

TRANSITIONING: EXPERIENCES OF TRANSFER STUDENTS

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education—Doctor of Philosophy

2016

ABSTRACT

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Transfer students are a growing undergraduate population in higher education. Large numbers of underserved students, low-income, first-generation college students and students of color tend to begin their postsecondary education in community colleges. Yet, many studies show that while students may have intentions to transfer and obtain a bachelor's degree, many do not. It is important to know what transfer students draw upon as resources to be successful in their degree attainment. The purpose of this study was to understand the post-transfer experiences of underserved transfer students related to transitioning after they enrolled at the new institution when existing in a native student paradigm, meaning in an environment normed on native students who began at the institution.

This qualitative study is guided by transition theory. This exploratory holistic case study was conducted to gain an understanding of the factors that contributed to the post-transfer experience of students, with a special interest in aspects of the institution. Respondents filled out an online demographic questionnaire and 27 individuals were selected to participate in one round of interviews (45-60 minutes). The findings show that the participants encountered both academic and social challenges. Through transitioning capital, the participants mitigated these challenges and contributed to their continuous transitioning at the senior institution. Implications for practice, policy, theory and suggestions for future research are presented.

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To all the transfer students I have met whose path is not exactly what they planned but who continue to put one foot in front of the other. You have given voice to so many others. Keep fighting, keep struggling, keep faith that you belong! Our world needs you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primeramente a Dios le doy las gracias. My sincerest thanks to people from all parts of my life, especially from the Rio Grande Valley, my hometown of Weslaco, Texas: I am blessed with many friends like the Silvas and the Castellanos who supported me with love and prayer. From the University of New Mexico, especially mi familia from El Centro de la Raza and my RA friends, thanks for being my foundation for my passion of putting students first. Dr. Carolyn Sandoval, you have been an inspiration. I thank you for never judging me and always making me laugh. Dr. Luis Romero, si se pudo Valluco! You are a wonderful human being who drives me crazy but I am eternally grateful for our friendship. To my University of Texas at Austin friends, thank you for supporting my decision to pursue my degree. Alex Salinas, I'm waiting to call you Dr. soon, so do what you got to do, to be what you are meant to be. Dr. Kedra Ishop, thank you for keeping it real. Through multiple conversations, I learned that what is not in the textbook is only believable with experience. I appreciate the insight and drive to continue to bridge scholarship with practice. And of course to my Michigan State University friends, Drs. Leanne Perry, Missy Soto, Christina Yao and my buddy, LJ Shelton, you convinced this Texas girl to come to frigid MSU and for that I am glad for peer pressure. To my HALE cohort, especially my A-Team (Drs. Tonisha Lane, Michelle Vital and soon to be Dr. Erin Carter), you held me accountable and made it possible for me to finish. To Rueda Latin@, you encouraged me to stay connected to my roots and to remember that we are all in this together.

My deepest appreciation is for my advisor, Dr. Marilyn Amey. You made me believe that I could get through this process. Since day one, you held me accountable to my own hopes and dreams. I am forever thankful. I also want to acknowledge my committee members for making

this dissertation a stronger narrative of transfer students. Dr. Brendan Cantwell, thank you for your insight on this study; Dr. Patricia Marín, gracias for pushing me to be a better scholar; Dr. Kim Maier, the long talks over the years helped keep me sane and maintain perspective. To the rest of the HALE faculty and staff, I am extremely thankful for your understanding and support so that I could keep striving toward this goal when I had to tend to family matters. Dr. Dorinda Carter, kicking you off my committee was a smart move on my part because although you were my professor first, you most importantly became my friend.

To my Lucy, the most loving and enjoyable dog that brings joy and laughter to this world, you were ever so patient until you let it be known that you had enough of these PhD shenanigans and tore up my book, papers, and the window. Lucy has truly been my best friend.

To the future Dr. Bernadette Castillo, three words started our relationship: Faith, Hope and Love! Oh, the days of narratives and graduation ceremonies to great parties and walks with Lucy. You are the smart one, crazy for joining me on this journey, but brilliant in what you bring to the field of education. I am forever thankful for your trust in us. You are my biggest supporter and I thank you from the deepest part of my soul. I am proud of the work that you do and look forward to watching you walk across that stage. You make our community proud. I love you.

And finally, I want to acknowledge la Familia Martinez, ¡No es la única pero si la mejor! From the Val-Verde Flea Market to the University, Mom and Dad, you are the hardest working people I know. Your words, “do what you have to do,” kept me moving forward. My brothers and sisters: Jr, David, Debbie, Anna, Lidia, I hope you know your support means the world to me. I took this path to help build a better future for Trae, Alyssa, Ryan, Veronica, David, Eric, Danyella, Nicolas and Briana. Your love and prayers were felt all these years. I hope I made you all proud.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

President Obama argued that increasing the number of educated citizens within the United States is important to maintain global competitiveness for the nation's economy (2014). Additionally, Carnevale and Rose (2011) reported that the United States needs an additional 20 million postsecondary-educated workers by 2025, requiring 15 million individuals to earn their bachelor's degrees in order to compete in the global market. Bachelor's degree recipients include not only native students but also transfer students. Native students are undergraduates who begin their education at the place where they complete it (Adelman, 2006). Transfer students are those who did not originally begin their postsecondary studies at the university where they are currently enrolled (Tinto, 1993). While bachelor's degree recipients are typically assumed to be native students, the ability of transfer students to contribute towards this socioeconomic need is often overlooked (McGlynn, 2013a). Transfer students represent a growing contingent within the larger student population in postsecondary institutions due to an increased emphasis in higher education enrollment and degree attainment for transfer students (Hagedorn, 2006; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013; Shapiro et al., 2013). There is much progress to be made on degree completion if the United States is to reach its goal by 2025; transfer students help fill this need and are an essential part of the equation.

Students from community colleges are the largest population of transfer students (Carnevale & Rose, 2011). The community colleges play a unique role in providing access to underserved students. Community colleges are a gateway to the baccalaureate for an increasing number of students, especially for students of color and other underrepresented groups, such as first-generation college and low-income students (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009a; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Handel & Williams, 2012; Laanan, 2007; Melguizo, 2007). These underserved students

have already faced difficult circumstances but continue to use community colleges as a vehicle towards earning a bachelor's degree.

Unfortunately, not all students who transfer to four-year institutions achieve a bachelor's degree. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that students who started their college careers at community colleges had a bachelor's degree completion rate of 16.2%, while students who started at four-year public institutions had a completion rate of 62.8% (Shapiro et al., 2013; Shapiro, Dundar, Yuan, Harrell, & Wakhungu, 2014). The disparity in types of degrees, based on where students initiated their postsecondary education, perpetuates the stratification of opportunities to underrepresented communities where low-income and students of color are marginalized (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2013). Although there are many underserved students enrolled in community colleges, it is not sufficient that they gain access to four-year institutions; they must complete their bachelor's degree in order to change the stratification of opportunity (Carnevale & Rose, 2011). However, what is less clear in the existing discourse is how to better serve transfer students, including underserved students, to persist while enrolled at the bachelor's degree-granting institution. Thus, it is important to understand the experiences of these students post-transfer.

Although there are more transfer students enrolled in institutions of higher education than before (Handel & Williams, 2012; Normyle, 2014), very little research has been done on the persistence of transfer students at the receiving institution. The persistence literature focuses on native students and overlooks transfer students who move from one institution to another or many (Tuttle & Musoba, 2013). Institutions do not do an adequate job of tracking transfer student movement, nor are transfer students necessarily identified at their new institution after matriculation (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). The traditional path for transfer students to attend

community college and then a four-year institution is one of many ways to transfer (Adelman, 2006). The literature regarding four-year to four-year transfer is scarce but indicates that the reasons for transfers tend to be the same as those among two-year to four-year transfers (Appendix A). Research also shows that students might have chosen to attend the first university for financial reasons or perceived academic fit (Li, 2010). The reasons students transfer might affect their overall outcomes and experiences at the receiving institution. Thus, an important question is raised: how do undergraduate transfer students with previous experiences at postsecondary institutions transfer and persist at the new institution?

Regardless of the reasons for movement between institutions, there is a need to understand the transfer student population because of the growing number of students who take nontraditional paths of enrolling in and graduating from different institutions. Policies developed for traditional-age students and those who matriculate at the university immediately following high school graduation do not take into account the academic and life challenges transfer students face (Fann, 2013). As transfer students have already persisted and achieved moving to another institution, it is crucial to understand their post-transfer experiences so that institutional policies and practices can be put in place to help them persist towards degree completion.

Many studies examined the barriers to transfer, the ways to mitigate those transfer processes, and the inequitable gaps of who transfers to a four-year institution (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008). While all these avenues of research add to the discourse on the pre-transfer experience, my study picked up where other studies left off and offered an understanding of the post-transfer experience of underserved transfer students.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of transfer students after they enrolled at the new institution when existing in a native student paradigm, meaning in an environment normed on native students who began at the institution (Handel, 2012; Laanan, 2007; Tinto, 1993). The findings from this study provided insight into how institutions can respond to the unique needs of transfer students. The research questions that guided this study were:

- What are the post-transfer experiences of underserved transfer students related to transitioning?
 - What challenges do underserved transfer students encounter?
 - What strategies do underserved transfer students utilize to mitigate those challenges?

Significance

There are several important reasons for studying the post-transfer experiences in order to understand what contributes to persistence of transfer students at the receiving institution. In general, universities proclaim that one of their goals is to help prepare individuals to contribute to society as educated leaders (Altbach, Gumport, & Johnstone, 2001). However, if universities fail to understand the nuanced needs of their undergraduate transfer students, they are remiss to not see the entire picture.

Second, understanding the post-transfer experience of students can help universities create policies and programs that might help students persist toward degree completion, especially for underserved students. Knowing what transfer students need as well as what resources they draw upon is an important and understudied aspect of the espoused goal of

increasing degree attainment for all students, including those who transfer. In answering these questions qualitatively, a deeper understanding of the post-transfer experiences of transfer students can offer a way for the university to better assist transfer students' adjustment and address any difficulty in the students' persistence at the new institution.

Third, there is an increase in federal initiatives, state policies, and programs to promote degree completion of students in higher education (Complete College America, 2011). Increasing use of student retention as a performance indicator for higher education is an important benchmark in assessing the number of students who actually earned degrees in a timely manner (Porter, 1999; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). Thus, states are beginning to use student persistence and graduation rates as performance indicators for both institution accountability and budgeting (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Zhu, 2005).

Finally, understanding the post-transfer experience of transfer students can inform and influence university administrators' decisions about where to place financial resources to support students. The results of this study are beneficial to individuals who work with transfer students, such as student affairs professionals, because university processes set up for native students may not be as beneficial to transfer students. The needs of transfer students are overlooked by policies and practices created to help native students navigate the university.

Summary

There is a growing number of transfer students in higher education institutions and a lack of information on what happens to them once they arrive at the receiving institution. Transfer students are part of the postsecondary community, and it is in the best interest of higher education administrators to better understand the experiences, aspirations, and academic outcomes of transfer students, especially when held accountable for metrics like degree

completion of different types of students (Cheslock, 2005). Institutions typically track first-time freshman students and may not track transfer students post-transfer (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Despite transfer being an increasing reality for many students, transfer students face persistence and retention issues that are incongruent with those of native students. By examining transfer students' experiences at the senior institution, institutions can better understand how focusing solely on native students can be detrimental and exclusionary to some students.

Definitions

This section provides definitions for key terminology used in the context of this study.

- **Lateral transfer** is when a student transferred from one institution to another that is of the same type, such as from one community college to another or from one four-year to another four-year institution.
- **Native student paradigm** is a model where all thinking, perceptions, and attitudes have native students as the central focus (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2011).
- **Receiving institution** is the institution that the transfer student moved to and is used interchangeably with senior institution.
- **Sending institution** is the institution that students came from.
- **Senior institution** is associated with vertical transfer but is also used interchangeably with receiving institution.
- **Swirling** is the way in which students engage in multiple patterns of attendance, moving between four-year and two-year schools, and between public and private institutions (Clemetsen, Furbeck, & Moore, 2013)
- **Vertical transfer** is when a student transferred from a two-year institution to a four-year institution.

