, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) identify different types of group counseling, not all of which are facilitated by licensed counselors, such as group guidance; that is, groups “designed to be preventive and growth engendering” and that are most often found in the education sector (p. 209).

This study utilized Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s (1995) model of support as a way to understand the impact of a transfer student living-learning center on its residents. The living-learning center served as a form of group guidance due to the fact that transfer student residents were engaged in group activities with other transfer students under the guidance of university staff, and were also provided with easily accessible information about the transfer process and the receiving institution, both culturally and academically speaking. Intentional interaction with other transfer students provided individuals with the universality, hope, social skills, and cohesion often

experienced in group counseling settings. In order to gauge transfer students sense of belonging and transition, exploration into the transfer student living-learning center was helpful.

Methodology

Qualitative research strives to understand “the social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4). This study used a qualitative approach to get at the impact of transfer students’ sense of belonging on their perceptions of their transition experience. Specifically, this study took an exploratory phenomenological approach. As an exploratory study, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the under-researched topic of transfer students’ sense of belonging. As a phenomenological study, I hoped to uncover how transfer students experience sense of belonging as part of their transition. In order to do this, I gathered information through interviews with first-year transfer students at a private, faith-based research university over the course of their first semester at the receiving institution. The participants in this study each contributed their own interpretation of their transition experience and sense of belonging, but having been a transfer student myself, my perceptions and preconceptions likely impacted my understanding of their experiences. Nonetheless, I strove to stay true to the lived experiences of the participants of this study as they are the ultimate knowers of their own perceptions.

Methods

Data Collection

For this study, I collected data from transfer students in the first semester of their transition into the receiving institution through in-depth interviews as they matriculated through their first semester at the receiving institution. Soon after their arrival to campus, I asked them to participate in an in-depth, individual interview, which was semi-structured with broad open-ended questions designed to gain deep insight into their sense of belonging as they progressed through their transition into the institution. These interviews were conducted on the campus of the receiving institution with one exception, which was held at a local coffee shop per the participant's request. Finally, I asked participants to submit photographs of places on or off campus to which they felt they belonged.

The interviews focused on allowing each participant to share their transition story and their perceptions of belonging in their own words. This provided greater understanding of transfer students' sense of belonging as they transitioned into their new institution. The photographs, on the other hand, shed light on what parts of campus or the larger community outside of the institution fostered a sense of belonging for the participants, creating tangible examples of the transfer student experience.

Participant Selection

This study took place at a private research institution in the South. Transfer students composed about 4% of the undergraduate student body (Institutional Research & Testing, 2013). Approximately half of the institution's transfer students came from 2-year institutions and about one-third came from other 4-year institutions (Institutional

Research & Testing, 2013). Generally, retention rates for transfer students at this institution were lower than that of native students (Institutional Research & Testing, 2013). In order to support transfer students, the institution featured in this study offered separate orientation sessions for transfer students, the ability to participate in transfer student small groups during their extended orientation program, a student interest group specifically for transfer students, an introductory course required for all incoming students that was transfer student specific, and a living-learning center that featured a mentoring component, faculty interaction, and social activities.

Due to the small size of the participant pool, as well as a lack of information about the participants prior to my contact with them, I utilized a convenience sampling approach. This approach enabled me to conduct interviews with any of the transfer students in the participant pool who were interested and able to participate. From a sample of approximately 50 new transfer students living within the transfer student living-learning center, I was able to interview 10 students. Despite the fact that I used a convenience sampling approach, my participants were stratified in a number of ways. There were 5 female and 5 male participants, 5 traditional aged students and 5 nontraditional, and 4 students transferring from community colleges and 6 transferring from four-year institutions.

Additionally, in order to gather information from the participants while they were in the midst of their transition, rather than retroactively, I contacted potential participants shortly after they arrived at their receiving institution. The Program Director for the Transfer Year Experience Living-Learning Center at the institution provided the needed contact information in order to facilitate contact with potential participants. Selected

students were invited to participate in the study via email correspondence, with any future communication taking place via email, phone, or text message.

Participant Protection and Ethical Considerations

Protecting the identity of participants in qualitative studies is imperative as this form of inquiry calls for personal reflection, sometimes from vulnerable populations. In an effort to assure anonymity and protection, I asked each student to sign an informed consent form in order to participate in the study. The form explained that participants could decide at any point during the study to withdraw without repercussions and provided information about my process for maintaining anonymity. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that was used on all forms of data in order to keep their responses anonymous. I was the only person with access to the actual names of the participants and their responses. My committee chair had access to responses only after the pseudonym was assigned. In order to maintain confidentiality, I also generalized any personal information or descriptions of people, places, and events. In addition to the informed consent form, each participant was reminded of their protection and freedom to withdraw at the time of their interview. Finally, I was committed to approaching all of my interactions with the participants with honesty and integrity.

Data Analysis

In order to test my interview protocol and data analysis process, I conducted a pilot study. This allowed me to make adjustments to my interview protocol to ensure an easy-to-follow, conversational style. The participants of my pilot study were both former transfer students who attended the university being studied and who were residents of the

living-learning center. The participants of the pilot study therefore had knowledge of and experience with the transfer process at the site of the study and were able to provide helpful feedback when changes needed to be made.

I analyzed the interview data using a two-cycle coding process. In the first cycle, I used an Initial Coding Method to code the data. This method was appropriate for this study as it allowed me to identify potential leads and directionality in the study (Saldaña, 2013). As this study explored the concept of transfer students' sense of belonging, which had not been researched previously, this form of coding allowed for flexibility in discovering patterns and trends. I used the Pattern Coding Method in the second cycle of coding. This method was appropriate because it allowed me to "pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). This approach was helpful as a way to group similar smaller codes together, allowing me to see the patterns emerge in my analysis.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are expressed through four concepts that promote trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Credibility*, or the likelihood that my findings are truthful, was established through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. The triangulation of data through interviews and photographs provided different forms of evidence from the same source, allowing me to verify congruence with the participants' expressed experiences. This study also underwent debriefing from my peers, both those experienced in conducting qualitative research, including my thesis chair and committee, and those experienced in working with transfer student populations, to ensure that I

maintained honesty in my interpretations and findings. I also utilized member checking to ensure credibility by consulting the participants about my findings. In order to do this, I asked some of the participants to comment on a summary of my findings after my second cycle of coding. This validated my interpretations and conclusions while maintaining the truths espoused during data collection.

I also strove for *transferability*, or the ability for the information gathered in the study to be applied to other groups, places, and times, by providing thick descriptions of all processes and elements involved. This enabled others interested in utilizing the study to determine whether it is suited for such a possibility in their context. Such detailed descriptions will include that of the participants, programs, processes, and pertinent details encountered during the study. In addition, I will strive for *dependability* in this study by providing detailed information about the research process and design to allow for replication by future researchers.

Finally, I reinforced the trustworthiness of my study by working toward *confirmability* by drawing conclusions from the meaning-making of my participants while maintaining awareness of my personal experiences and attitudes (see Positionality Statement in Appendix). The utilization of triangulation and member checking aided in my pursuit of confirmability as such action verified that my interpretations of the participants' perceptions remained as neutral as possible, while I remained honest about and mindful of my personal connection to the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study utilized Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) as a means to better understand how transfer students experience a sense of belonging at their receiving institution. More specifically, this study looked at the experiences of students participating in a living-learning center designed solely for transfers in order to answer the question: *Do transfer students develop a sense of belonging and how does their sense of belonging, or lack thereof, impact the process of transitioning into their receiving institution?*

In the following chapter, I will discuss seven major findings that both answered the sub-questions and contributed to a greater understanding of the original research question. First, I will discuss the importance of having a sense of belonging for transfer students, followed by what the participants revealed about how transfer students are different, or set apart, from other students, specifically first year students. I will then analyze the perceived importance of the transfer student living-learning center to the participants in the study. Next, I will discuss the relationship between the 4 S's of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) and a transfer student's sense of belonging, specifically looking at the following elements: determination, positivity, and hope as they relate to self and strategies; age as it relates to situation; and how having a sense of belonging to the larger community, versus to a smaller friend group, impacts support. Finally, I will re-examine, in light of these findings, how a transfer student's sense of

belonging impacts whether or not they have a positive transition experience at their receiving institution.

The Importance of a Sense of Belonging

All of the participants in this study felt that having a sense of belonging at their new institution was important and desirable. For many of the participants this meant making deep connections with other students with whom they had common experiences. This typically referred to fellow transfer students, but could include other groups as well. Daniel, a nontraditional, community college transfer student explained the nature of the sense of belonging that he desired while at his new institution, as well as why he decided to live in the transfer student living-learning center:

You know, a lot of the basic human necessities – people want to be loved, they want to be accepted, they want to feel a part of something – and I wanted to have all of those. So I joined because I knew that there was going to be similar people, maybe even from similar backgrounds, maybe even similar cities, that were going through the same thing that I was going through. So I am really hoping to connect with those people and build a strong bond with those people.

Daniel, along with several other participants, sought out the transfer student living-learning center both because of his perception that having a sense of belonging is a basic human need, and because of his desire to meet other students with similar experiences. Daniel's concept of what it means to have a sense of belonging includes having deep relationships with others who are similar to him in some way.

Darcy, another nontraditional, community college transfer student explained how she was able to find these deep relationships through her participation in a group for veterans. Having recently served in the military, Darcy was looking for connections not only with other transfer students, but with other veterans as well. She was able to find

these relationships through her new student seminar course, a class required for all new students during their first semester. Her new student seminar course was specifically for veterans.

I've made some really good friends through there, and I think some of the younger students have looked to me for like advice, or like I guess of like a form of mentorship. It's really cool. Like I'm pretty much forming family relationships. They're all like my sisters... it's not like we isolate ourselves from the rest of campus, but it's just, because of our like-minds and experiences, we're able to come together a whole lot easier.