In the next chapter, I review the literature related to transfer students as it pertains to their transfer experience toward persistence. Chapter 3 outlines my research methods and design for a holistic case study, as well as other components of my methodology. Chapter 4 follows with findings of the study. The dissertation concludes with Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings, the implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter 1, I outlined the problem that is the focus of my dissertation. Transfer students are part of the undergraduate student population that enter and exist in the native student paradigm when they arrive at the receiving institution (Laanan et al., 2011). Yet, the university assumes that the challenges transfer students face can be addressed with the same policies and practices that are in place for native students (Lazarowicz, 2015). In order to understand the current issues of transfer students, it was necessary to examine the literature currently in the discourse of higher education. What follows is a discussion of the conceptual framework I incorporated to examine this problem. I argue that the post-transfer experience of students is best understood utilizing Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, modified to include the native student paradigm.

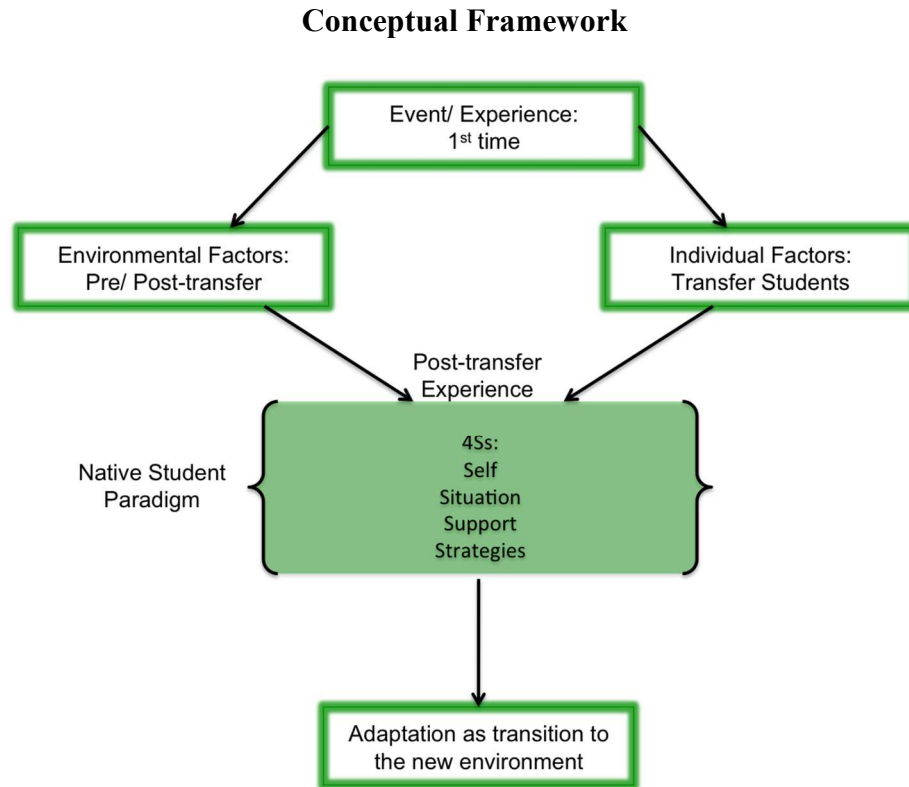


Figure 1: Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Model

This study focused on experiences of transfer students after they transitioned into a four-year university. I anticipated their experiences to be unique to those of native students, due to the fact that they had previously attended another postsecondary institution. Using Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, specifically the 4Ss of self, situation, support, and strategies, was most useful to understand the transfer student experience because of the transition from one postsecondary context to another. In this section, I describe the theories that most frequently have been used to study persistence among students. I then explain Schlossberg's model for analyzing human adaptation to the new environment and conclude the chapter with the 4Ss as a way to tie the study together.

Theories of the Student Experience

A variety of theories are used to understand the experiences of undergraduate students in higher education. Some of the seminal work most commonly used in studying college student experiences are Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, Metzner and Bean's (1987) model of nontraditional student undergraduate attrition, and Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora and Hengstler's (1992) integrated model of student persistence. I briefly review each below.

Tinto's (1975) longitudinal and interactional model focused on student engagement or involvement in the learning communities in postsecondary institutions and is used widely to study students in higher education. Tinto offered insight into the social and academic integration of students as well as the shared responsibility between the institution and students. However, scholars criticized Tinto's theory because the onus of responsibility was placed on the student and not the institution (Melguizo, 2011). Another critique was that the student sample from the 1970s was not representative of the diversity in student demographics, such as the growing

number of minority students attending postsecondary institutions today (Braxton, 2000; Melguizo, 2011).

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory focused on students' involvement on campus as an indicator of being more devoted to the academic experience. It emphasized traditional students who had time to become part of the university culture. This theory did not take into account that transfer students who came with previous institutional experiences may have had different ways of expressing their devotion to the academic experience (Cox & Ebbers, 2010). For example, transfer students might have chosen to spend their time in other ways that worked best for their work and/or family commitments, or they focused solely on finishing their degree and did not get involved in campus activities.

Metzner and Bean's (1987) model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition took into account commuters and part-time freshmen. Their model argued that students left the institution for academic reasons as well as a lack of commitment to the institution. Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) proposed that a more comprehensive model was needed and therefore used Tinto's (1975) student integration model combined with Metzner and Bean's (1987) student attrition model to form a more comprehensive model. Again, while these models all contributed to a greater understanding of students' experiences, the element of transition between institutions was missing.

Although these theories were helpful in describing the experiences of some students, they did not focus on transfer students, nor did they necessarily examine students transitioning from one higher education setting to another. I proposed to use Schlossberg's (1981, 1984) transition theory because it helped me to understand and examine the transition experiences of transfer students.

Framework: Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's (1981, 1984) transition theory derived from her model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. All students who began their postsecondary education went through a transition. Schlossberg (1981) postulated three major sets of factors that influenced adaptation to transition: (1) the characteristics of the particular transition; (2) the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments; and (3) the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. According to Schlossberg (1981), all three sets of factors interacted to produce the outcome: adaptation or failure to adapt. I used this theory because it provided actionable steps for supporting the transition of transfer students and their persistence at the receiving institution. Anderson et al. (2012) and Goodman et al. (2006) built on the model through the use of the 4S system: situation, self, support, and strategies. These 4Ss were the resources and assets that individuals used to transition towards adaptation. I explain how I used the 4Ss at the end of this literature review. While I engaged with this theory, I found it useful to logically shift the order in which it was presented in Schlossberg's theory. I describe each of these particular factors as it pertained to transfer students in what I argued was a native student paradigm (Laanan et al., 2011).

In a native student paradigm, first-year students started at the institution and were embraced with the assumptions that they were first-year, native, traditional, and residential. Although some schools had programs for transfer students, it was on a smaller scale (Quaye & Harper, 2015). The institutional environment was set up with models and practices intentionally designed for native students. A problem surfaced when transfer students who were new to the receiving institution without being new to postsecondary education were supposed to fit into supports that were already in place but that were not designed specifically with them in mind.

The transfer student experience at their first institution influenced how they adapted as a first-time student at the new institution (Quaye & Harper, 2015). I began to question how transfer students persisted within a native student paradigm, what challenges they faced, and what strategies they used to overcome those challenges.

Characteristics of the Particular Transition: First-Year Experience

Schlossberg (1981) described a trigger as a transition that an individual experiences. For this study, I argued that the trigger was the student's transfer to a new institution. Although the transfer student already had a first-year experience elsewhere, they were in essence having another "first-year" experience. Schlossberg (1981) emphasized that the perception of the transition was the way the individual experienced the event. I utilized the concept of perception as an indicator of how a transfer student would perceive the new transition to a new institution. I anticipated that some transfer students had certain expectations of their receiving institution, and knowing transfer student perceptions and expectations when they arrived to the institution helps inform policies and programs and better supports students' transitions.

Native student paradigm. Living in a native student paradigm is part of the transition that transfer students have to additionally manage upon their transfer. University policies and programs were built around native students where "most institutions pay far more attention to new first-time first-year than transfer students" (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014, p. 136). When 41% of students completing degrees at four-year institutions are transfer students, it is important to understand transfer students' experiences (Baker, 2014). Understanding student success also includes the experiences of transfer students.

In various studies, transfer students were compared to native students (Ishitani, 2008; Porter, 1999). Again, this not-so-subtle measure puts native students as the primary or the

standard. Scholars often focused on who had higher degree completion rates or compared grade point averages after the first year (Johnson, 2005; Porter, 1999; Townsend, Carr, & Scholes, 2003). Some studies found native students performing better in these areas than transfer students, but there were biases that needed close attention. For example, native students gained social capital from being at the institution from the initial days they stepped on to campus (Laanan et al., 2011). There were institutional processes and practices that became second nature to native students. These were anything from knowing how to maneuver the library system to knowing how to get around campus via the bus system. Native students were around the culture and became comfortable within the institutional structures. Depending on the postsecondary institution that transfer students first attended, they may or may not have been told what to expect about the services they would receive at the senior or receiving institution (Moser, 2013). When it came to academic preparedness, there were programs institutionally set in place for native students to become accustomed to and to learn how to do university-level work. For example, at some universities, living on campus was a requirement of freshman students, giving them the opportunity to develop a social network of peers and a sense of community and agency (Renn & Reason, 2013). The benefits native students have might not be as prevalent for transfer students. Transfer students based their perceptions on their previous academic experience, which may have been quite different from what they found in their new institution. Their situation was different from that of native students because they may not have had the opportunity to live on campus, and they did not experience the full extent of the welcoming events and informational communications available for native first-year students (Handel, 2012; Renn & Reason, 2013); therefore, they had to find other ways to build the social capital that was critical to their persistence.

Institutions dedicate many resources to help undergraduates persist in degree completion (Renn & Reason, 2013). The first year of college is considered a precarious time, and institutions have made great efforts to intervene at this critical period to increase persistence (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013). Student services such as orientation, advising, and first-year programs focus on the native student experience (Renn & Reason, 2013). Additionally, student success programs emphasize first-year transition students and typically do not include transfer students attending the university for the first time. Transfer students are new to the institution and may or may not have had the same experience or needs as native students. Understanding the experience of transfer students toward persistence can give universities a greater perspective on how to utilize resources.

An embedded assumption of the persistence literature clumps together transfer and native students. Failing to disaggregate the data between these two distinct student populations ignored the fact that students may persist and experience the institution differently based on previous history. Quantitative research on transfer students tended to focus on graduation rates and time to degree completion (Allen, Robbins, Casillas, & Oh, 2008; Blecher, 2006; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Ishitani, 2008) more than on the transfer student experience itself at the receiving institution. When universities look at persistence, they focus on the cohort of students entering as freshmen. To provide better experiences for native students, the university provides support services to help them with the transition to the university; they approach enrollment management practices with traditional students in mind (Handel, 2012). While it was problematic to look at all freshmen and have the same expectation regardless of their background, it was even more troublesome to examine transfer student persistence with the same lens as that of native students (Hagedorn, 2006).

Quantitative studies were typically normed on a native student paradigm. For instance, six years is now the standard for tracking graduation rates; if the student achieved a bachelor's degree in that time frame, transfer student persistence was not deemed problematic. However, a problem with the focus on the six-year graduation rate when examining transfer students is that it does not take into account that these students had been attending another institution prior to the receiving institution, and therefore, their time clock had already begun.

In this section, I described the particular transition of transfer as the focus of this study. I also argued how transfer students entered and existed within a native student paradigm. Understanding how transfer students exist and persist within the native student paradigm was the essence of my study. Using Schlossberg's theory, I now describe the characteristics of transfer students and the environments and my interpretation of adaptation to the new environment.

Characteristics of Individuals Experiencing Transition: Transfer Students

While all students go through a transition, the individuals experiencing the transition that I focused on were transfer students. In essence, these students had another first-year college experience after arriving at the receiving institution. Traditionally, in empirical research, most students started at community college and then transferred to another institution in order to obtain a baccalaureate degree; however, transfer student patterns indicated that more students were attending multiple institutions before arriving at the senior institution (Handel, 2013). Students attended a postsecondary institution and may have needed academic remediation. They tended to come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Dowd et al., 2008; Handel, 2009; Handel & Williams, 2012). How did they persist with all these barriers already stacked against them? There were several factors that scholars identified that influenced persistence. I organized these factors into three groups: sociodemographic factors, pre-transfer factors, and pull factors.

Sociodemographic factors. The first factor was sociodemographic information, including race, gender, age, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status. The racial and ethnic distribution of transfer students was evident throughout most of the literature on demographic statistics. Crisp and Nunez's (2014) study on the racial transfer gap discussed the need to disaggregate data and compare White alongside underrepresented minority transfer students (URMs). Niu and Tienda's (2013) study pointed to the socioeconomic status (SES) differentiation among transfer students. In their study, community college transfer students attended college orientation in high school. They also noted that the individuals with academic preparation came from a higher SES family background. Individuals with low socioeconomic status had lower transfer rates because they considered it a financial challenge to move, which was often required to attend a four-year institution (Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Moodie, 2007). A majority of studies addressed the intersection of community college and minority students and showed that underrepresented students enrolled in community college at an overly represented rate. For example, 51% of Latino students were more likely to begin their postsecondary education at community colleges than at four-year institutions (Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013).

A student's age was a characteristic that influenced persistence. More specifically, Schlossberg (1981) argued that it was the life stage of an individual that impacted his or her transition. For example, there was a difference between a traditional-age student (18-22 years of age) who attended a community college for two years then transferred to a four-year institution and an older student with other life experiences who transferred to a four-year institution. These two groups of students had different expectations of the receiving university and had different experiences at the community college that influenced their transition in the university. Although

what was salient for one transfer student differed for another, particular patterns were likely to emerge. My study sought to learn the adaptive patterns of transfer students and the factors that influenced the transition experience.

Pre-transfer factors. The pre-transfer factors that influenced persistence included but were not limited to high school curriculum, remediation courses taken, academic preparation, grade point average (GPA), and associate degree completion (Crisp & Nora, 2010). Wang's (2009) study of community college students who transferred to four-year universities indicated that those students with strong high school academics and curriculum rigor had a better chance of attaining their bachelor's degree; conversely, remedial math had a negative effect on persistence.

As some might expect, higher GPA was associated with higher persistence (Ishitani, 2008; Wang, 2009). One study contended, "The very fact that community college GPA is the single best predictor of baccalaureate attainment and persistence brings attention to the defining role of the academic experience at community colleges in shaping community college transfers' long-term educational outcomes" (Wang, 2009, p. 583). Community college students who completed an associate degree were more likely to attain a bachelor's degree (Tuttle & Musoba, 2013; Zhu, 2005). While obtaining an associate degree was not a requirement of transferring, it is important to note that students who did achieve this goal carried momentum with them into the receiving institution after they transferred.

Pull factors. According to NCES, 81% of all community college students indicated they wanted to get a bachelor's degree (Fann, 2013; Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013), but only 25-35% of those students ended up transferring. Why is that? What pulled them away or interrupted the path to achieve this first step in transferring? The third group of individual factors that affected

persistence consisted of pull factors such as work, family, dependency status, enrollment status, and financial aid. Pull factors were defined by Fann (2013) as those factors that pulled the student away from the focus of school.

As more students entered higher education and found ways to pay for this education, they took on more employment. This distracted them from making postsecondary education the primary focus. Research indicated that students persisted at higher rates when they maintained full-time student status (Tinto, 1993; Tuttle & Musoba, 2013). Financial considerations also helped students make decisions about where they attended and persisted (Tinto, 1993). While these individual factors were identified, what was important to my study was how these factors of persistence were determined after the students transferred and how they might have affected the student experience post-transfer.

Characteristics of the Pre- and Post-Transition Environments

Schlossberg (1981) described the characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environments as internal support systems, institutional supports, and physical setting. I discussed the pre- and post-transition environment as related to transfer students. When examining factors that impacted student persistence, understanding how students interacted with their previous institution influenced how they interacted with their new context, including if they persisted or how well they persisted. Much of the pre-transfer literature discussed pre-college factors (Adelman, 2006; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004) and emphasized that it was important to understand that students' experiences prior to attending their new institution had an impact on transition and persistence (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006; Crisp & Nunez, 2014). It was critical for both students and researchers to acknowledge

that the pre-transfer experience was a determinant to students' successful adaptation to their transfer transition.

Pre-Transition Environment: Sending Institution.

Community colleges. Transferring from one postsecondary institution to another was a pathway for millions of students (Handel, 2013). Historically, with the creation of junior or community colleges, an alternative pathway to a four-year university came into existence, and a focus of community colleges had been on helping students to transfer (Zhu, 2005). Community colleges focused on providing access to higher education for the general public. In addition to this goal, community colleges helped those who wanted to transfer to a bachelor's degree-granting institution. Transfer students were a vital part of the higher education landscape. Shapiro et al. (2013) concluded that 45% of students who completed bachelor's degrees in 2011-2012 previously enrolled in community college. This revealing number indicated the important role that community college transfer students played in the future of postsecondary institutions.

There were numerous factors why students enrolled in community colleges. Community colleges or junior colleges were stepping stones to the four-year university. Some students wanted to obtain the necessary requirements to transfer to a bachelor's degree-granting institution. Community colleges offered general education courses, associate degrees, professional development, or continued education courses (Tinto, 1993). Some individuals entered to gain additional work skills.

The students' experiences at the prior institution were proven to influence future student successes. Laanan, Storobin, and Eggleston (2011) wrote about the impact of community college students' pre-institution experiences in relation to their persistence at the senior institution. A main factor in this experience was the role faculty played in the pre-transition environment

(Rendon, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Barnett's (2011) study showed that "validation by faculty significantly predicted students' sense of academic integration and intent to persist in college" (p. 215).

Institutional relationships and policies. Important studies provided insight into what community colleges did to improve the transfer process (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Laanan et al., 2011; Li, 2010; Whitfield, 2005), examined how these colleges better supported their students (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Dowd et al., 2006; Miller, 2013), and measured student persistence in their goals to transfer (Adelman, 2006; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Gilroy, 2013). All these aspects that affected transfer students connected to the internal and institutional supports at both the sending and the receiving institution.

Many studies discussed the policies that involved transferring from one institution to the next (Anderson et al., 2006; Bers, 2013). The majority of these policies focused on transferring from the community college to the four-year institution. Articulation agreements were binding agreements between a two-year and four-year institution that outlined how specific courses and letter grades completed at the community college transferred to the university. This was a way to address the barrier of access to a senior institution. Articulation agreements allowed for postsecondary leaders to create pathways in which students took courses at the community college that facilitated a smoother entrance into the senior institution. Articulation agreements helped students follow more defined curricula at the community college; however, they were not in place at all institutions. Policy makers in many states have pushed for articulation agreements to allow more seamless access to four-year institutions. However, Anderson et al. (2006) found that there were no differences in transfer rates between states with or without transfer articulation agreements.

Policies and practices regarding which credits transferred were helpful, but they did not necessarily identify which credits, if any, would be counted toward any specific degree program. They also did not automatically factor in the cumulative grade point average, which did not help a student move more quickly towards degree completion. Also, depending on institutional policies, transfer students may not have had access to certain college programs right away, like upper degree programs. Transfer students may have enrolled with the sufficient number of credit hours to be placed in upper division courses; however, they may not have been eligible to enter into certain programs because they did not have the required courses that needed to be taken at the senior institution.

Post-Transition Environment: Receiving Institution

When examining the post-transfer context of students, the senior institution had support systems in place to ensure transfer students persisted. Although many transfer studies examined the support systems students had outside of the institution (Adelman, 2006; Barnett, 2011), which coincided with Schlossberg's (1981) support systems of family and friends, my study focused on the experiences that students felt while at the institution. I wanted to know whether or not the transfer students' experiences included individuals, programs, or services associated with the receiving institution as a way to help them with the transition process. Schlossberg (1981) also looked at the physical setting that students experienced, which fell under the auspices of factors, as it was something that impacted persistence.

Several reports pointed to the success of transfer students at senior institutions; however, data also indicated that 40% of two-year to four-year transfer students did not graduate in four years (Shapiro et al., 2013). Cheslock (2005) noted, "The percentage of an institution's incoming class that is transfer students depends on the institution's selectivity level, institutional type,

attrition rate, number of majors, financial resources, tuition level, proximity to potential transfer students and direct attendees, and convenience for commuting students” (p. 256). These multiple factors influenced the transfer student experience.

An example of how the type of institution influenced the transfer experience is elite universities. There is a body of literature that addresses the access of community college students to elite education. Elite educational institutions were missing out on “late bloomers” (Cheslock, 2005; Dowd et al., 2008) because these were students who started at a community college and may have needed extra time to become focused on their educational endeavors.

Although this body of literature was important, what was more beneficial to this study was the fact that about 40% of all transfers nationwide transferred to public research institutions (Adelman, 2006). Public institutions were more likely to enroll in-state students and were more likely to face pressure from state governments to act in response to state needs (Cheslock, 2005).

Role of institution in persistence. I argue that it is not only the responsibility of the higher education system to get transfer students in but to get them through to obtain a degree. Understanding that transfer students have different experiences from native students, it is imperative that universities utilize transfer student capital (Laanan et al., 2011). When transfer students have this capital, they are more able to navigate the institutional processes.

The positive association between college involvement and baccalaureate attainment lends empirical evidence to the notion that more involved community college transfer students are likely to have more gains academically from the educational experience at their new home institutions. Institutional policies and student affairs practices should aim at developing programs and activities that involve more students, especially community college transfer students who arrive in the new college environment later than their native counterpart. (Wang, 2009, p. 584)

Existing research focused on the pathways providing access to public research institutions. However, there remains a need for additional research focused on the college experiences and academic learning that provides a greater understanding of the transfer student experience.

An institution's mission influences the experiences of transfer students to persistence. Strauss and Volkwein (2004) wrote, "Retention research on four-year institutions cannot automatically be generalized to community colleges" (p. 204), and neither can the reverse. This is because institutional missions are different and therefore, the organizations' intentions are not the same. The transfer student research focused mostly on the transfer student process and factors that were highly influential in persistence, not on the role the university has in creating an environment to help transfer students to succeed.

Challenges to persistence. Transfer students still persevered despite the challenges to transfer and the challenges they faced throughout their tenure at the receiving institution. Below I describe three major themes found in the literature as challenges to persistence: climate, academics and financial aid.

Climate. Climate was defined as "the overall ethos or atmosphere for a college campus mediated by the extent individuals feel a sense of safety, belonging, engagement within the environment, and value as members of a community" (Renn & Patton, 2011, p. 248). Climate was a product of the environment and individuals' interactions in and with it. However, the research showed multiple ways the institution made the climate better for transfer student when they created a receiving culture, provided support services, and understood how to engage transfer students.

Several studies commented on the lack of services provided to transfer students or that transfer students were not aware of the resources available to them (Quaye & Harper, 2015).

Empirical research has identified the need for better transfer student orientation, advising, and student services. The challenges for transfer students tended to be more related to the added responsibilities that they faced such as family obligations, greater workload, and less financial support. Herrera and Jain (2013) wrote about the transfer receptive culture and identified five ways to improve the culture:

1. Establish the transfer of students as a high institutional priority
2. Provide outreach and resources for transfer students
3. Offer financial and academic support
4. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring
5. Create an appropriate framework to further scholarship on transfer students

Although the researchers focused on pre-transfer, the first two points emphasized the importance of making students feel welcomed prior to stepping onto campus, which was the focus of their paper. They did not discuss the post-transfer points. My study helped fill this gap in this research by examining the post-transfer experience.