Darcy's description of her new relationships with other veterans as being "like family" indicates how deep these relationships are, but it is also important to note that, similar to Daniel, Darcy values being able to build close relationships with other students who she feels have a similar background to her own. All of the transfer students interviewed for this study mentioned the importance of being able to find like-minded people with whom they could form close relationships. Darcy also indicated in her description of her relationships with her classmates, that she felt more like a mentor with some of the younger students, indicating that her age played a role in shaping the nature of her sense of belonging with her peers.

Belonging to Different Communities

Many of the students experiencing or desiring a sense of belonging discussed the concept in reference to different realms on campus, particularly within the larger campus community, within the living-learning center, and with a smaller friend group. Erin, a female transfer student from a large public research institution, explained that while she believed that she ought to have a sense of belonging to the larger campus community, she felt a much stronger sense of belonging to the living-learning center.

I wouldn't say I feel like it, but I know it, if that makes sense. Like I know that this is where I'm supposed to be and that they do, that I will belong here, I guess, if that makes sense. But right now, it's just kind of still that transition time. [Do you feel the same way about the LLC or do you feel differently?] No. I feel like I belong at the LLC. I mean, we're all transfer students so we're all in the same place.

Similarly, Ryan, a community college transfer student explained the difference between belonging at the institutional level versus belonging within the living-learning center in this way:

I feel very accepted. I do feel like I fit in. I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that I can carry on conversations with people that I might not be able to carry on, uh, from other parts of the campus because I'm in a community of other transfer students. And they're going through very similar obstacles as I am...I think that makes a very, very big difference.

Both Ryan and Erin felt a sense of belonging within the transfer student living-learning center because they were surrounded by other transfer students who, they felt, were experiencing similar obstacles during their transition. They also both juxtaposed this against their experience with the larger campus community. Erin did not have a sense of belonging on campus, though she felt that she ought to, while Ryan explained that he felt more comfortable talking to people within the living-learning center versus other students that he may meet on campus.

Additionally, Meredith, a transfer student from a mid-size four-year institution, addressed all three groups when asked if she felt accepted within the living-learning center.

I feel that all my friends, they're not just tolerating me, but they actually want me there, want me around. And even like in the LLC, with even like the leaders, that they want you there, they want to kind of get to know you. And also as a campus, too. Like professors, teachers, staff.

Meredith's separation between her friends, the living-learning center, and the larger campus community is reflective of how many of the participants in this study viewed their sense of belonging, with each group serving its own purpose. Meredith felt valued by her friends, appreciated and welcomed by the living-learning center, and supported by the campus at large, all of which she felt were important.

Factors Contributing to the Desire to Belong

Most of the transfer students that participated in this study mentioned specific reasons for wanting to have a sense of belonging to different communities at their new institution. These factors included the desire to avoid isolation and loneliness, the belief that having a sense of belonging was necessary in order to have a full college experience, and the belief that having a sense of belonging was beneficial to them in general. Some students specifically mentioned the importance of belonging to groups that can benefit you or help you become successful. Ben, a community college transfer student, explained that his decision to live in the transfer student living-learning center was based on the fact that he did not want to be alone.

I didn't want to feel left out and isolated, so that was my main reason for doing it and it's worked out really well. My roommates are really great guys. We all get along, hang out. Met lots, tons of people through there, so it's awesome.

Ben believed that if he had lived elsewhere, specifically off-campus as he mentioned later in his interview, he would not have been able to develop a sense of belonging to a group. It is important to note that this was his motivation for participating in the living-learning center, indicating that he believed that at least part of the function of the living-learning center was to help facilitate a sense of belonging for transfer students.

Tina, a nontraditional transfer student who has attended both a community college and an online, four-year institution, described that her desire to meet people and develop a sense of belonging stemmed from the fact that she wanted to have a full college experience.

I wanted to be able to take advantage of being at [my new institution]. I didn't want to be just one of those people who came to school, did my classes, go back home, that's it. I actually wanted to make a solid effort at being able to meet new people.

This discussion was in response to the question, "Why did you decide to live in the living-learning center?" and is indicative of the general perception among the transfer students in this study that the living-learning center was helpful in creating a community to which they could belong. Tina viewed her experience at her new institution as a second chance at life due to some additional personal issues that she struggled with before her arrival. As such, it is clear that she placed great value on being able to have a transformational experience at her receiving institution, which included developing relationships with other students.

In addition to the previous two perspectives, several of the transfer students that participated in this study expressed the idea that having a sense of belonging was simply beneficial in and of itself. Brandon, a nontraditional transfer student from a large, public research institution succinctly stated it in this way, "I really like the idea of living in a community. I think that's beneficial." He later explained this in more detail when asked, "Do you feel that the living-learning center is helpful for you?"

Probably more than I'd be willing to admit. I tend to fancy that I can get by on life alone and that I can get by on just determination and hard work and gumption, but I feel like I really do need other people. I need a social outlet and I need something like that. And maybe having some people there telling me that you

need to know your neighbors, you need to occasionally do something fun. That's helpful.

Brandon's emphasis on the importance of having a social outlet stems from the fact that he is a self-identified introvert. Knowing that he has a tendency to choose to spend a lot of time alone, the fact that he still felt the need to have a group to belong to is significant. His sentiment, that it is generally good for students to have a group of friends to be a part of or a community to interact with, was a common one with several of the participants in this study.

Tim, another nontraditional transfer student from a small four-year institution, takes this idea a step further and talks about the importance of having a sense of belonging with people that push you to succeed.

First, you have to know who you are. Second, you have to find out who's a good person for you to be with. Who is gonna help you succeed? There's a saying that, you know, "show me your friends, I'll show you your future," so you want to be around those like-minded people that can help you, that can push you, that can help you succeed, that will help you do well, you know, not just as a student, but as a person.

Tim's understanding of why it was important to have a sense of belonging included aspects of being a part of a community of like-minded people, but also being around people that can help you to be your best. For Tim, and for many of the other transfer students in my study, finding a community that had your best interests in mind and that would help support you when you needed it was a motivating factor. This perspective, that it is important to have a sense of belonging with a group of people that will push you to succeed, was echoed by several of the participants in the study.

In summation, when asked about the concept of belonging, Brandon explained its importance to him in this way:

I'm reminded of quote by George Lucas, and I know this is very nerdy, but he was talking about the difference between excitement and enjoying, and I thought it was profound: "One is not as immediate and long-lasting, but it's more fulfilling and nurturing and satisfying." And I feel like if you belong in a place, that's the kind of joy that you get. It may not be as flashy and adrenaline packed, but it sustains you. And I guess that's what I'm looking for is, to feel comfortable, and not to seek out every thrill, but to be lifted up when I need it, I guess.

Brandon's comparison between a sense of belonging and joy is reflective of the perceptions of the transfer students that participated in this study. These students were looking for the deep relationships and support to sustain them through their time at their new institution, allowing them to feel the comfort that comes with feeling a sense of belonging to a group, whether that be to the larger campus community, to the living-learning center, or to a smaller group of friends.

We Are Different

As I addressed in the previous section, none of the students interviewed for this study expressed that they did not desire to have a sense of belonging to the institution, the living-learning center, or to friend groups. Nevertheless, many of them expressed a sort of disdain for having to interact with or be grouped with first year students in any way. Erin brought up what she felt was an awkward experience during the extended orientation program she attended the summer before her arrival, which was mostly attended by first year students.

My parents made me go to [the extended orientation program], which was, fun, I don't know. Like I said, it was a bunch of freshmen. And I'm not saying like, "Oh, I'm so much older," cause I'm not. Realistically I'm like a year older than them, but it was their first taste of freedom and they're like, "Let's go to Whataburger at 2:00AM," and I'm like, "I'm just gonna sleep." I did that my freshman year...I feel like transfer students have like a completely different story because they've had to make harder decisions, more life decisions.

Darcy also attended the extended orientation program over the summer and said, “I can honestly say that I don’t recommend it for any transfers because I kinda felt like a creeper being like the oldest person there.”

Erin and Darcy both felt out of place at the extended orientation program because they felt older or more experienced than the first year students that they were surrounded by during the week. Erin specifically mentioned that she felt that she had to make harder life decisions than first year students because she is a transfer student, which impacted how she related to others around her. Darcy, a nontraditional student, mentioned that her age was a factor in making her experience at extended orientation awkward, but she also attributes her experience to her status as a transfer student, believing that extended orientation is not a good fit for transfer students in general. This perception, which was voiced by several of the participants in this study, indicated that they felt their experience as a transfer student set them apart from native students.

Meredith elaborated on the different needs transfer student have compared to first year students when she started talking about her orientation experience.

I didn’t really know what to expect cause I know [my previous institution], even for [orientation], they didn’t do really anything, so I didn’t know if it was like, “hey if you want to, here’s a group you can join with a bunch of freshmen.” So it was nice that it was kind of, we’re separated to transfers cause we are at a different level than freshman. I don’t really need to hear about tips for doing well in college life because I’ve been through it before. So I liked it, it was nice. Like tailored to transfer students, except for a couple things that we did that was with freshmen. That wasn’t that big of a deal.

Meredith came into her new institution hoping that she would not be grouped with first year students during the orientation programming, and was appreciative of the fact that, for the most part, she was able to mingle with only other transfer students. Similar to

Erin, Meredith felt that she was different from first year students because she already knew what it was like to be in college, specifically how to do well in school.

This perspective, which was shared by most of the transfer students in this study, caused many of them to pointedly search for a sense of belonging within the transfer student community. Brandon described how this affected his decision to live in the transfer student living-learning center instead of the residential college for engineering, computer science, and bioinformatics majors.

It came down to, do I want to live with freshmen that are taking classes that I am, or do I wanna finally be with people that are a little bit closer to my age and maybe have something in common with me when it comes to challenges in life. I've met a lot of people that went straight from junior colleges and stuff, but some people have been through a bit, like my roommate...And that's kind of refreshing to know that not everyone is the bright-eyed, bushy-tailed 18-year-old high school kid, because that just doesn't work for everyone. So I wanted to know I was not alone, I guess.