Engagement was considered a persistence factor (Astin, 1984; Blecher, 2006; Wang, 2009) and was defined as more than student involvement; engagement was an approach to providing learning opportunities for students (Quaye & Harper, 2015). There were differences in experiences and satisfaction between students who were integrated into the student body of the receiving institution and the individuals who were not. For example, first-time first-year students experienced orientation activities at the start of the academic year, were inundated with university culture and lore, and quickly took ownership of their university (Renn & Reason, 2013). While universities have transfer student orientation, they are abridged versions where the exposure to university culture is limited. The inundation received by first-time first-year students

creates a different understanding of the institution and more opportunities for students to be engaged. To discuss student engagement, it is important to distinguish the terms *integration* and *engagement*. Although there are nuances and some scholars might use them interchangeably, students engage when universities integrate them into the university (Hagedorn, 2006; Miller, 2013). Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) found, using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) benchmarks, that transfer students were less engaged than the average native student. NSSE measures of students' efforts, campus service use, and faculty engagement were proxies for both integration and engagement (Wood & Palmer, 2013). However, typical nontraditional-age students struggled with integration because they had to work, missed the time to connect to other students their first year, and had little interest in socializing and just were focused on getting their degree (Miller, 2013).

Academics. Research reported that there were many challenges transfer students faced when it came to academics. They struggled with the coursework and their GPA dropped or they may have not been advised well and had credit issues. In the following section, I discuss some aspects related to academics that I believe institutions could address via policies or practices that might affect the post-transfer experience of students in my study.

Transfer shock was when transfer students started taking courses at the university and their GPA dropped from what it was at their previous institution (Laanan, 2007). Kirk-Kuwaye and Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) compared lateral and vertical transfers during the students' first semester. Their study found that an "overall emerging pattern was that students' expectations based on their previous experiences in higher education accounted for the level of 'shock' when transferring" (p. 23). The drop in GPA was expected as it was a new place; however, depending

on the field of study, students ended up in a transfer coma where they could not get out of shock (Whitfield, 2005) and could not adjust to the academic demands of the receiving institution.

Academic advising was critical for all students because minimizing time to degree was imperative, considering the increasing cost of higher education; it was in the students' best interest to be most efficient and to know what courses were necessary for degree completion. Institutions should want to get people through in a timely fashion. Inefficiency occurred when transfer credits were not aligned with a degree plan. Students risked repeating courses that caused delays and increased costs for students (Li, 2010). Students also transferred courses that did not go into any specific degree program (Miller, 2013). However, due to the native student paradigm, transfer students' academic needs were overlooked. As transfer students, they came in with different advising needs and opportunities. They had different career goals than native students, requiring specialized advising.

Financial aid. One of the biggest challenges to all students was the cost of higher education. While this was an issue for all college students, it continued to be a challenge especially for transfer students. In this section I discuss the process and receipt of financial aid for transfer students.

Transfer students were not aware that they had to apply for financial aid to a new institution without knowing their admission status (Miller, 2013; Tuttle & Musoba, 2013). The timing of the receipt of the application influenced the amount of financial resources the university had to distribute. Not applying for financial aid decreased persistence rates (Tuttle & Musoba, 2013). While transfer students had grants to cover their community college costs, they were not aware of the extra-incurred costs at a four-year university. Basically, students had to relearn the financial system (Miller, 2013). Students often chose to enroll part-time at the

university to be able to pay for costs (Crisp & Nora, 2010), which was problematic because research found that being enrolled part-time decreased persistence rates (Handel, 2009; Tuttle & Musoba, 2013).

Another extension of the native student-focused paradigm was that there were typically not as many scholarships for transfer students as there were for native students (Tuttle & Musoba, 2013). Scholarship deadlines were not available at the sending institution, and transfer students also missed these opportunities, especially in their first year at the receiving institution. Miller (2013) found in her study that transfer students were more likely to take out loans, while others have written about debt aversion (Crisp & Nora, 2010). In a 2013 study, Tuttle and Musoba looked at transfer students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) who transferred with an associate degree. According to Tuttle and Musoba (2013), transfer students who obtained associate degrees knew to take out loans because they were closer to finishing and were willing to incur debt, meaning they were financially literate and aware of the investment in their future. They also found that the transfer students in their study tended to have lower incomes than the average native student. While their study may have been at an HSI where 65% of those sampled made less than \$25,000 annually, the fact remained that a majority of transfer students tended to be from low socioeconomic status families.

Adaptation as Transition to the New Environment

As explained by Schlossberg (1981), the characteristics of the transition, the individual, and the environments culminated in an outcome of adaptation. For the purposes of this study, I interpret adaptation as transition to the new environment and apply it to the transfer student experience. I question whether we know if transfer students persisted well or if they were barely getting by. Based on the known scholarship, I argue that we have not thoroughly examined the

presumed difference between the two. Schlossberg's (1981) theorized adaptation was dependent on the "balance of individual's resources and deficits" and the "differences in pre- and post-transition environments" (p. 5). Universities understanding transfer students' resources and deficits at the receiving institution, as well as the institution examining its resources, can increase the retention of transfer students.

In many studies that examine the onus of responsibility for student success, the terms *persistence* and *retention* were mistakenly used interchangeably. "Persistence can be framed as the outcome of individual student behavior, whereas retention is the outcome of institutional efforts and action" (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009, p. 26). Studying persistence through retention rates was problematic because retention rates did not necessarily track if students were native or transfers. Once transfer students enrolled at the senior institution, universities were not sure what helped them persist. Reason stated, "The goal of persistence research must be to explore students within the multiple concentric environments they inhabit, recognizing that different students engage differently within those environments" (2009, p. 676). In other words, when examining the persistence factors of transfer students, institutions should not assume that they were the same factors as for native students.

In general, the persistence discourse pointed to ways that students continue to attend the university year after year to achieve the goal of degree completion. Persistence can be measured in several ways. A student could persist from semester to semester, from year to year at a single institution, within a major, or within the university. Most persistence literature was focused on freshmen or native students and, on first term to second term, with minimal emphasis on persistence from year to year. My study focused on the transfer student experience post-transfer, not just continued attendance. Reason (2009) examined how institutional strategies

influenced/contributed to student persistence. He posited that institutions need to be more aware of research on the role that institutions played in creating student environments that encouraged student persistence. My study hoped to find some answers to how institutions could do that by understanding the transfer student experience.

The current literature on persistence of transfer students at the receiving institution had an overabundance of quantitative studies (Melguizo, 2011) and often compared transfer students to native students. Quantitative studies were helpful to some extent in studying large data sets and looking at factors that helped predict persistence. These studies indicated that certain factors hindered persistence for all students. However, when these factors were examined, the researchers frequently did not differentiate between native and transfer students. Failing to differentiate made it impossible to know if the policies and practices that were in place for both groups were different or similar and met the needs of transfer students. I wanted my study to help fill the gap by learning about the transfer student experience and how the characteristics of the transition, the individual, and the environment influenced their persistence.

Using the 4Ss: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies

My study focused on the experience after students made the transfer to the receiving institution. Schlossberg's (1981) theory allowed for understanding transfer student experiences, and the framework of the 4Ss provided a lens for examining the factors that influenced the transfer student transition to the receiving institution and their ability to successfully persist from one point to another. In her later work, Schlossberg and colleagues (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006) developed the 4Ss to represent how an individual processed the transition. These lenses were valuable in studying the experiences of transfer students.

The 4Ss referred to situation, self, support and strategies. Situation referred to how individuals assessed transition and the sense of control they had over what was happening. Self referred to the internal resources and personal characteristics that influenced coping with the transition. Support was the social network that offered positive support to transition. Strategies were the individual behaviors used to go through the transition. Each individual dealt with transfer differently, and how each person persisted was based on how they used the resources and assets available to them. Later in this document, I explain how I utilized this framework for my analysis and how the data further expounded this model.

Some scholars have used the 4Ss in studying different aspects of student persistence and adaptation. For example, Griffin and Gilbert (2015) utilized the 4Ss when studying institutional support structures for veterans. It was my hope that my research filled a gap in the transfer student literature of qualitative work by understanding the post-transfer experiences of transfer students. The challenges that these students identified were unique to their previous experiences and hopefully provided a framework from which institutions created structure to address those challenges. In identifying student strategies used to overcome these challenges, institutions can begin to replicate the environments that would facilitate greater success.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter, I provide the research design and approach of my proposed study. I wanted to understand the transition experience of transfer students at the receiving institution. After articulating why I chose a qualitative case study for my overall design, I describe the way I framed and collected data. Next, I discuss how I analyzed the data. I conclude by addressing issues of trustworthiness and my role as a researcher. Finally, I include the limitations of this study.

Research Design

This was a qualitative study, as I believed it was the most appropriate approach in answering this study's research questions, which were:

- What are the post-transfer experiences of underserved transfer students related to transitioning?
 - What challenges do underserved transfer students encounter?
 - What strategies do underserved transfer students utilize to mitigate those challenges?

Case Study Approach

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the factors that influenced transfer student experience at the receiving institution. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to know more about the meanings that transfer students made of their post-transfer experiences (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). I used an exploratory, holistic case study because it provided “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). I defined exploratory as an investigation into the phenomenon of the transfer student experience at the receiving institution. I saw this as a holistic case study as

I looked at the various factors that contributed to the post-transfer experience of students, with a special interest in aspects of the institution. This was also a bounded system because my unit of analysis was transfer students' experiences at one receiving institution (Merriam, 2009). In using a case study, I was able to get a deeper understanding of what transfer students found as challenges and ways that they addressed those challenges within the context of the institution. I hoped that this approach would illuminate their experiences and that institutions would gain a deeper understanding of transfer students to better support them after transfer.

In this study, I positioned myself as a constructivist/pragmatist researcher. I believe that reality is socially constructed, and as such, I wanted to understand the lived realities of transfer students (Merriam, 2009). Transfer students entered into a native student paradigm at the university and their experiences are their reality. As a pragmatist, I was interested in finding practical solutions to this problem by conducting my research with appropriate methods (Patton, 2002). As I continued with my research, I continued to have a research-to-practice mindset that would provide universities with an opportunity to make a more welcoming environment for transfer students.

Research Site and Location

This exploratory case study took place at Liberty State University (pseudonym), a large, public, Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest. This university was one of over a dozen public universities in a state that also had over two dozen community colleges. At the case institution, there were over 35,000 undergraduate students, with approximately 7,000 freshmen enrolled every year; about 1,500 were transfer students. I chose a single institution because I wanted to get an in-depth understanding of the experiences of transfer students at research intensive institutions and recognized that context was always important in studying student

experiences (Stake, 2000). While this decision limited generalizability, it also allowed me to have a more holistic understanding of post-transfer experiences, including institutional factors, and resulted in lessons learned for similar institutions.

Sampling

The research sample for this study included transfer students who had been enrolled at the receiving institution for a minimum of one academic year, meaning both fall and spring semesters. Purposely selecting these students was necessary so that transfer students had time to experience the university. Having spent more time at the university, transfer students had more opportunity to make connections with university officials, faculty, and other individuals who affected their post-transfer experiences on campus and had more information to offer for the study (Patton, 2002). Participants shared their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes concerning their transfer student experience at the receiving institution.