Brandon's decision to live in the transfer student living-learning center was based on the fact that he felt that he would relate better to other transfer students instead of the first year students with whom he would be taking classes, despite the fact that the first year students would most likely have more interests in common with him. His last comment about loneliness indicates that he felt his experiences set him apart from first year students to the extent that he would risk loneliness if he were to live with them in the residential college. Several of the transfer students who participated in this study expressed the wish to be with other transfer students instead of first year students. These students often looked to the transfer student living-learning center as the best means to accomplish this goal.

The Role of the Living-Learning Center

All of the transfer students interviewed for this study felt a sense of belonging in the living-learning center. They felt cared for and supported by the staff leading the programming, as well as the community as a whole. Darcy described her experience in the living-learning center by saying, “so far it’s been really great. The [living-learning center] has been part of the whole welcoming experience, just how everyone’s so nice and accepts you for who you are, and I love it.” Similarly, Tina described the supportive and accepting atmosphere by comparing it to her experience in the military: “The military in general has a saying, ‘No man left behind,’ and in this community, no man is left behind...I mean that’s the core and the beauty of it.” Both of these students’ perceptions of the transfer student living-learning center are reflective of the larger group of participants in this study. Many of the students believed the living-learning center to be welcoming, supportive, and accepting of all types of people.

All of the participants in the study also felt that the living-learning center was meant to help ease their transition and meet other transfers. Based on their experiences, whether they had a friend group or not, most of the transfer students in this study believed that the living-learning center did a good job of helping them meet people with similar experiences and struggles, which they found valuable during their transition to Baylor.

Ben expressed the goals of the transfer student living-learning center in this way:

Just to kinda ease the transition I guess. So that way if you’re coming from community college it’s not a huge shock to you...there’s people that are also in the same position as you, so it’s kinda just there to make sure that, they’re like, “Hey, you guys aren’t alone. There’s other people in the same position that you are.”

Meredith reiterated this perception:

I like the transfer program that I'm in. It's nice rooming with other transfer students cause we all know what we're going through. I think we all just have maybe a better appreciation for coming here and transferring than a freshman does.

Ben emphasized the fact that the living-learning center helps ease the transition for transfer students as they enter a new collegiate environment that may substantially differ from that of one's previous institution, a perception that several of the transfer students in this study discussed. Both Ben and Meredith talked about the importance of being surrounded by other transfer students who have an understanding of one's personal struggles. Ben felt that this kept him from feeling alone, while Meredith appreciated being able to be with like-minded people. Both of these sentiments were common themes among most of the transfer students in this study.

One participant in the study felt that the apartment-style setup of the living-learning center was not conducive to meeting people. Sarah, an international student who transferred from a small private university, explained why she preferred the dorm-style living at her previous institution:

I think that we just don't have chance to meet people unless they've already met each other before cause we are living, like, maybe it's apartment. I think there's a lot of difference between dorm and apartment cause I was living in dorm in [my previous institution], uh, it's like everyone knows each other. Not knows each other, but we just would remember each other. At least we can know this person's face. But in the apartment I think it's more, maybe it's more big cause I can't meet a lot of people there. That's why I feel lonely.

Sarah believed that because the apartment complex was bigger, there was less of a chance that you would be able to get to know the other residents, whereas, based on her previous experience, it was easier to at least recognize other residents in her dorm. It is also important to note Sarah's inclusion of the possibility of meeting the other residents before

living there because, as she revealed during her interview, she was not able to attend many of the orientation events.

Many of the students I interviewed were grateful for the opportunities provided by the living-learning center that allowed them to meet other transfer students that were also new to the institution, but also second year transfer students that could encourage them as they transitioned. Ryan highlighted this point when he talked about the goals of the living-learning center.

I believe that that could be another goal: to foster an environment in which people who have already been in the same exact situation that the incoming transfer students are going through presently, uh, these students who have already been through the situations can come and they can help, and they can give you advice here and there, make the whole transition process easier. The point of the [living-learning center], from what I can tell, is to make the transition process easier, allowing faculty members, officials like [the program coordinator], and allowing students who've been at [my new institution] for longer than the rest of us, to help us, to make the process a little bit easier on us.

Ryan indicated that he felt the second year transfer students in the living-learning center, all of whom serve in leadership capacities, were helpful because they were able to impart wisdom from their previous experiences onto the new transfer students. Ryan also mentioned the faculty and staff associated with the living-learning center, as many of the participants in this study did, as another way that it helped ease the transition into the new institution.

Based on the lived experiences of the majority of the transfer students in this study, the living-learning center appears to help transfer students feel welcome and comfortable with one another, and helps facilitate a sense of belonging for transfer students by introducing them to others that are going through similar transitions. For many of the participants, the relationships they formed with their peers in the living-

learning center have become the group to which they feel their strongest sense of belonging. Meredith described the nature of her sense of belonging with her friend group within the living-learning center in this way:

I believe a lot of my guy friends do care about me. And also several of the friends like my roommates and my next-door neighbors, and that we would stand up for each other, and pretty much do anything for one another, even though we haven't been around each other that long. Just because we are so close and we do spend so much time together. That's developed fairly fast.

Meredith's perceptions were common among the transfer students in this study who had a sense of belonging to a small group of friends. They felt cared for on a deep level and were very close to their group. Despite this however, a handful of students did not view the living-learning center as being important in the long-run. Some of these students felt that it was important during their first week at their new institution, but have seen it dwindle in importance as they made friends and became immersed in their studies. In his description of the importance of the living-learning center, Tim explained, "I mean, I wouldn't say they've been paramount, but they've been helpful in their way." Similarly, Erin said, "It's not like my top priority, I mean, it's just kind of there if I need it, I guess." Meredith explained this in more depth:

It was important to me like the first week or so, and throughout [orientation], helping get settled in, helping get the mentors through the LLC I believe. Just helping with that piece. And then now it's like a place where on Sundays they throw a pool party or something...which is fun so you have the music and all that. But not as important as it was the first week.

Meredith associated this lack of importance with the fact that she had a close friend group with whom she would rather spend the majority of her time, and who also served as her support system. Erin, on the other hand, did not yet have a close friend group to which she felt she belonged, but she still saw the living-learning center as somewhat

unimportant. Tim seconded this belief, indicating that the transfer student living-learning center was helpful, but not terribly important. Nevertheless, most of the students appreciated the care and attention provided by the living-learning center and felt that they made the right decision in living there.

Determination, Positivity, and Hope

A common characteristic among all of the transfer students that participated in this study was a determinism that pushed them to want to succeed at their new institution that, in some cases, was a motivating factor in their decision to come to their receiving institution in the first place. Many of the participants also engaged in positive self-talk throughout their transition, which helped them cope with any struggles they may have been experiencing. As a part of this positive outlook, many of the students were hopeful that any obstacles they faced during their transition would eventually dissipate as time passed. The following section explores these themes as they relate to Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995), specifically the elements of Self and Strategies.

Self– Determined to Succeed

Many of the transfer students who participated in this study came to their new institution looking for an academic challenge. Several of the participants described themselves as being determined to succeed because of future goals or external pressures. Daniel, because he is a nontraditional student who unsuccessfully tried to attend college in the past, felt that there were people who do not believe that he would succeed, and was therefore more determined to do so.

The biggest mode of rigor for me is when people tell me I can't. I knew when I was going to back to school that, in order for me to succeed, I'd have to do

something that I really love doing. I really have to have a passion for it or else I wouldn't be interested in it. I didn't want a repeat of my first time that I went to school. It just so happens that what I really wanted to do was very specialized and I knew it was not going to be an easy route to take. When I started that journey I was told by friends, family members, it wouldn't be a good idea to go back to school, "you can't do it." So far I've proven everybody wrong, and by being accepted to [my current institution], that is my biggest academic achievement. Now people see where I'm at now and people are starting to take me seriously.

Daniel's initial lack of support from friends and family pushed him to continue on his academic journey and to pursue higher levels of achievement. As he later revealed in his interview, he could have remained at his previous institution to obtain his degree, but he wanted a more challenging environment that was also more supportive and caring.

Sarah, despite already facing the challenges of being an international student, wanted to attend a more prestigious university than her previous institution.

I had a lot of friends [at my previous institution], but I really want to go to a bigger university and try something different. And [my new institution] is a prestigious university, and um, that is the most important reason that I came here.

Even though Sarah had a sense of belonging to her previous institution, her desire to challenge herself and attend a more prestigious institution pushed her to transfer. One of the struggles she faced at her new institution was the fact that, because of the more rigorous academics, she felt many of the students were more focused on their studies and therefore less available for social activities. Despite this struggle however, Sarah was determined to build relationships with others, causing her to become active in the living-learning center's leadership team.

Sarah and Daniel's reasons for transferring to pursue their degree at their current institution are common among many of the transfer students in this study. This determination to succeed through a higher level of academic rigor and challenge also

translated into social aspects for many of the participants. Several students indicated that after arriving at their new institution, they were determined to pursue friendships and a sense of belonging. Ryan described his mindset by saying, “I also came here with the attitude that I was going to, to make friends. You know, obviously not too quickly but definitely not too slow either.” Ben, who describes himself as having been shy in the past, was determined to overcome this as he perceived it to be a deterrent to his ability to develop a sense of belonging.

Early in my life I realized that if you were shy, you kinda lose out of a lot of stuff just because you don’t get those opportunities, and so coming out here, I was kinda like, “Ok, you can’t be the shy guy anymore,” and so I kinda just put myself out there and went out and started talking to people and stuff like that.

Similarly, Brandon, a self-identified introvert gave examples of how determined he is to make friends by describing some uncomfortable situations he put himself in after arriving at his new institution.

I’m just continuously putting myself in awkward situations just for the benefit of growth. I went to a party the other night and I asked someone out the other day, and things that I would not have seen myself doing even a few months ago. It’s just the pressure of the situation and my willingness to make something of my time here’s kind of pushed me into some scenarios that I didn’t think I was capable of.

All three of these students approached their new institution determined to make friends in order to develop a sense of belonging. Ben and Brandon both mentioned the fact that they wanted to have a full experience, believing that having a sense of belonging would contribute to that. The transfer students involved in this study had similar attitudes toward making friends and becoming a part of a community at their new institution.

Strategies – Positivity and Hopefulness

In addition to their determination to develop a sense of belonging and succeeding at their new institution, many of the transfer students in this study utilized positive self-talk and a hopeful approach when dealing with the stress of transferring. This is especially true when the participants discussed their sense of belonging, or lack thereof, at their new institution. Erin, who had a strong sense of belonging at her previous institution, and whose decision to transfer was not her own, worked to find the positive in her situation in this way:

I believe it was all like part of God's plan obviously, but I do think it was a transitioning time. Just this summer was a big transition time in my life. Like a time of growth and stuff. And I think it was a good time to like stop and kind of restart, I guess. [Can you tell me more about that, if you don't mind?] Yeah. I'm not even sure if I really know what I mean by that, but I just feel like...I don't know. I guess I was too, like, in my comfort zone at [my previous institution], I guess, with that group of friends and like, just so comfortable with them. It was like family, you know? And I feel like to, I don't know, make a difference and get where I want to go in life, I need to step out of that comfort zone. So I feel like it was a good time to like break free of that family thing.

Erin's transition to her new institution was difficult not only because of the friends and sense of belonging that she left behind at her previous institution, but because, as she revealed in her interview, she was struggling to make friends at her new institution. Despite her struggles however, Erin continued to try to find a positive way to view her situation by believing that transferring was part of God's plan, and by viewing her current discomfort as a way to grow and possibly make a difference in the future.

Daniel, who also struggled to form deep friendships, remained hopeful that he would develop a sense of belonging.

I don't want to just come here and be a student and leave. You know? I am here and I feel that I was selected to be here for a reason and I feel like this is where

I'm supposed to be. I feel like things have happened in my life that have brought me here, some things that I feel like I can't explain, but I feel like I'm here for a reason. And so while I'm here I want to make my time meaningful, and I want to be involved, and I want to find my place here in [my new institution], I just haven't found it yet.

Similar to Erin, Daniel felt that he was at his new institution for a reason and was hopeful that, because of that, he would eventually develop a sense of belonging. As was discussed in the previous section, he was determined to get involved and have a full college experience, but instead of allowing his loneliness to overshadow his desire to be a part of his new community, Daniel remained hopeful that those relationships would form eventually.

Maintaining a positive outlook and hopefulness despite difficulties was a common theme among the majority of the transfer students who participated in this study. Sarah articulated this perspective clearly when she said:

I'm telling myself I need to belong here cause I'm not familiar to this environment yet, but I think I'll be used to it in a few months, so I think I'll feel like I'm belonging to [my new institution] in the future.

Whether they have a sense of belonging or not, the transfer students in this study were typically looking forward to having a more positive experience as their time at their new institution passed.

Age and Situation

Each transfer student who participated in this study had an individualized situation that made their transition experience unique, especially as it related to their sense of belonging. Erin, who had a strong sense of belonging at her previous institution, did not have control over the fact that she transferred, causing her to have a more negative experience.

I kind of went through phases of excited and not excited. Like at first I was really mad at my parents about it, and then I worked at a summer camp this summer...I don't know. A lot of people here work there. Which was a really really good time for me to work there cause I was going through this transition time in my life and coming out of my shell kind of, and a lot of [students from my new institution] actually work there, so that kind of got me excited because I was meeting people, and they were really awesome people, but then, like actually coming here I guess it's kinda different, cause I'm not hanging out with those people. I'm just kinda doing my own thing.

Erin's belief that her frustration with her situation – her parents making her transfer – would be ameliorated by the sense of belonging she felt she was developing with the friend group she formed over the summer is important. Because she was unable to carry that sense of belonging with her to campus, she felt lonely and was generally having a negative experience.

As an international student, Sarah's situation involved grappling with cultural adjustments as well as the transition between schools.

I would say it's much better than the first year I came to the United States cause for me I'm knowing more than two years ago. Some American foods, or how the country looks like, and cause everything's different from China to America, so I need to get used to it. And this is my third year so I'm getting more used to it, but for the transfer experience, I feel very lonely and I feel like everything is so unfamiliar. And I need to remember the directions to everywhere and it's very hard for me. Especially cause the campus is much bigger than before and it's hard to find a parking space.

Even though this is not Sarah's first year in the America, she still struggled with the many differences between the United States and China, in addition to her adjustment to her new institution. Similar to Erin, Sarah's situation makes her experience unique. Nevertheless, one commonality between them is that, despite the vast differences in their experience, they both mentioned the impact of their loneliness on their situation in the form of concurrent stress.

Although each participant had an individualized situation, the nontraditional students in this study all mentioned their age as being a factor that impacted their sense of belonging on campus and within the living-learning center. Similar to Erin and Sarah, the age gap that these students saw as an obstacle left some of them feeling lonely. Daniel grappled with this issue almost immediately in his interview when he was asked to share his age:

[long pause before answering] So, my age is 34, and that's one of the challenges I have when I come here at [my new institution] is that a lot of people think that I'm younger than I really am, which also presents some of the social challenges I have. You know, when you meet someone you talk, and as the conversation starts getting deeper and deeper and you get a closer connection, then that question comes out and people, um, that's what I'm noticing. That's one of my biggest things here is people don't really know what you did before [arriving at your new institution]. Getting here was a process for me to get here, you know? I worked really hard to get here and I have many reasons of why I went back to school, but, yes. That's one of the big challenges that I have.

Daniel's immediate response to this demographic question was hesitancy, followed by a somewhat uncharacteristically disjointed description of how his age affected his experience at his new institution. Daniel felt that the age gap between himself and the majority of the other students on campus caused him to experience some awkward or unpleasant situations, leaving him feeling out of place in his new environment. His reaction to my questions seemed to convey a sense of frustration and anxiety, which he voiced when he described the age difference as being "one of the big challenges" he faced. His description of having to reveal his age to others after getting to know them indicated that the age gap that existed between himself and the majority of the student body at his new institution had already negatively affected his sense of belonging.

When asked if she felt hindered in her transfer experience, Darcy discussed her concerns with finding a friend group to which she can belong, knowing that the fact that she was 27 would factor into her interactions with other students.

I was gonna say maybe the immaturity levels sometimes of the students, or like having a hard time finding other like-minded individuals. And then it's just kind of personal trials, like having to build enough patience to deal, because I have to remember that these kids aren't in the military and they're not my age, so I can't expect of them the same standard that I'm expected to hold to my marines or that I've been expected to hold at their age.

Darcy's description of other students as "kids" who are immature and who require her to utilize patience indicates that she feels separate from them. Darcy believed this separateness was a result of the age gap that she saw between herself and the majority of the student body, as well as the fact that she believed she had experienced a different level of discipline than the other students.

For some of the nontraditional students, the struggle to develop a sense of belonging was at least somewhat alleviated by living in the transfer student living-learning center. Tina, who like Daniel was also in her thirties, described this perception in this way:

The LLC afforded me the opportunity to be able to live in an environment where I could be around people who, ok, transfer students coming in, so I'm not really dealing with students coming straight out of high school.

Darcy, on the other hand, felt that her expectations about the living-learning center were not met because of this issue. When asked if the transfer student living-learning center had met her expectations, she said she was somewhat disappointed, but did not elaborate and instead said that her expectations had been met. When asked if there was a way that her expectations had not been met, she explained:

Yeah, in a way, you know, socially. And that's like I said, probably the age difference. And you know, I don't know if that's something that is fixable because there's always gonna be the difference in what they like to do and what I like to do.

Although Tina was grateful to be living in an environment that was populated by other people that had least had some experience outside of high school, Darcy still felt the age difference between herself and the younger transfer students. Both of these women were looking for a community in the living-learning center, but their individual perceptions of their situation affected their ability to develop a sense of belonging to that community.

Sense of Belonging and Support

All of the transfer students interviewed for this study felt supported by their families, by the living-learning community, and by the institution, therefore giving them a sense of belonging to the university. Ben felt supported by his family and friends-of-the-family, saying, "I had some people that are more excited about me going to [my new institution] than I was." Ryan seconded this perspective by describing his family and friends as being proud of him.

Well, I get a lot of encouragement from my family back home telling me that they're proud of me, and they can't wait to see what I do here on campus, what I do when I graduate. I get a lot of encouragement. People from my old college, they encourage me a lot. They tell me congrats on getting here and they wish me the best.

Tim described the environment at the living-learning center as being supportive as well.

I would say so far, everybody's helpful, everybody's supportive of each other, there's no grudges, there's no animosity, so I think everybody's just with people just being supportive, you know? I could just come over if there's a college football game on or an NFL football game on. So everybody's really friendly you know? It's not really cliquey like high school where you have this clique and you have this clique, you know?

Finally, Daniel explained the support he felt from the larger campus community at his new institution.

I felt like everyone had my best interests with them. And that's one of the biggest reasons why I chose [this institution] is because I felt like the support system was the best here and I couldn't get that anywhere else.

All of these students articulated how they felt supported by their families and the communities of which they were a part at their new institution in a way that was consistent with the rest of the transfer students who participated in this study. Despite these different areas where the participants felt a sense of belonging, some of transfer students did not have a friend group from which they could get support at their new institution. Their lack of a smaller, tight-knit friend group caused them to experience loneliness and anxiety, and they repeatedly mentioned their struggle in social situations or in making friends. These students were not having a positive experience overall and this issue was the main, and in most cases, only struggle that was keeping these students from doing so.

Erin addressed her struggle to make friends repeatedly during her interview, sometimes showing considerable emotion, especially when she first admitted that she was having trouble: "I mean, I've kind of had trouble making friends, I guess. But, [starts crying], yeah. Sorry, I might get teary. Now that I said it I'm gonna cry, but I've had trouble making friends." Later in the interview, Erin was more specific about how her expectations to make friends had not been met:

But like, personal expectations with roommates and stuff, not quite, cause when I was at [my previous institution], my roommates were like my instant best friends, and I didn't know them coming into it either. So I was kinda expecting that to happen here, and we're just not that close.

Erin finally explained the implications of her distant relationship with her roommates when she described how her lack of support left her feeling alone.