Data Collection

In order to answer this study's research questions, I interviewed transfer students to understand their transfer experiences, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they enacted to overcome those challenges. Prior to the face-to-face interview, participants completed a consent form (Appendix B), which requested permission to audio record the interviews and to take notes during the interview (Glesne, 2011). Taking notes allowed me to stay engaged and keep myself focused on the interviewee. It also guided me to probe further on the open-ended questions (Glesne, 2011). I was able to reflect on these notes and write down my speculations of what was occurring (Creswell, 2009). At the conclusion of the interview I thanked the participants and had them sign that they received a \$10 Amazon gift card for their participation and time.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants for approximately 60 minutes. Semi-structured interviews allowed me as a researcher to ensure I had covered basic questions consistently with all participants while still exploring more points made by individual participants in their responses (Merriam, 2009). I was also able to ask additional questions in order to explore more of the student's particular experience. I utilized questions that were both targeted and open-ended, which I developed based on the literature reviewed and from what scholars noted as areas for further research related to the topic of this study. I also used my framework to design the protocol. All of the interviews were audio recorded. They were also transcribed so that I was able to dig deep into the data collected in order to gain a better understanding of the themes that emerged (Glesne, 2011). The notes and initial interviews provided rich data from which to continue analysis.

Before I began interviewing any participants, I conducted three pilot interviews with transfer students from other universities to test my protocol. I included their feedback to make the interview questions clearer and to elicit responses that allowed for participants to share their story. After conducting the pilot tests, I updated the interview protocol (Appendix C).

To prepare myself for background information, I examined university policies and documents regarding transfer students to help inform me of the university context. Document data were beneficial "because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing" (Patton, 2002, p. 294). I also reviewed the institutional website. These sources of information helped me gain an understanding of what the institution claimed it provided for transfer students in order to compare and contrast those claims to what the transfer students experienced. I spoke to 10 staff members who served in administrative roles at the university to gain a deeper understanding of

the context. These individuals interacted with transfer students in a variety of ways, including admission decisions, policies, and student success practices. I used these conversations as background information to gain an appreciation for the complexity of transfer student policies. I did not analyze these interviews nor were they part of my formal data collection.

I also reviewed the institutional services provided specifically to transfer students. I contacted the transfer admissions counselor to get an understanding of the entire process that a transfer student went through at the receiving institution. I also contacted the student services offices to learn about the services available to transfer students. Unfortunately, after several attempts to meet with an individual, from these offices, no meeting occurred. By talking to these individuals informally, I gained a better background understanding of the programs and services that were provided to transfer students by their receiving university.

Liberty State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study as exempt on Monday, February 1, 2016 (Appendix D). After receiving permission to begin my research, I contacted the university registrar's office at Liberty State University (LSU) and requested that they distribute an e-mail letter from me inviting all transfer students who met the criteria to participate in this study (Appendix E). The letter outlined the nature of my study and the criteria for participation, which were having been enrolled at the receiving institution for at least an academic year, be either a first-generation college student or Pell-eligible, and not be a student athlete. Finally, the letter invited interested students to click on the embedded link in the letter and to fill out an online profile questionnaire on Google Forms (see Appendix F). I used this as a tool to obtain a diverse group of transfer students. I wanted to get a mix of race/ethnicity and areas of study, as well as gender and age, if possible. The diversity of student profiles was important to get a representation of lived experiences. After the students filled out the survey, I

confirmed that they fit my criteria; if I selected them, I sent them an email with a link to select a date and time for an interview. Once they made their selection of a meeting time, I scheduled a room at the main university library and then sent a confirmation email to the student with the information of the location. I included that they would be compensated with an Amazon gift card if they chose to participate. I expected to identify and interview 10-15 individuals who fit the criteria of this study, which is not atypical for qualitative studies that often involved sampling a “small n” (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011, p. 156). Surprisingly, there were 149 students who expressed interest in the study by filling out the profile questionnaire. I invited close to 60 students to be interviewed who fit the criteria and ended up interviewing 27 transfer students. I rejected 39 individuals because they did not fulfill the requirements of the study. I notified the remaining 83 individuals who expressed interest in this study that I had acquired enough participants for the study.

Participants of Study

Table 3.1 Demographic Summary of Participants

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------|----|
| Interviews | 27 | Race/Ethnicity | |
| Female | 14 | Arab-American | 1 |
| Male | 13 | Asian | 2 |
| | | Black or African-American | 2 |
| Underserved markers | | Hispanic or Latino | 5 |
| First-generation college student only | 7 | Multiracial | 4 |
| Pell Grant-eligible only | 9 | White (Not Hispanic/Not Latino) | 12 |
| Both first-generation and Pell Grant-eligible | 11 | Member of race not listed above | 1 |

Participant Selection

This study focused on understanding the post-transfer experience of underserved transfer students. I defined underserved as first-generation college student and/or Pell-eligible, which I

used as a proxy for low-income status. I used these qualifiers because so much of the discourse around providing more access to education is focused on these individuals. I also used the requirement that the transfer student not be student athletes because their transfer and resources available to them are different. I also requested that students be at LSU for at least a year in order for them to have experiences at the university to discuss. Appendix G provides more complete information of participant demographics, pathways, colleges they are enrolled in, 1st generation college student status and Pell-eligibility status.

There were a few surprises in the sample of transfer students that I used for this study. First, 11 students were both first-generation and Pell-eligible; seven were first-generation and not Pell-eligible; nine were Pell-eligible but not first-generation. These were self-reported responses. During the interviews, I found that some students were not first-generation as their parent had received a college degree prior to or while the student was in college. Also, additional students mentioned that their parent had attended community college or trade school and/or had received an associate degree. There were students who were not Pell-eligible but had qualified in the past. However, it appeared that now that they were married, they were no longer eligible. Also, while none of my participants were student athletes, three students had been athletes at another institution. All but one of the transfer students had more than a year experience at LSU. Finally, an unexpected group of students fell into the sample: students who had been deferred admission to the university until the spring semester. These “deferred admit” students had met all the criteria but I had not anticipated that they would be marked as transfer students by the university. While technically they are not required to attend another postsecondary institution before matriculating at LSU, all of them did. Their experiences may have started differently as they

knew they had admission to the university, but they still had experiences that brought value to having been at another campus previous to LSU.

Biographical Descriptions

Below I provide a short biographical sketch of each of the participants. I indicate if they were first-generation college student or Pell-eligible and write about their path to Liberty State University. I include general pieces of information to provide a snapshot of these transfer students. Appendix G has a complete table with demographic information, criteria eligibility, pathway, and the college they are currently listed under. Pseudonyms were used for the student names, locations, and institutions.

KC is a 34-year-old white female and mother of one. She obtained her GED ten years after dropping out of high school. She is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. She began her higher education journey at her local community college, where she obtained three associate degrees and is now at LSU. KC is a social work major and will be graduating in May 2016; she will begin her master's degree in social work program in the summer. She is involved in a few student organizations.

Brandon is a 23-year-old white male. He is both first-generation and Pell-eligible. He is a deferred admit, and while he could have enrolled at LSU in the spring semester, he attended a community college for three semesters for financial savings. Brandon is enrolled in mechanical engineering and has taken advantage of the internships that the engineering center facilitated for him. He shared that he is not involved on campus and works with his family business when needed.

John is a 23-year-old Latino male. He is from Lima, Peru, but came to the United States at the age of eight. He is first-generation but not Pell-eligible. He attended his local community

college for three years and then transferred to LSU. He is a senior in supply chain management and got involved right away at LSU when he arrived, especially in the diversity programs in the College of Business.

Lauren is a 23-year-old African-American female. She is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. She attended a local community college and then attended a nearby four-year university for two semesters while also applying to LSU. She is majoring in human resource management. She has taken advantage of the global opportunities at LSU and has participated in two international study abroad experiences.

Jay is a 22-year-old biracial Asian/White male. He is first-generation and Pell-eligible. He attended his local community college for two years and then transferred to LSU into communication arts; he then internally transferred to the College of Business. He is a senior in marketing and referred to having a strong social network.

Patrick is a 24-year-old white male. He is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. He is a senior in communications. He was homeschooled by his father, a trained teacher. His mother has a degree in biblical studies. He is the seventh child of nine, all of whom were homeschooled. Patrick went to trade school and received an associate degree in general education. He came to LSU and joined the ROTC program, wanting to find a way to create structure. He struggled his first year, as he was diagnosed with appendicitis, which pushed back his enrollment in ROTC. He then had financial stressors. He had always been an LSU sports fan and immersed himself in the LSU community.

Ryan is a 22-year-old Iraqi male. He is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. His parents are educated. He is a deferred admit and was required to live on campus his first year. He attended an in-state university and then moved to LSU. Ryan is a junior in chemical physics. He

used the math learning center and the writing center but does not seem to have any social connections.

Deborah is a 22-year-old white married female. She is first-generation and Pell-eligible. She is a senior in social work. She is from the city where LSU is located and was raised on welfare and government housing. Deborah attended an out-of-state university for a year, then moved back home, attended the local community college, and then LSU. She is graduating in four years and took 18 credit hours per semester at multiple institutions. She compared the out-of-state university to LSU in a variety of ways and was especially disappointed about the requirement of an unpaid internship at LSU.

Olivia is a 23-year-old biracial Mexican/White female. She is first-generation and Pell-eligible. She is a senior in neuroscience and plans to graduate in 2017. She was not the “smartest” in high school, attended her local community college for 2.5 years, and then transferred to LSU. Olivia is conducting research in her professor’s lab.

Mike is a 44-year-old white married male with three children. His parents are deceased and his brother is his only relative. He is first-generation and Pell-eligible. He is a senior in computer science. He attended the local community college and did not do well academically. Mike enlisted in the Army and after completing two tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, transferred to LSU. He utilized both versions of the GI Bill to pay for his education. He stated that LSU is another bureaucratic system like the government. Mike said that after living in barracks with young men, he observed the university as a young person’s environment as well and was used to being older than others.

Christian is a 22-year-old Asian male and has permanent residency status. He is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. He is a junior in electrical engineering. He is a deferred admit and

was required to live on campus. He attended an in-state university and took general education courses in psychology. At LSU, Christian has found the engineering center to be an important part of his experience.

Sam is a 21-year-old Arab-American male and has permanent residency status. He is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. His parents are immigrants; his mother, his older brothers and he moved to Saudi Arabia while his father attended a state university near LSU as a mechanical engineering major. However, due to personal issues, his father did not finish his degree and decided to bring the family over to the United States and to the state where LSU is located. Sam is the third of six children, and his time was constantly occupied with family obligations. He wanted a better school; he tested well and got a 31 on his ACT. He attended a research-intensive state university for a year and then, with a friend, applied and transferred to LSU. Sam studies economics and political science. He is a member of an economic honors program and speaks highly of it.

Chase is a 23-year-old Hispanic female. She is first-generation but not-Pell eligible. She is a senior in abnormal psychology. Chase is from New York and was raised by a single mother who moved them to Virginia so Chase could attend high school. She went to a community college in Virginia. She participated in the Disney internship program, and while there, met people who were moving to the state where LSU is located to attend school. She applied to LSU and transferred. Initially denied admission, Chase did not accept that answer as she knew her credits were being transferred and the paperwork would catch up; the next day, LSU offered her admission. Chase did an online orientation and came to LSU without ever having visited campus. She is extremely independent. Her social network is her work peers and she identifies more as an employee who goes to school.

Shannon is a 24-year-old African-American female. She is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. She is a senior majoring in animal science and sociology. She attended an out-of-state historically black university for a year, transferred to her local in-state community college for another year and a half, and then transferred to LSU as a sophomore. Shannon was extremely involved in social organizations to the point that counseling services suggested she drop one activity; she chose to become inactive in her sorority. She was able to study abroad in Costa Rica.

Lisa is a 24-year-old biracial married female. She is not first-generation but is Pell-eligible. She is a food science major and works at a dairy plant where she makes cheese and ice cream. As a junior in high school, she studied abroad in Brazil, where she met her future husband. Lisa took a year after high school to figure out how her husband could move to the United States. She attended one local community college and then another, where she obtained an associate degree. She then transferred to LSU. She finds it difficult to be involved on campus as a married person.