I don't know. I feel like sometimes I feel like I handle it really well, but sometimes I'll be like crying and stuff like now, and I'm like, I don't see anyone else crying. Cause all my roommates are transfers also, cause I'm in the transfer community or whatever, and I don't ever see them getting super upset, but I guess it's something that'd be good to talk about because they probably do get upset.

Erin's hesitancy to seek support from her roommates stems from her feeling that she does not have a close-knit group of friends. Other participants in this study had similar experiences of feeling alone and without support from close friends on campus. In each case, as in Erin's, these students frequently fixated on this issue, demonstrating how important it was for them to have a friend group to which to belong.

Sense of Belonging and a Positive Transition Experience

As each section in this chapter has demonstrated, the transfer students in my study felt that they needed to develop a sense of belonging to the larger campus community, to the living-learning center, and to a smaller friend group in order to have a positive transition experience. These different communities and groups were perceived as supportive, could affect a student's situation, and were looked for as part of one's self and situation.

The transfer students in this study repeatedly associated their positive or negative experience with their sense of belonging. For example, here is how Meredith responded when I asked if her expectations had been met at her new institution:

Yes. I love it here. Absolutely love it. [Can you elaborate on that at all?] Yes. Um, it's even from the second day, I just felt like this is where I am supposed to be. I felt at home. Whereas [my previous institution] never fully felt like that. Never really felt like, "This is my home. This is my whatever."

Meredith associated her positive experience with the fact that she felt at home at her new institution. She especially appreciated this because she did not have a strong sense of belonging at her previous institution. On the other hand, Sarah, who did have a strong sense of belonging at her previous institution was not having a positive experience. When she was asked to talk about the most difficult part of transferring for her, she mentioned her difficulty with making friends: “After the transfer I felt like it’s hard to meet people in the big university cause everyone does their own things. That is a problem for me.” Although both of these students are having very different experiences, it is clear that their sense of belonging to a community at their new institution directly impacted how they perceived their transition.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This study focused on how a transfer student's sense of belonging affected their transition experience as they entered their new institution. Despite the fact that previous research has found that transfer students need support from multiple places in order to have a smooth transition (Volkwein, King, & Terenzini, 1986; Laanan, 1996; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Dennis, et. al., 2008; Wang, 2008; Lee, et. al., 2009), and despite the fact that research also demonstrates the importance of developing a sense of belonging when considering college student success (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004), the phenomenon of transfer students' sense of belonging was largely unexplored. The following chapter will summarize the conclusions of this study, look at how those conclusions interact with the conceptual framework, discuss the limitations of the study, and outline implications for practice and future research.

Conclusions

The findings presented in this study indicate that transfer students desire to develop a sense of belonging to different groups within their receiving institution. When institutions deliberately work to help transfer students develop a sense of belonging to the university community as well as to smaller communities within the university like the living-learning center, they are providing a support system for those students that can affect how they view themselves, their decision to transfer, and their future selves. The

following section outlines the conclusions drawn from these findings, specifically, that transfer students desire to develop a sense of belonging in different areas, that their sense of belonging is central to how they experience their transition into their new institution, and that transfer students seek out relationships with other transfer students both for community and individual friendships.

A Desire to Belong

The participants in this study have demonstrated that transfer students can and do develop a sense of belonging to the university community, to other formal communities within the university, and to informal friend groups. The sense of belonging that develops within each of these groups has an impact on the transition experience of transfer students. For example, although a transfer student may feel a sense of belonging to their new institution and to a smaller, formal community within that institution, if they do not feel that they belong to an informal group of friends, their social experience will likely still be a negative one.

Additionally, the transfer students in this study who felt that they had not yet developed a sense of belonging to any of the above-mentioned groups strongly desired to do so. This attitude demonstrates the idea that transfer students can be extremely invested in experiencing a transformational collegiate experience, rather than a transactional one, at least initially. In other words, the transfer students in my study were looking for a challenging collegiate environment in all aspects in the hopes that they would grow from their experience, rather than simply looking to get a degree and move on. Many of the transfer students in this study indicated that their desire to feel a sense of belonging was a direct result of their desire to have a full college experience. Many of the students in my

study wanted their experience at their new institution to have meaning in their lives, even beyond their time at the institution, mentioning that they wanted to make lasting memories and build strong relationships that they could potentially still have years after graduation. The transfer students' focus on building relationships and fully experiencing college at their new institution supports the assertions of previous researchers that transfer students could benefit from co-curricular interventions designed to foster community and support.

The idea that transfer students benefit from co-curricular programming was corroborated by several of the participants in this study who felt supported by the different transfer student specific interventions created by the receiving institution. Many of the participants perceived the orientation activities that were geared toward transfer students as being particularly helpful in fostering an environment conducive to the development of a sense of belonging on all three levels. These findings confirmed that the suggestions made in previous studies on transfer students were apt: that programs created specifically for transfer students would help create the supportive environment that these students typically need (Laanan, 1996; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Dennis, et. al., 2008; Wang, 2008).

In addition to the orientation activities, many of the participants talked at length about the benefits of the transfer student living-learning center. They felt that living in a community with other transfer students was beneficial because it allowed them to meet other individuals who were experiencing, or had already experienced, several of the struggles that they were currently grappling with, therefore creating a network of support for the new residents. This finding supports Flaga's (2006) suggestion that a living-

learning community would be a productive way to provide long-term support for transfer students due to the fact that living-learning programs typically orient students to campus and provide them with services in a more centralized and accessible manner.

Different Levels of Belonging

As was mentioned in the previous section, the transfer students in this study identified different areas of belonging, specifically those at the university level; at the formal, smaller community level within the university; and at the deeper friendship level (Fig. 3). The participants discussed each area as being of value to their transition experience.

The bottom two levels of belonging mentioned by the participants, those at the campus-wide level and at the smaller formal community level, were generally fulfilled through institutional interventions. Due to the activities held by the university specifically for transfer students, along with events like convocation that focused very pointedly on belonging, many of the transfer students felt a sense of belonging to the wider campus community. Some of the students also felt this connection due to interactions with faculty and staff members. The same activities that helped foster a sense of belonging to campus, particularly those during orientation, for many of the participants, also contributed to their sense of belonging to the living-learning center community. This was due to the fact that most of the orientation activities took place within the context of the living-learning center.

On the other hand, although all of the participants in the study felt that the living-learning center's purpose was to help them meet other transfer students, therefore helping

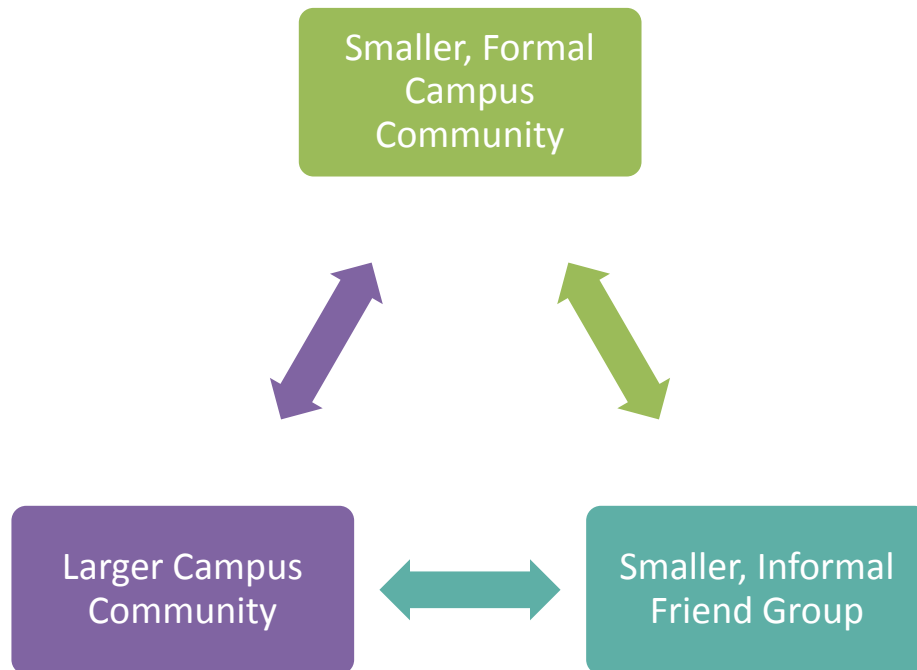


Figure 3. Necessary elements of belonging for a positive transfer transition.

them develop a sense of belonging to smaller friend groups, this last level was achieved to a lesser degree. Despite the fact that most of the transfer students in this study felt that they belonged to the wider campus community and to the living-learning center community, if they did not have a smaller friend group to which they felt they belonged, then they felt that their transition experience was lacking. This finding demonstrates that the participants needed to fulfill their desire for belonging on the deepest level in order to have a genuinely positive transfer experience.

Although all three of these elements have been considered in previous research as key places for individuals to derive support (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995), for the transfer students in this study, these three areas appeared to build on one another. For example, the transfer students who felt a sense of belonging to the larger campus community described the nature of that belonging as being one of

academic support, or of figurative encouragement derived from the general atmosphere. These feelings of support grew deeper when students discussed their sense of belonging at the living-learning center, indicating that they felt supported both academically and socially in their residential community, as well as generally cared for. However, the transfer students in this study viewed the idea of belonging to a smaller group of friends as essential in that they felt this provided support academically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually, and also provided a deep level of care that they did not describe as taking place within the larger living-learning center community. Although the living-learning center works to help transfer students develop relationships with one another, I believe the program cannot actively cultivate the deeper relationships that the students in my study desired through programming. As the students themselves explained, they are responsible for developing deeper relationships out of the more surface-level friendships they make through the living-learning center.

It is important to note these differences because they imply that helping transfer students develop a sense of belonging to their new campus or to a smaller community within that institution may not provide the total amount of support needed for a positive transition experience to occur. For the transfer students in this study, it was imperative that they develop a sense of belonging to a group of friends in order to feel at peace with their transition. The students who did not have a sense of belonging to a friend group had strong feelings of loneliness, causing some to have higher levels of anxiety, and other to reach out to communities outside of the institution for support. Many of the students treated these outside support systems as second rate, indicating that they would prefer to find support through friends on campus.