Benjamin is a 30-year-old white male. He is first-generation and Pell-eligible. He is a communications major and plans to graduate in May 2016. Benjamin attended a local university near his home for three years as a baseball player. While he was at the university, the baseball program was cut. He then contacted the LSU baseball coach, who welcomed him to try out and walk on in the fall semester. Benjamin transferred to LSU and was practicing on the field for tryouts when the coach told him he had to get off the field because he was ineligible, according to the NCAA Clearinghouse. Benjamin left LSU after a semester and was out for seven years. He returned after working, lives with other undergraduates off campus, and is a 4.0 student. He has studied abroad in New Zealand and is gaining research experience with a professor, while

another has asked him to be a teaching assistant for an undergraduate class. Benjamin said he comes from a family where he was expected to play three sports or activities. He is paying for his own education.

Bronn is a 22-year-old white male. He is first-generation and Pell-eligible. He attended a small private college to play football. Bronn was there for a year, but then his father got sick. When he came home, he was more interested in attending a bigger school like LSU. His father helped him transfer to a local community college, and then he transferred to LSU. He had constant meetings with the LSU admissions staff to make sure he was taking the appropriate steps to transfer. He entered as a biology major but then changed to engineering at orientation. Bronn is a junior in applied engineering. He is from a nearby town and his network had contacts with LSU. He started working at LSU athletic events while at his local community college.

Lydia is a 25-year-old white female. She is first-generation and Pell-eligible. She is a senior in creative advertising. She attended a midsize state university for two years, then transferred to a local community college and was there for two years. She then transferred to LSU as a junior. Lydia has worked for the state full-time but currently is working 30 hours a week. She needs to finish nine credit hours of her portfolio this summer.

Victoria is a 23-year-old Hispanic female. She is first-generation and Pell-eligible. She is a fifth-year senior in advertising and will graduate in May 2016. She comes from a Mexican family that values education. Victoria's father received his associate degree and works as a chemical specialist, and her mother is a housekeeper. Her older sisters are in graduate programs in another state. She received a full-ride to a small historically black out-of-state university where she attended for a year. She then transferred to LSU. She immediately joined several organizations out of a need to connect to other Latino students. Victoria works in the financial

aid office and has gained an understanding of financial literacy. She also studied abroad in Rome.

Bill is a 25-year-old white male. He is first-generation and Pell-eligible. He is a senior in kinesiology at LSU. He attended a mid-sized state university for a year, then transferred to a second university, then to his third university, and then finally to LSU. He is a laid-back student who identifies as a skater. Bill entered in human biology and then transferred to kinesiology. He has worked on campus since he enrolled at LSU, either in dining halls or with maintenance and facilities. Bill says he goes to the library every day. He also says he would like to use the gym on campus but that the extra fees keep him away. His mother has a semester of community college experience.

Monzerad is a 23-year-old Hispanic married female. She is first-generation and Pell-eligible. She is a junior in a residential college at LSU and is majoring in social relations and policy. Her parents are from Mexico, and when she finished high school, they explained to her that she was on her own to fund her future education. Monzerad attended her local community college and then transferred to LSU. She had been interested in the residential college since high school. She did not have good interactions with the admissions staff, so she contacted the college staff directly. She receives a scholarship that pays her tuition. Monzerad has a strong family network and studied abroad in Argentina.

Claire is a 21-year-old white female. She is first-generation but not Pell-eligible. She is a junior in journalism and expects to graduate in May 2017. She attended a local state university near her home for a year because her parents made her. She had always wanted to attend LSU and is on track to graduate in four years. Claire was on the high school yearbook staff and now

works at the LSU school paper where she has identified her social network. She is a sports fan and utilizes the writing center.

Sophia is a 21-year-old Asian female. She is first-generation but not Pell-eligible. She is a deferred admit. She attended an in-state university and then transferred to LSU where she was required to live on campus. Sophia applied for nursing but was denied admission. When she was forced to choose a major because of her credit count, she chose biomedical laboratory science. Sophia was visibly upset about how this was wasted time and felt guilty for how many sacrifices her parents have made for her schooling. Sophia is a junior and will graduate in four and a half years. She is quiet and shy and her social network is her roommate's network.

Amelia is a 29-year-old white married female with three children. She is not first-generation and is Pell-eligible. She is a junior in the social work program and attends LSU part-time. She began her college career at a mid-sized state university then a local community college, where she says she was in and out. She transferred in fall semester 2015 and so has been at LSU for less than a year. She mentioned her parents are graduates from LSU. Amelia says her department talks diversity but not about families. She was expecting more academic rigor from LSU.

Jacob is a 23-year-old white male. He is first-generation and Pell-eligible. He is a senior in psychology and will graduate in May 2016. He attended a local community college for three years and obtained an associate degree. He transferred to LSU and lived on campus with a roommate although he was not required to do so; he then moved to a single room and has found it less communal than expected. Jacob is civically engaged in his hometown and is running for office. He has had mentors helping him. He asks a lot of questions and is involved with an

academic fraternity. He referred to being first-generation as his primary identity. He works in the registrar's office.

Elvira is a 34-year-old Hispanic married female. She is first-generation and Pell-eligible. She is a senior in social work and will be moving into an advanced master's program this summer. She is from Mexico but married an American-born person who was raised in Mexico. She started ESL courses in 2007 at a local community college. Her advisor suggested that as she was already going to receive her associate degree, she should consider transferring to LSU to get her bachelor's degree. Elvira received her U.S. citizenship in 2012. She has made many sacrifices to not quit this program. Her community is mostly Mexican, and the only time she speaks English is when she is on campus.

Austin is a 23-year-old biracial African-American/White male. He is first-generation and Pell-eligible; both his parents have associate degrees. His father is a police officer and his mother is currently in school at LSU pursuing her nursing degree. Austin attended an out-of-state private college as he aspired to play football, but when that did not work out, he applied to LSU and was told to earn more credits and raise his GPA. He attended a local community college for a year and then transferred to LSU. Austin is a senior in kinesiology and will graduate in summer of 2016. He lucked out and had older roommates who "showed him the ropes" and provided a social network. He has participated in internships for physical therapy experience.

Data Analysis

Case studies involve giving a rich description of the individuals followed by analysis of data for themes or issues (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 2000). As mentioned earlier, this single institution bound this study and the data analysis provides an understanding of the context and lived experiences of transfer students. After the interviews, I wrote down my initial observations,

read the transcribed interviews and kept organized notes from all of the interviews (Glesne, 2011). Analysis began immediately after finishing the first interview and continued throughout the study (Maxwell, 2013), using my theoretical framework as a guide for grouping data into large categories and looking for patterns, themes, and issues in the analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Patton, 2002).

Coding is a way to organize and prepare the data, become familiar with it, and then be able to understand what the student participants stated (Creswell, 2009). While listening again to the interviews, I read through the data, got a general sense of the material, then chunked or segmented the text before assigning meaning (Creswell, 2009). I looked for themes in the data based on the literature, Schlossberg's transition theory framework and 4Ss (1984) and conversations with my peer coder and advisor. I kept record of the themes that I identified immediately after collecting my data to help me as analysis continued (Glesne, 2011). I remained open to inductive coding, which allowed for other codes to emerge from the data. I coded the transcripts by hand and then entered this information into MAXQDA12 qualitative data analysis software for further analysis. While I used a modified conceptual framework, I interrogated the codes and attempted to determine if what I coded fit in one of the 4Ss or not, allowing for data that did not fit the modified framework or that might lead to a change in weight or importance of one or more of the 4Ss. I asked a peer to review and critique the codes I developed, paying close attention to any bias or assumptions that I may have made. I did this to help ensure reliability (Creswell, 2009).

Trustworthiness and Internal Validity

In addressing issues of trustworthiness, I used member checking for credibility and confirmed if I had accurately represented the student's experience or if issues needed to be

clarified. Internal validity is addressed by triangulation (Merriam, 2009). Through triangulation, I also examined different resources to “build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). I used multiple pieces of data collection to address validity threats. I interviewed transfer students, examined transfer policies and services, and reviewed documents that addressed transfer students. Finally, I used my peer debriefer to help me identify other perspectives and acknowledged any biases in my analysis of the findings (Merriam, 2009).

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I used my experience and my knowledge working with students to guide me through this process. How I interviewed, interpreted, and discussed the findings were all linked with my previous personal and work experience (Glesne, 2011). My varied educational and professional experiences included working at a charter high school where the population of students was mostly Mexican. I am a second-generation Mexican descendant and these high school students’ achievements and struggles held a special interest in my own research pursuits. The students who did attend postsecondary institutions struggled and most did not achieve a university degree. I then worked at a national corporate education company where teaching students how to take college entrance exams was a formula. The students I worked with minimally increased their test scores but also struggled to complete and earn their university degree. Later, in my experience working in the regional admissions office of a large public research institution, I encountered many students who were very eager to attend the university. However, many students were not initially admitted and a large number of them made plans to transfer to this coveted university. Yet, many never achieved that transfer. Many did not meet the requirements to transfer, some chose to stay at their initial institution, and of those who did transfer, some struggled, some were fine, and others took a long time to finish. Throughout my

experiences, I saw students overcome barriers to attempt to achieve their transfer goals. At the same time, I observed their potential receiving institution making minimal efforts to support those who were outside of the traditional-age student bracket once they arrived at the institution. I knew the transfer students had potential to earn their degree. However, once they arrived, there were barriers to them successfully persisting that seemed symptomatic of the institution. I believed that there was a way to learn the factors that contributed to transfer students' persistence and to determine interventions that the university could utilize to be more supportive of its transfer students. I hoped that with my prior experience and knowledge, I gained some insight to how universities increased the persistence of transfer students.

Limitations

As is consistent with all research studies, limitations existed for this study. The findings were context-specific as well, and so are not meant to be generalizable, though there are likely lessons to be learned for those trying to support transfer students at similar receiving institutions. The participants were interviewed only once. Although the majority of interviews provided rich data for this study, having a second interview would have given students more time to reflect on their experience. Timing of the interview influenced the transfer students' experience. The time of the semester in which I interviewed the participant, life events, and the length of their tenure at the university influenced the description of their experience. None of these students had graduated but all had a timeline and a plan to finish. And finally, this study only has the perspectives of students who have persisted from one semester to the next and not of those who did not.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings from this study to understand the experiences of underserved transfer students once they are at the receiving institution. I use Schlossberg and colleagues' transition model (1981) to organize this chapter. First, I discuss *self* to describe the traits that were common among the participants in this study as well as the types of *support* networks the students described. I then discuss *situation* as the assessment of the environments the transfer students enter. Finally, I discuss *strategy* as the ways in which transfer students respond to challenges they encounter at the receiving institution.

Self

According to Anderson et al. (2012), self as a concept is the internal resources and personal characteristics that influence students' abilities to cope with the transfer transition. The characteristics related to self that I found transfer students possess are perseverance, resilience, intentionality, and self-awareness. I provide examples from students' experiences of these major characteristics. I then showcase two students who provide a holistic representation of what characterizes the concept of self.

Perseverance

Transfer students showcased perseverance in multiple ways. Schmitt (2012) defined perseverance as "committing oneself to goals and priorities set, regardless of the difficulties that stand in the way" (p.21) including short and long term goals. The transfer students were committed to attaining their degree regardless of the path they had to take to the receiving institution and showed perseverance to get to Liberty State University. For example, some students had to deal with the process of getting their credits accepted by the receiving institution. Lauren shared, "I contacted [the] registrar here...I was wondering why I didn't get credit for the

stats class...so I had to reach out to the stats department and let them know...I got this [equivalent] grade...So it worked out. I just had to do extra work in that.” Bill experienced a similar situation when attempting to prove that he fulfilled the requirements to be admitted to the institution. He explained, “There was a couple credits they didn’t [take] and...I went to the advisor, he said you haven’t taken this course and I said, yeah, I have in the past and he said, okay, let me look this up and he said, oh, I guess you have. He just had to type it in.” Some other students had to take additional classes to improve their GPA or they had to fulfill certain course requirements that they may have not known about. In other instances, Christian, Lisa, and Lydia either lost or were at the brink of losing credits because they had taken too many credits at their previous institution.