The potential difficulty in developing a sense of belonging at this deepest level is paramount to the field's knowledge of the transfer student experience. Previous research has demonstrated the impact that the development of a sense of belonging can have on college student retention and persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, & Alvarez, 2007). Knowing that transfer students need to develop a sense of belonging to a small friend group, and knowing that it is difficult for institutional programs to facilitate these relationships, raises the call for creativity among student affairs practitioners as they work to encourage a positive transition experience for transfer students.

Making Connections with Fellow Transfer Students

Transfer students want to be able to connect with other transfer students. This is where they tend to look for their deeper, more meaningful, and sometimes life-long connections, as well as for their most important level of belonging, as I discussed in the previous section. Many of the participants in this study specifically stated their desire to build deep connections with transfer students because of their shared experiences in having to transition to a new collegiate environment. Some of the participants also mentioned that they felt other transfer students tended to have more life experience and would therefore be easier to relate to in that way as well. As a result of this perspective, most of the participants in this study were openly resistant to building deep relationships with traditional first year students.

The fact that transfer students in this study viewed themselves as a subgroup within the student body suggests that transfer students ought to be viewed as a distinct group on college campuses by student affairs professionals. Their perspective alone

separates them from other students in a way that the transfer students themselves encourage. Two participants in this study exemplified this in their strong resistance to make friends in their classes that were populated by a majority of first year students, despite the fact that they did not have a sense of belonging to another friend group elsewhere. As such, when transfer students view themselves as being different from native students, it affects their actions toward developing a sense of belonging.

Sense of Belonging and Schlossberg's Transition Theory

For the transfer students in this study, understanding their sense of belonging in conjunction with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) revealed a great deal about their transition experience. It is clear that the participants in this study viewed their sense of belonging as a central component for having a positive transition experience (Fig. 4), affecting all four elements of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995): Self, Situation, Support, and Strategies.

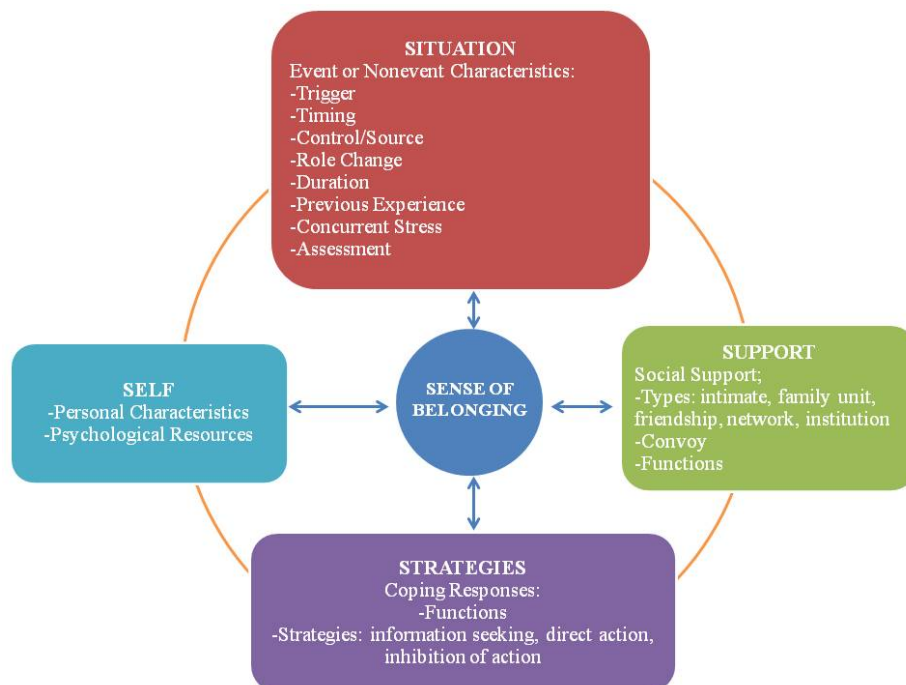


Figure 4. The integration of sense of belonging and the four S's.

Strategies, and Support. Additionally, elements of each of the 4 S's impacted how these transfer students sought out or viewed a sense of belonging during their transition, indicating a bi-directional relationship. This means that, when considering the successful transition of transfer students into their new institution, one ought to consider their sense of belonging as a factor of paramount importance that can affect all four elements of their transition experience as defined by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), and which may also be affected by their Self, Situation, Strategies, and Support.

Self

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) describe *self* as including both personal characteristics and psychological resources, such as personality traits, outlook, commitment, values, and ego development. This study identified a direct connection between the participants' sense of belonging and their outlook as they transitioned into their new institution, as well as how a common character trait among the transfer students in this study, namely determinism, impacted their approach to developing a sense of belonging.

As I discussed in chapter four, the transfer students in this study retained a positive outlook despite any difficulties they may have been experiencing in relation to their transition. However, their positive outlook manifested in different ways depending on whether the transfer students had developed a sense of belonging or not. For the students who had a sense of belonging to all three areas – the university, the living-learning center, and a friend group – their positive outlook was reflective of how smooth their transition had been. This perspective allowed them to look to their overall future at their new institution with eager anticipation of success. However, for the students who

had not developed a sense of belonging to one or more of these areas, which most commonly meant a lack of a sense of belonging to a friend group, their positive outlook usually manifested in the form of hope for the future development of a sense of belonging. In other words, instead of focusing their positivity on more holistic success at their new institution, these students typically fixated on developing a sense of belonging.

The fact that these transfer students allowed their lack of a sense of belonging to consume their focus demonstrates their perception of the importance of its development. As this study took place during the initial few weeks of the fall semester, many of the transfer students in this study had not yet started to feel much pressure from other areas of their collegiate experience, namely that of academic rigor. It is important to note that developing a sense of belonging was important for these students as an element of their initial transition. Had this study been conducted later in the semester, it is possible that academic concerns would overshadow social ones. That being said, the students' focus on developing a sense of belonging during their first few weeks of school, and therefore during their initial transition, is significant.

In addition to their positive outlook, the transfer students in my study possessed a determined character, which directly impacted their pursuit of a sense of belonging. All of the students in my study were determined to succeed at their new institution, but for the students who felt that they had not yet developed a sense of belonging to one or more of the groups described in the previous section, their determination included their social life as well. Many of these students would put themselves in uncomfortable situations or seek out leadership opportunities in an attempt to develop the sense of belonging they felt they were lacking.

Situation

Situation entails a large number of considerations that affect a person's transition process, including elements like trigger, timing, locus of control, potential role changes, durations, previous experience, concurrent stress, and assessment (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Similar to self, the participants' sense of belonging affected how they viewed their transition and was also a form of concurrent stress for the transfer students who had not yet found a friend group.

The transfer students in this study tended to view their initial transition experience, to a great extent, in terms of their development, or lack of development, of a sense of belonging. For the students who felt they belonged to a friend group, to the living-learning center, and to the university, their transition was completely positive. On the other hand, students lacking a sense of belonging to one or more of these groups felt that transitioning to their new institution had been, and often was continuing to be, a struggle. As was mentioned previously in this section, this focus on social adjustment and developing a sense of belonging may have been due to the fact that the transfer students in this study had not had many academic experiences at the time the interviews were conducted. This may have impacted their perception of the importance of developing a sense of belonging for these students, which may have lost priority once academic stresses began to accelerate. That being said, the fact that the transfer students in my study felt they were having a positive transition experience if they had developed a sense of belonging is important when thinking about the initial transition experience of these students.

In addition to affecting the participants' assessment of their transition, many of the transfer students in this study who had not yet developed a sense of belonging on at least one of the three levels viewed their situation as an additional form of stress. Not only did these students feel the stress of transferring to their institution generally, but they were also upset by the fact that, for example, they did not have a friend group to which to belong. This also contributed to these students' assessment of their transition, causing some of them to feel overwhelmed.

Many of the transfer students in my study also communicated that different aspects of their situation affected their ability to develop a sense of belonging. The nontraditional transfer students in my study felt that their age factored into their ability to develop a sense of belonging, particularly with a smaller group of friends. These students typically viewed the age gap between themselves and the majority of the student body as a hindrance to their development of a sense of belonging, seeing it as an obstacle that they must overcome in order to develop deep relationships with other students. Some of the other transfer students mentioned different aspects of their situation as having an effect on their ability or desire to develop a sense of belonging. One student felt that transferring was outside of her control, and believed that developing a sense of belonging would help support her as she struggled to adjust to her new institution. Another student felt that her status as an international student left her feeling lost on campus and was looking to develop a sense of belonging with a small friend group in order to help her adjust to her surroundings. Finally, a few students came to their new institution with additional stressors, such as health problems that contributed to their transfer, family

issues, or previous struggles, all of which led these students to desire a sense of belonging in order to cope.

Strategies

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) describe strategies as coping mechanisms employed, or not employed, by the individual in transition to help navigate their way through moving in, moving through, and moving out. As was discussed in the section about *self*, the majority of the transfer students who participated in this study were hopeful for the future in one way or another. This outlook became a strategy for many of the transfer students who had not yet developed a sense of belonging as they grappled with their loneliness.

In addition to their positive outlook, the students who felt a sense of belonging to any or all three groups utilized their sense of belonging itself as a strategy. These students were often grateful for the fact that they had a support system in place through their friend group, their living-learning community, or their institution, that they felt would help them succeed despite their struggles. This typically manifested through open discussions with friends about the stresses of transferring, or feelings of freedom to approach faculty and staff within both the living-learning center and the larger campus community when issues arose.

Support

Finally, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) include the different types of support that one may look to while moving through a transition. As I mentioned in the previous section, the transfer students in this study looked to the groups to which they

belonged as a source of support. Several transfer students in my study mentioned seeking out support for the larger campus community through interactions with professors and university staff, as well as through a general feeling of support gained simply by being a student at the institution. Many of them also mentioned ways that they felt supported by the living-learning center in their transition, specifically through interactions with the program coordinator and chaplain, through their ability to meet other transfer students through events and programs, and through the general atmosphere within the living-learning center. Finally, the transfer students in my study who had a sense of belonging to a friend group on campus mentioned looking to this group as a support system because they felt their friends genuinely cared about their success and were available to help them get through tough situations.