These students enhanced their strength of perseverance through their previous life experiences and situations at their former institutions. Previous life experiences included their upbringing or family life experiences. For example, KC was approximately 16 years old when she dropped out of high school; she then returned ten years later to obtain her GED. Another example of a distinct background is Patrick, who was homeschooled along with his siblings by his father. He later attended trade school during traditional high school years. Another student, Victoria, initially went out of state for school. She had the support and encouragement at home to do well but when she was away at school, she had to figure out how to be a better student on her own. She described her experience:

I had to teach myself how to study and go to class all the time and just stuff like that...I think that was my biggest thing, just getting used to like the workload and how hard the classes were and how to organize my time...I can’t do bad and I have big shoes to fill...So just basically...putting myself in check.

Victoria mentioned that she attended a low-resourced school where there was not a high percentage of students who went on to postsecondary education. She said that she taught herself the skills to have a better chance at success.

All the transfer students are still currently enrolled, transitioning at the receiving institution and planning to continue on their path to attaining a bachelor's degree. The transfer students displayed a sense of determination that was upfront and unapologetic. They were goal-oriented and relentless in overcoming the obstacles they encountered. Patrick commented, "I just felt like my education was something I needed to nurture. And this is where I wanted do it." Further, they recognized friends and family members were committed to their success and had supported them in their higher education journey. Deborah dealt with not being able to stay at her initial university and felt that it was her duty to be an example of tenacity for her siblings. She stressed, "I don't wanta drop out because it'd be a bad example for them." For students in this study, the motivation to succeed at their receiving institution was deep and personal. For some, it was an obligation to family and friends who sacrificed for them; for others, it was a personal sacrifice that drove them to persevere. The recognition of the benefits of earning a degree was what kept others moving forward. A few students, Brandon and Sam, mentioned that family businesses were a driving force to keep attending school because they wanted another path for their lives. Christian used work experience as a tool to persevere, explaining:

I just love learning and learning new things. It's like my drug... it's just cool learning about new stuff I didn't know about and applying it to real life. And also another thing that influences me to come back is...I've worked, so I've been working a lot in...restaurant type of situations or restaurant settings and...I realize...I can't live like this my whole life.

Christian shadowed some individuals in his field of electrical engineering, which gave him insight to the purpose of his education: "I just found it really cool doing that stuff [that you can do only by] getting an education so...I'm gonna keep studying." He used his options of career

choices to persevere. Christian, along with the other transfer students, kept moving forward in spite of the obstacles.

These examples are but a few ways that the transfer students illustrated this strong personal characteristic of perseverance. The examples show that there were internal and external forces pushing them to continue their education.

Resilience

Perseverance begets resilience. Morales (2008) explained that resilience pertains to the process and outcomes of achievement. All the transfer students showed this characteristic by transferring and continuing their studies at LSU. Students moved between multiple institutions and adjusted or continue to adjust to their surroundings. Similar to the experience of other transfer students, Bill transferred to multiple higher education institutions and had to continuously demonstrate the courses he had already taken. He shared the following experience:

The first [institution] transfer that I had, they took some credits away, like some organic chemistry away and stuff like that so I had to go in and I had to take them all my papers, like a big stack and show them and they had to see if it compared to their courses which it did and then I got the credits.

In addition to Bill adjusting to different schools, he had to continue to prove that he deserved credit for previous courses. In a sense, he had to restart his educational journey each time he arrived to a new institution. Bill had attended multiple four-year universities and exemplified his resilience in being questioned about his academic record.

The transfer process can be quite challenging for students, especially those who may not have as many resources or are traditionally underrepresented. Students in this study were either first-generation college students or Pell-eligible. These circumstances may not have provided them with the skills or resources to be as prepared as their peers at the university. Monzerad addressed such obstacles:

I do feel like transfer students...are at a disadvantage, especially going to [my particular program] where their standards are really high. [The] freshmen courses [are writing intensive] and coming from a community college and low-funded [public] school(s)... I do feel like I have to try twice as hard or ten times harder than others to like feel like I was at their level, or catch up in a way.

Monzerad faced the adversity of not having adequate resources to be successful in school. She felt that she was not as prepared as her peers. She showed resiliency by staying in her program and devoting extra time to complete her work.

Many students struggle with the transition to the new university, but for others, the new university is where they begin to flourish. Olivia, who lived at home prior to transferring to LSU, noticed the change occurring in her from one year to the next, sharing, "I was being really comfortable with who I was at home because who I am at home and who I am here are two different people." Before she went to college, she said she was described as the pretty cheerleader whose interest was boys, not school. She had been led to believe by her family and school counselors that college was not an option for her. She started off at a community college and believed that was all she would accomplish. Olivia commented that after transferring to the university she was starting to believe that she did belong in school. She is now in a competitive program and working on research with a professor.

This transformation was also present in Christian's experience. He explained, "I just feel like after I transferred I just became a different person...I'm glad I transferred because a lot of positive things happened transferring here and I definitely do not regret transferring....it's helped me." Christian has taken the transfer as a chance for a new beginning to overcome personal challenges. The adjustment to a new location may be the beginning of better things for many students.

One particular student, Mike, is the epitome of resilience. He is an older married transfer student who shared several personal stories of adversity. For example, early on in his marriage,

he and his wife had just bought a house when he was laid off from work. Both his parents are deceased and he shared that he and his brother “didn’t have support from above, you know, help from parents or anyone who had done this or even moral support cuz they were passed away, you know what I mean? So yeah, it’s been, it’s been really hard. But you know, like I said, it makes you have a better sense of accomplishment.” Mike started community college and failed his courses. He went on to work for many years at several different types of jobs. He knew he wanted to go back to school but did not have the financial ability to do so. At that point, he had a family and decided to join the army as a 34-year-old man. After seven years and two tours in the Middle East, he returned to school where he then was told that he “couldn’t take too many [courses at the community college]” as he had been taking courses while in the Army. He also was told by the LSU admissions office, “We wanta see you take a full load semester” in order to prove that he could handle the coursework. Mike spoke about these multiple experiences to show how his resilience got him to this point in his postsecondary education.

Resiliency is built through change and the multiple situations these students encountered exemplified this personal characteristic. The students could have easily walked away but they became stronger for their experience.

Intentionality

Another characteristic that transfer students exemplified was intentionality. They were intentional with their actions and methodical in the steps they took to achieve their goals. These characteristics propelled them forward towards completing their degrees with an especially keen awareness of their environment. Jay was clear about his intention to achieve his goals when he stated, “I’m just a very goal-orientated person. I’m always setting goals. You know, one year goal, a three year goal, a five year goal.” While Jay may have been explicit in setting goals for

himself, another student, Bronn, intentionally sought out guidance and assistance to achieve his goals. He shared that he visited the university admissions office constantly to meet with advisors before he was admitted. He further explained,

It was sort of my own push at that point, just educating myself...I came to the Administration Building probably every other week to the point I thought they would start recognizing me just cuz how often I was there. That's how bad I wanted it...I just sort of played the game with them. I knew I could get enough credits and a certain amount of classes where if I pick a certain degree that doesn't have a limited enrollment, I would get in. So I would get in, I'll change my major, I'll do whatever I have to do.

Bronn is aware of the barriers that limit his direct admission to his program of choice. He was methodical in his intent to gain admission to the university by navigating the institutional protocols to reach his goals.

Another student, Monzerad, made a plan to get into her college of choice when she was in high school. She was intentional about taking particular courses to get into a specific residential college, describing her strategy this way:

I had a teacher that went to [this college] and had a couple other friends that were going there. Except they went straight into it and I didn't. So I always knew I wanted to come here. I specifically took the econ courses that were needed and all that to get into the college.

Some students transferred into programs that they could get into with the hope of later transferring into their program of choice. For example, John, who is in a highly competitive major, still had two courses to take in order to apply to the business school, so he had to do two semesters before being admitted to his college of choice. John explained:

My parents really wanted me to think about [this] deeply, just in case I didn't get in. But I wanted to pursue it. And so then afterwards once I did well in my classes for a semester and then I knew I was gonna do well in my classes second semester.

John showed he was willing to risk not getting in but knew he had to do well in his classes to have a chance to transfer.

Transfer students were intentional about how they went about their day. The majority lived off campus and so had to prepare themselves to think about their day as they could not efficiently head home if they forgot something. For example, transfer students had to think about and confirm what projects were due in order to be prepared, if they were going to attend study groups after class, or if there were family responsibilities to be addressed so that they could stay late. Several students brought up the issue of parking and having to commute to school. For students like Mike who commute, the mental energy it takes to prepare is only added stress:

You know, it's always, it's a lot of preparation, a lot more preparation involved, make sure you have your bus pass, make sure you know the bus routes, make sure you know your schedule. You can't just wake up ten minutes before your class and walk over there. You know, sometimes I've gotta wake up a lot earlier because my bus comes at this time and so it gets here at that time. If I wait for the next bus, you know, it only stops, has bus stops here and here and so I have to walk a certain distance so I might have to catch the earlier bus.

Half of the participants described challenges with parking on campus. First, students noted the extra time it took to park in the commuter lot and get to campus. Second, students indicated that they did not feel safe when they had to go back to the commuter lot after a late class or study session. Jacob mentioned that he was hesitant on whether he could participate in this study, as it would take a lot of his time and he did not have a parking permit near the library. The challenges students faced with parking added extra time to their day. Students also had to identify where to hang out to study or eat because they did not have the ease of going back to their dorm. The challenges not only affected these students but at times family members who were supporting the student. Monzerad expounded this topic,

And then the commute doesn't help. Especially cuz the buses to the commuter lot stop running at 7 pm [sic] so it doesn't help....my brother, he works third shift so he's able to pick me up from [my college] and then take me to the commuter lot or take me to his house...Sometimes if they have events at like 9 pm or 8 pm because I know some clubs meet at that time, it's really not convenient for me at all. And then I also don't like being on campus late, cuz it's not the same like if

you live on campus. If you forgot something, you can just go to your dorm and get it or if you're hungry, you can quickly go [back to your dorm room.]

This example illustrated an issue that other participants faced as well. Since they did not have a dorm room or a space to go back to, they had to find other ways to fulfill their needs for things such as rest, food, and study.

In this study, transfer students had factors that played a larger role in their lives besides school. Some transfer students were married, had children, or worked at multiple jobs. Because of these competing factors, transfer students were methodical in prioritizing these other obligations. They were methodical in choosing course schedules that allowed them to be able to address and prioritize other factors in their lives. They were intentional with how they spent their time and focused on their ultimate goal of obtaining a degree. Olivia highlighted her experience:

As a transfer student, at least for myself and a few other transfer students I know, I feel like we're more focused on school. I could be completely wrong but especially transfer students that have to pay for it on their own, you're more concerned with making sure you don't have to retake the class. You're making sure you don't fail. And I feel like the experience is different because at least for me, because of that, there's no room for error and I feel like I still make the error but I don't know. I just don't have time. There's not enough time, whereas I feel like everyone says the grass is greener on the other side and I kinda feel that way when you compare transfer students with students that attended all four years. But the students that attended all four years, I don't know. I see it as their home. Cuz like when you talk to people who graduate, oh, you know, "that's my home. It was the best four years of my life." I feel like it's my home but not to the extent that they probably do.

Olivia's comments bring to light the intentionality with which she approached her LSU experience. She recognized that there is difference in how much room there is for meandering for transfer students versus native students. She felt the pressure to be more focused.

Transfer students wanted to attend a university with a strong reputation. They wanted access to the alumni network and were aware of opportunities available as a student at this university. Bill and Patrick remarked that the university's reputation was a determinant of enrolling, while Lisa and Chase focused on the quality of the programs. Sam commented that he

researched the rankings of the economics and political science programs and while they were not the top in the country, he shared, “I just knew that it would be a step up from [my previous] program...I would be able to get the education I wanted.” He was intentional in being aware of what his academic programs would be able to offer. Sam expected that the university as a whole would be an overall better experience.