Additionally, the transfer students who did not have a sense of belonging to all three groups had a desire to develop belonging at the level it was lacking. They felt that if they were able to develop a sense of belonging to a group of friends, for example, then they would feel more supported in their transition to campus. Both of these findings are consistent with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) as it presents the importance of multiple support systems for individuals in transition, which include different types of intimate relationships as well as formal communities. This study also demonstrated that, in order for these groups to become sources of support, the individual must first feel a sense of belonging to them, as discussed by Bollen and Hoyle (1990).

Limitations

Due to the nature of this study, the time frame for collecting and analyzing data was limited to one semester. These time constraints limited the interview process to a

single interview conducted with each participant. Had time not been a factor, it would have been beneficial to conduct at least one more interview with each of the participants. This would have enabled me to look at how the transition process for transfer students changes over time, as well as examine any changes in the nature or desire for a sense of belonging.

Another limitation of this study was the size of the participant pool. Due to institutional shifts, the number of potential participants was reduced to approximately 50 students. This not only drastically reduced the number of potential participants, but also affected the number of participants in the study. This study could have been improved had more participants been interviewed, but due to the limited participant pool, only 10 students expressed interest in participating. A smaller participant pool also prevented me from being able to utilize any form of selective sampling in an effort to deliberately compare groups of transfer students.

The fact that the transfer students living in the transfer student living learning center self-selected to live there was another limitation of this study. This leaves room for the possibility that transfer students who chose not to live in the living-learning center may have a different perception of their need and desire to develop a sense of belonging to the three areas previously identified. Future research needs to be conducted to look at transfer students that live off campus or who live in other on campus housing that is not specifically designed for transfer students.

Finally, my experience as a transfer student at the university where this study was conducted could have affected my interpretation of the experiences of the participants in this study (see Positionality Statement in Appendix). Despite this however, the disclosure

of my transfer student status helped me build rapport with the participants and could have resulted in more candid disclosures during the interviews. Additionally, my experience as a transfer student enabled me to better understand some of the experiences described in the interviews, strengthening my interpretations and analysis.

Implications

Although my study examined the impact of a sense of belonging on transfer students' initial transition experience, the potential ramifications of the study went beyond what I initially anticipated. Not only did this study reveal the need for a deeper investigation of the topic itself, but it also illuminated the need for a potentially different understanding of transfer students themselves. The following section will outline the implications for both future research and practice.

Future Research

This study focused on the initial transition of transfer students, only looking at the development of a sense of belonging for transfer students during the first three weeks of the semester. It was clear from their interviews that the participants in this study had not moved out of their transition, but instead were still moving through it. Because of this, I believe it would be valuable for future researchers to conduct a more thorough study that encompasses the entire first semester, or even the first year, in order to gain an understanding of the entire transition experience of transfer students. Additionally, it may be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study of transfer students throughout their entire experience at their new institution, from their arrival to their departure. This would

provide insight into their complete transition, as well as into any other shifts that may take place in the transfer student experience as it relates to their sense of belonging.

Another implication for future research that was mentioned in the limitation section is the need to study other groups of transfer students. This study focused solely on transfer students living within the transfer student living-learning center. Although the insights provided by this focus are valuable, they should not be taken at the exclusion of the perspectives of transfer students in different living situations. I believe it would be valuable to study transfer students who live off campus, as well as those who live in different, less focused forms of on-campus housing. These studies could provide a range of information on the development and impact of transfer students' sense of belonging, and could also impact future practices for student affairs professionals.

In addition to including other sets of transfer students in a similar study, it would be beneficial to conduct a study on transfer students' sense of belonging at institutions that do not have as many resources for transfer students as the one used in this study. There is a possibility that the transfer students in this study felt different from first year students because they were treated differently than first year students by the institution. A study conducted at an institution that included transfer students in all of their first year student programming may have different results.

Also, the university at which this study took place could have had an impact on the perceptions and desires of the transfer students themselves. The institution is a mid-sized private research institution in the South. The students in the study considered the academics to be rigorous and many also noted the large size of the institution. These elements could potentially have influenced the transfer students in my study to want to

make one-on-one connections with other transfer students as a means of coping with the increased rigor, for example. It would be beneficial to conduct a similar study at institutions with different environments to see if these elements affect transfer students' desire for a sense of belonging.

Finally, one of the most important implications of this study is the impact that the transfer students' sense of belonging had on their transition experience. My findings indicated that a transfer student's sense of belonging could influence all four elements of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995). As a result, I believe it is important to consider transfer students' sense of belonging when conducting future studies about their transition into their new institution. This would provide a more holistic approach to understanding transfer students, especially considering that most of the previous research focused solely on academic adjustment.

Practice

One of the major findings that came out of my study was the fact that transfer students desire to develop a sense of belonging to different areas within the campus community. Many institutions provide avenues for transfer students to get to know the larger campus community during the first few weeks of the semester, and some even facilitate smaller, formal communities within the university for transfer students, such as the institution in this study. Despite this however, the transfer students in this study felt that belonging to a smaller group of friends was imperative to their having a positive transition experience. In addition to this, the transfer students in my study explicitly stated that they wanted to build these relationships with other transfer students during their initial transition into their receiving institution. Knowing this, universities should

work to facilitate connections between transfer students rather than grouping them with the larger campus community when they first arrive. As Daniel explained, transfer students “crave” deep relationships with other transfer students, but they may need help in making those connections.

Additionally, it is important to note that the transfer students in my study felt that the transfer student living-learning center helped ease their transition into their new institution. This finding supports previous research on living-learning centers, which states that these programs typically help college students transition into their new environment (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas, et. al., 2007). This information is vital for student affairs practitioners looking for ways to increase transfer students’ sense of belonging. Living-learning centers are an effective tool to help transfer students become oriented to campus and connect with others, providing them with the specialized support that they need, while also facilitating their development of a sense of belonging on all three levels.

Finally, the transfer students in my study emphasized the fact that they felt they were different from other first year students. Due to this perception, the way universities view transfer students should change. As previous studies have shown (Laanan, 1996, 2004, 2007; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Dennis, et al., 2008; Wang, 2008), transfer students have different needs than first year students, and the transfer students in my study confirmed this. As a result, colleges and universities ought to develop ways to both facilitate the sense of belonging transfer students are looking for with each other while also helping them integrate within the greater campus community in order to prevent a complete separation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Statement of Positionality

Personal History with the Topic

My interest in exploring the transfer student experience comes from the fact that I am a former transfer student. After attending one year at a community college that served a large urban and suburban population, I transferred to a large, private research institution. My academic transition into my receiving institution was not difficult as I was prepared to attend a university upon graduation from high school, but chose not to for personal reasons. My social transition was difficult, however. At the time of my arrival, I was engaged to a true freshman, and was therefore aware of the programs put in place to welcome first year students, versus those meant for transfer students. I quickly became frustrated with the fact that my fiancé was encouraged to attend numerous large scale events that I was not supposed to attend as a transfer student. I arrived on campus hoping to be able to participate in all of the new student programs and was extremely disappointed to find out that I was not invited. This led me to stop attending the transfer student welcome events and to decide for myself how I would get involved in the university.

In addition to this early frustration, I experienced pretty severe culture shock due to the fact that the environment at my receiving institution was vastly different from that of the community college that I attended. This part of my transition took me several years to overcome.

Biases

Not only do I have personal experience as a transfer student, but having stayed at the university I attended after graduation as a staff member in different departments, I have seen the changes that have taken place at the university to help support transfer students. It is possible that I will interview a student who perceives these programs differently than I do, or who is unaware of the programs and therefore perceives the university differently because of that. Because of my knowledge of the university and my own transfer experience, I will have to resist any temptation to challenge or lead participants in their responses.

Addressing my Biases

Because of my negative experience during my transfer process and because I have knowledge of the university's programs and efforts, I will be interpreting my study through this lens. In order to minimize the impact of my bias on the findings of my study, I will utilize member checking during data analysis and will debrief with peers invested in the transfer student experience, specifically the Program Director for the Transfer-Year Experience Living-Learning Center, and a staff member from the department of New Student Programs who works closely with transfer students.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

- Why did you decide to transfer to Baylor? (Situation - Trigger)
- What were you looking for when you transferred to Baylor?
- Did this seem like the right time to transfer for you? (Situation – Timing)
- What were you expecting your college experience to be like before arriving at Baylor?
 - Were these expectations met? If so, how? If not, explain.
- What goals do you hope to meet by coming to Baylor? (Self)
- How would you describe your transfer experience?
 - Tell me about the process of transferring to Baylor before your arrival.
 - How has your experience changed since you arrived on campus, if at all?
- In what ways have you felt helped or hindered during your transfer experience
 - Do you feel supported in your transfer? How? From whom to you get support? From where to you get support? (Support)
- Describe a time that you felt the transfer process was stressful.
 - How did you handle the situation?
 - How would you describe your ability to handle the situation?
 - What have others done to make you feel like you made the wrong decision? (Support)
- How have you felt affirmed in your transfer experience? (Support)

- What have others done to make you feel like you made the right decision?
(Support)
- What has been the most difficult part (or parts) of transferring to Baylor for you?
(Strategies)
 - How have you dealt with the stress of transferring? (Strategies)
 - What have you done when you feel stressed out? (Strategies)
- How do you feel you are handling the transfer experience so far? (Strategies)
- Do you feel you were prepared to handle the stress of transferring? (Strategies)
- What skills or gifts do you have that have helped you handle transferring to Baylor? (Strategies)
- What motivates you to succeed? (Self)
- Is there anything you learned about yourself from previous experiences that helped you handle the transfer to Baylor? (Situation – Previous Experience)
- How, if at all, have you changed since you transferred? (Situation – Role Change)
- How do you view your transfer experience overall? (Situation – Assessment)
- What has your overall impression been of the services provided by Baylor during your transfer?
- Why did you decide to live in the TYE-LLC?
 - Has your experience in the LLC met your expectations? Explain.
- How would you describe the TYE-LLC?
 - What do you think the goals are of the LLC?
 - How have you seen these goals play out during your time here?
 - Do you feel that the LLC is helpful for you? Why or why not?

- What have you enjoyed about the LLC?
 - What would you change about the LLC?
- Are you involved in the TYE-LLC? If yes, in what ways? Why or why not?
 - How important has the LLC been to you since arriving at Baylor?
- How would you describe your experience in the TYE-LLC?
- Tell me about BU 1000.
 - What sorts of things do you talk about in class?
 - Can you tell me about any connections you feel you are making with people because of this course?
 - How has BU 1000 contributed to your relationships with your peers?
- Describe your experience with the TYE Supporter program.
- Describe your experience with Orientation/Welcome Week/Social Activities/Service Activities through the LLC.
- Tell me about your impressions of the overall environment at the LLC. (Elaborate on potential topics below.)
 - Tell me about a time that you felt like you could be yourself in the LLC?
 - Describe your friendships in the LLC?
 - Do you feel cared about in the LLC? Explain.
 - Tell me about a time that you have felt valued as an individual in the LLC?
 - Do you feel accepted in the LLC? Explain.
 - Do you feel lonely in the LLC? Explain.
- Are you glad you decided to live in the TYE-LLC? Why?

- Tell me about your experience at your previous institution. What groups were you a part of that were important to you? Describe relationships you built while you were there. Did you have any opportunities to get involved?
- What on campus groups are you a part of? Off campus? Formal? Informal?
 - What drew you to these groups?
 - Why are you affiliated with these groups?
 - What do you talk about when you are with these groups?
 - How would you describe your relationships with people in these groups?
 - Do you feel supported by these groups? Explain.
 - Do you feel supported by the people in these groups? Explain.
- Who do you spend time with?
 - What about these people makes you want to spend time with them?
 - Why do you spend time with these people?
 - What do you talk about when you are together?
- Do you feel supported by these people? Explain.
- Describe a time that you felt cared for and respected outside of the LLC since your arrival at Baylor.
- Describe a time or place where you have felt important during your time at Baylor.
- What stands out to you when you think about your experience at Baylor so far?
- What do you hope to get out of your experience at Baylor?
- What do you value about being at Baylor?
 - How would you describe a typical Baylor student?
 - Does this describe you as well? In what ways yes/no?

- Can you think of an example?
 - How do you feel you fit in on campus?
- How committed are you to staying at Baylor and finishing your degree? (Self – Commitments)
- What does belonging mean to you?

Do you feel like you belong at Baylor? In the LLC? Why or why not?

REFERENCES

- Alfonso, M. (2006). The impact of community college attendance on baccalaureate attainment. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(8), 873-903.
- Bollen, K. A., & Hoyle, R. H. (1990). Perceived cohesion: A conceptual and empirical examination. *Social Forces 69*(2), 479-504.
- Brower, A. M., & Inkelas, K. K. (2010). Living-learning programs: One high-impact educational practice we now know a lot about. *Liberal Education, 96*(2), 36-43.
- Cheng, D. X. (2004). Students' sense of campus community: What it means, and what to do about it. *NASPA Journal, 41*(2), 216-234.
- Coccarelli, J. L. (2010). *Applying Schlossberg's transition theory to students with learning disabilities in the transition from high school to college*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 1479882).
- Davies, T. G., & Casey, K. (1999). Transfer student experiences: Comparing their academic and social lives at the community college and university. *College Student Journal, 33*(1), 60-71.
- Davies, T. G., & Dickmann, E. M. (1998). Student voices in the transfer process: Do we hear them? Do we listen? *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 22*(5), 541-557.
- Dennis, J. M., Calvillo, E., & Gonzalez, A. (2008). The role of psychosocial variables in understanding the achievement and retention of transfer students at an ethnically diverse university. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(6), 535-550.
- Dion, K. L. (2000). Group cohesion: From "fields of forces" to multidimensional construct. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 4*(1), 7-26.
- Flaga, C. T. (2006). The process of transition for community college transfer students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 30*(1), 3-19.
- Gonzalez, J. (2012, February 28). A third of students transfer before graduating, and many head toward community colleges. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved February 21, 2014, from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Third-of-Students-Transfer/130954/>

- Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African-American and white first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(7), 803-839.
- Herman, J. P., & Lewis, E. (2004). Transfer transition and orientation programs. In T. J. Kerr, M. C. King, & T. J. Grites (Eds.), *Advising Transfer Students* (pp. 57-64). Manhattan, KS: NACADA.
- Hills, J. R. (1965). Transfer shock: The academic performance of the junior college transfer. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 33(3), 201-215.
- Hurtado, S. & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70(4), 324-345.
- Inkelas, K. K., Daver, Z. E., Vogt, K. E., & Leonard, J. B. (2007). Living-learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(4), 403-434.
- Inkelas, K. K., Soldner, M., Longerbeam, S. D., & Leonard, J. B. (2008). Differences in student outcomes by types of living-learning programs: The development of an empirical typology. *Research in Higher Education*, 49(6), 495-512.
- Inkelas, K. K., Vogt, K. E., Longerbeam, S. D., Owen, J., & Johnson, D. (2006). Measuring outcomes of living-learning programs examining college environments and student learning and development. *The Journal of General Education*, 55(1), 40-76.
- Inkelas, K. K., & Weisman, J. L. (2003). Different by design: An examination of student outcomes among participants in three types of living-learning programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(3), 335-368.
- Institutional Research & Teaching (2013, September 13). *Profile of Undergraduate Transfers Fall 2012 and Fall 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/209351.pdf>.
- Ishitani, T. T. (2008). How do transfers survive after "transfer shock"? A longitudinal study of transfer student departure at a four-year institution. *Research in Higher Education*, 49(5), 403-419.
- Johnson, D. R. (2012). Campus racial climate perceptions and overall sense of belonging among racially diverse women in STEM majors. *Journal of College student Development*, 53(2), 336-346.

- Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., & Alvarez, P. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(5), 525-542.
- Jones, J. C., & Lee, B. S. (1992). Moving on: A cooperative study of student transfer. *Research in Higher Education, 33*(1), 125-140.
- Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Laanan, F. S. (1996). Making the transition: Understanding the adjustment process of community college transfer students. *Community College Review, 23*(4), 69-84.
- Lannan, F. S. (2004). Studying transfer students: Part I: Instrument design and implications. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 28*(4), 331-351.
- Laanan, F. S. (2007). Studying transfer students: Part II: Dimensions of transfer students' adjustment. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 31*(1), 37-59.
- Lee, D., Olson, E. A., Locke, B., & Michelson, S. T. (2009). The effects of college counseling services on academic performance and retention. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(3), 305-319.
- Li, Y., McCoy, E., Shelley, M. C., & Whalen, D. F. (2005). Contributors to student satisfaction with special program (fresh start) residence halls. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(2), 176-192.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park: CA: SAGE Publishing, Inc.
- Meiklejohn, A. (1932). *The experimental college*. Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Museus, S. D. & Maramba, D. C. (2011). The impact of culture of Filipino American students' sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education, 34*(2), 231-258.
- Newbaker, P. (2014, May 6). *College students still on the move in 2012-13*. Retrieved from http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/about/media_center/press_releases/files/release_2014-05-06.pdf
- Ott, A. P., & Cooper, B. S. (2013, March 18). They're transfer students, not cash cows. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved February 22, 2014, from <http://chronicle.com/article/Theyre-Transfer-Students-Not/137935/>.
- Pasque, P. A., & Murphy, R. (2005). The intersections of living-learning programs and

- social identity as factors of academic achievement and intellectual engagement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4), 429-441.
- Pendleton, K. J. (2007). *Using Schlossberg's transition theory to identify coping strategies of welfare recipients attending post-secondary institutions*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3293561).
- Powers, M. S. (2010). *Applying Schlossberg's transition theory to nontraditional male drop-outs*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3397864).
- Quanty, M. B., Dixon, R. W., & Ridley, D. R. (1999). The course-based model of transfer success: An action-oriented research paradigm. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 23(5), 457-466.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publishing Inc.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory*. New York, New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Schlossberg, N. K., Waters, E. B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with Theory (2nd Ed.)*. New York, New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Shapiro, N. S., & Levine, J. L. (1999). *Creating learning communities: A practical guide to winning support, organizing for change, and implementing programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Stassen, M. L. A. (2003). Student outcomes: The impact of varying living-learning community models. *Research in Higher Education*, 44(5), 581-613.
- Strauss, L. C., & Volkwein, J. F. (2004). Predictors of student commitment at two-year and four-year institutions. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75(2), 203-227.
- Swail, W. S. (2003). *Retaining minority students in higher education: A framework for success*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Townsend, B. (1995). Community college transfer students: A case study of survival. *The Review of Higher Education*, 18, 175-193.
- Townsend, B., & Wilson, K. (2006). "A hand hold for a little bit": Factors facilitating the success of community college transfer students to a large research university. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(4), 439-456.
- Volkwein, J. F., King, M. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (1986). Student-faculty relationships and

- intellectual growth among transfer students. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 57(4), 413-430.
- Wang, X. (2009). Baccalaureate attainment and college persistence of community college transfer students at four-year institutions. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(6), 570-588.
- Wawrzynski, M. R., & Jessup-Anger, J. E. (2010). From expectations to experiences: Using a structural typology to understand first-year student outcomes in academically based living-learning communities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(2), 201-217.
- Wawrzynski, M. R., Madden, K., & Jensen, C. (2012). The influence of the college environment on honors students' outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(6), 840-845.
- Wawrzynski, M. R., & Pizzolato, J. E. (2006). Predicting needs: A longitudinal investigation of the relation between student characteristics, academic paths, and self-authorship. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(6), 677-692.
- Wawrzynski, M. R. & Sedlacek, W. E. (2003). Race and gender differences in the transfer student experience. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(4), 489-501.