Self-Awareness

Transfer students exemplified self-awareness in various ways. I use the term *self-awareness* to encompass the qualities of independence and self-confidence. Some students found their sense of independence by experiencing the transfer process itself. They explained that transferring changed them or was a good move for them. Students also noticed when their past support systems (family and friends) were no longer able to support their educational endeavors. They were aware that they were changing and needed to change their environment in order to keep moving forward in their journey.

Participants realized that they had to exist at the university independently because they were aware that the university focused on native students. Transfer students noticed when they were self-sabotaging or when their grades were slipping. There was recognition of wanting to become a better student and acknowledgement when they had to change behaviors to accomplish this goal. For example, Brandon explained how being part of a club that many of his classmates were in was enticing and felt that being involved should be part of his experience. However, he was not willing to sacrifice his academics to take this step.

I saw that people would...be in that club for more than a couple years would typically be suffering grades-wise. They would be at the shop more than they would be anywhere else. They would probably spend at least 50, 60 hours a week in the shop...And I couldn't do that...I did it for about eight months and I realized that my grades were starting to slip too much and I didn't wanta do that.

Brandon prioritized his academics when he realized that student involvement might interfere with his grades. This experience empowered him to make better decisions to reach his educational goals.

Independence, or having freedom from others, was an attribute exhibited by transfer students in how they made decisions. For those accustomed to depending on family, part of gaining independence was letting go of that security. Monzerad was a stark example of having independence forced upon her by her family.

When I graduated from high school, my senior year, my parents congratulated me, my mom sat me down and she told me that we are no longer going to help you. She says we cannot help you fill out FAFSA or do any of that stuff because we don't understand the college system here in America and it's not because we don't want to help you, we just cannot. So you're gonna have to find the resources by yourself and figure this out. I believe in you. I know you can do it. And then we trust you and we just want you to know we support everything you do but we can't help you...so basically, that's what they told me and that's kind of why I have always been like independent and been like I've taken initiative. Like if I have an advisor that I don't like, which I did have a lot of advisors that I did not like, took me like five before finding a good one, I won't just stop there.

The forced independence made Monzerad gain autonomy to navigate the complex university system. Even when an academic advisor, a person of power at the university, did not meet her needs she had the tenacity to find an advisor who was a better fit for her.

Sam sought independence even from the dorms and resident advisors. He initially lived on campus but then moved off campus, commenting, "no one should be in charge of anyone...to have them know that...they've got their back, that they're their friends, not their supervisors...I like the sense of freedom." Sam liked having a flexible schedule that he controlled. He chose to live off campus to maintain his sense of autonomy.

Other students sought independence even from student groups. Benjamin shared that although he had been in a fraternity at his previous institution and was heavily involved, he "didn't feel as compelled to join them [here]. Even though I had this want and need to assimilate,

I didn't want to join a fraternity here...it didn't fit my motives, what I was aiming to do."

Benjamin was separating his previous university experience from his current plans. In his return to LSU, he was able to appreciate what was available and chose what was best for him on this second attempt.

A way to understand these characteristics in a more holistic manner is to hear the narrative of a few transfer students. I present Chase and Elvira's stories because they are representative of the transfer student characteristics that I found consistent with the participants in this study.

Chase

One student who portrayed a strong sense of self was Chase. As an out-of-state student, she was intentional and methodical in how she pursued her transition at LSU. Chase's story of how she utilized internal resources comes from her personal history. She was raised by a single mother and gained a sense of self-confidence and independence early on. She was very aware of how to handle herself when facing adversity. When initially denied transfer student admission by LSU, she called the Admissions Office and said she would not accept being denied because she knew that LSU would accept her when they received her transcript.

They sent me a letter saying they couldn't accept me and I sent a letter back saying I'm sorry, they just haven't released my grades. Don't say you haven't accepted me. Next day, I got a letter of acceptance and my mom still laughs about it. Well, you couldn't get rejected correctly. I didn't even know I wanted to go there and I was just like, no, you need to accept me. You need to do it right now. Cuz they just got my grades but they did and I was like moving [out of state].

Chase has worked for several years with a keen sense of how to financially afford to go out of state for school. While interested in going to California, she found herself exploring the area around LSU.

And so when I saw [state LSU is in] had great programs, my friend wanted to move up there. Economically, it was probably the best bet. California, price of

living is ridiculous and trying to pay tuition, nevertheless out -of-state tuition without a job that wasn't secured? At least here, I called [the store in which she worked]. They did some transfers. They were like, yup, you've got a job when you come up here. So it wasn't a difficult decision. It was more like just waiting for the acceptance letter kinda thing.

Chase works full-time and is aware of what is required to work and go to school successfully.

She is intentional about scheduling courses so that she can be most efficient with her time.

I've broken it up so I can work the hours that I do so I've stuffed my classes to Tuesdays and Thursdays so I have those completely off and I have one night class on Wednesday night...when I make my schedule, I put large gaps between my classes so Tuesdays, I have a gap from 9:50 to 2:40. So I usually just leave my car, stay on campus, do all my studying in like the human resources cuz ...I've structured it, every single one of my classes is in the same classroom, in the same building. Oh, yeah, I made sure of that.

She also mentioned not using work as a handicap in her performance. Chase is aware of how to include time for group projects and demonstrates a maturity to handle adulthood.

A lot of kids don't have to do with moving apartments, rent, paying all the stuff. So it's very much an adult life. With a school life, I don't think a lot of kids are experiencing and so that's kind of the stress I've had.

Chase's identity is as a full-time employee and when asked how she transitioned to LSU, she replied:

I don't think I still have [transitioned]. I don't find myself to be really a student. I feel like I'm just a worker that goes to school...Like a person that goes back to school. I don't associate with the students. Sometimes a few friends here and there but I don't like, a lot of my friends, a lot of the friends that I have like to go to [the university town], come here, do stuff on campus and it doesn't appeal to me...But yeah, I'm a student but I feel like I'm more of a worker that goes to school.

Elvira

Elvira exemplifies perseverance and resilience. She is a Mexican married woman who started attending a local community college in order to learn English because she wanted to gain independence to communicate on her own. Her story showed how she was a risk-taker and someone willing to try a new path. Elvira shared that the impetus for her enrolling at the local

community college started when she was at work and needed to take the morning off to go to the doctor: “I was so stressed out. How am I going to tell [my boss] that I need this morning off? So I relied on a person [to interpret for me]...but I didn't want to rely on people all the time to ask simple questions.” She kept taking courses and her advisor noticed how successful she was in class, asking if she had considered obtaining an associate degree. She had not and trusted him enough to take a turn to put herself on that path. When she was close to finishing that degree, he asked again if she was willing to enroll for a bachelor's degree, which is why she is now currently enrolled at LSU.

At the beginning of her studies at LSU, Elvira was shy to share her experience “cause I didn't want people to think about me like, why are you telling us all this. I thought ok, if I'm here, it's because I'm able to do this.” She expressed her frustrations in her academic experience saying,

The classes were frustrating me sometimes specially being a Spanish speaker, you know, English is not my first language so every assignment takes more time for me to complete it. For some of the other people, they were saying, ok, I will complete my assignment in 2 hours and for me sometimes it's more than even 8 hours to complete an assignment, just reviewing it and trying to find the right words to say what I want to say. Sometimes I felt kinda stupid. I had the things in my mind, ok, I wanta share this with this people but I don't know how to articulate the words that I want to use.

Elvira spoke passionately about her family being her motivation,

They are expecting a lot from me. As I said before, I don't know if it's because I'm not a quitter but no. It took me a lot to be here so I didn't wanna mess it up. And I feel obligated. I feel obligated to complete what I'm doing...[I feel obligated to myself.] Too many sacrifices. To my husband. He's been supportive, a supportive person. Yeah, but basically to myself. You know, I don't wanta be out of LSU with, you know, with a lot of loans and with not a, without my diploma, to be able to work. It's been a while. Even listening to people, to other people in the community, Mexicans that I know, saying are you still in school? When are you gonna graduate? You've been there forever. Like when are you gonna be done? Okay. I need to complete. I need to finish whatever I started.

Elvira and Chase demonstrated the internal resources that allowed them to continue through challenging times. They exemplified the traits that several students shared in their stories. These characteristics all are part of the experience of transfer students.

Support

Support, as a concept, is a social network that offers a positive support to transition (Anderson et al., 2012). At first, I considered social network to only provide a social aspect to transitioning; however, what came to light was that students created support structures with different groups for different purposes other than social activity. The networks are positive and I use support and network interchangeably in this section. I discuss where students find support and how they create those support networks.

Finding Support Networks

In this section, I discuss the areas in which transfer students found support. I discuss the diverse student body, family, work, faculty and staff, and advisors.

Diverse student body. Having a network of friends for support is helpful to ensure a successful transition. Most transfer students in my study did not possess the presumed social network that comes with experiences like living on campus. While most transfer students struggled to identify networks, specifically other students, some students mentioned their appreciation for a diverse student body.

That's one of the cool things I didn't anticipate transferring here was how diverse every, not just the culture but, you know, I met somebody in my dorm from Brazil so I became pretty good friends with her. Met some people from Asia. Just fun to learn about their culture. Met somebody from Nigeria as well which it was just, that's been fun. Those are the positive experiences I have. Talk about some of the big differences in culture and expectations and I mean, being that I've lived it, it's funny cuz they'd mention something and like, oh, yeah. That's just how we do things. So those are some of the positive ones. (Patrick)

As an Arab-American, Sam had a great perspective to describe his appreciation in the student

body.

I feel...people are much more open-minded and they have...a lot of positive energy going around and it's really great...it's really supportive...you really don't have anyone holding you back or anyone trying to drag you down. It's kinda like everybody working together... it's not a cutthroat environment. So if you ask for help or if you're stuck on something, people are very willing to help you out and get you out of the slump you're in...the community is very, very supportive of its people. The people within it are very friendly and very understanding with everyone. And they're very open minded, so I don't speak with people who basically commit the ecological fallacies of using anecdotal evidence to describe a whole group of people. So I don't have somebody saying, oh, this person's a...this person's Muslim so he might not like to do the things we do. It's just you become a lot more multicultural when you come here cuz you get to experience all these cultures, like different people and I have friends who are Brazilian, who are Indian, from all types of nationalities or ethnicities and it gives you a much better understanding of the world.

Sam highlighted the diverse student body, environment, and world views that enrich his feelings of support in his new educational pursuits.

Family. For other transfer students, family was a major part of their support network. Some students talked about how their family members helped them transition and helped them go through the process. Patrick said, "Yeah, I always had a couple family members that have really supported me so I was always relying on them." A handful of transfer students felt like they were pulled in multiple directions when it came to family obligations. For example, KC earned her GED ten years after dropping out of high school and when deciding to attend a postsecondary institution, needed help and turned to her mother. She explained: "I returned home and part of that was having that stability. I'm a single parent and so having the support and help from my mom and being able to move back in with her... [this] was a huge part of what made deciding to go to college a feasible thing for me." Moving back home to have her mother's support was essential for KC. This did not mean her mother took care of her son all the time but was a pillar of support as she pursued her studies. One example KC shared was the challenge of balancing homework with making her son's birthday cake for school. Figuring out how to

navigate relationships with significant others was mentioned by the married students. Monzerad made a connection as to why transfer students might lean more heavily on family support networks.

I'm big on family...if I didn't have them, then I'd basically have no network... But besides that, when it comes to friends...I think the older you get, the harder it is to make friends anyway. When I was first starting off at the local community college, I tried to make friends, but no one really has time to make friends anymore cuz they're so busy...I think about it, too...when would I even fit a friend in my schedule, to be honest...I barely have time to hang out with my own husband sometimes. So it's kinda hard.

Monzerad spoke highly of the support she receives from her husband. However, the support networks that students create are at times bound by their circumstances. As she pointed out, juggling school with her relationship encumbers on her time to create friendships.

Work. Most transfer students worked at least one job and spoke of having supportive supervisors who worked around their course schedules. As Claire said, "They're kind of like a family there so they really welcome you." Lisa commented that her supervisors

really want to see us all succeed and they really wanta help us out. I guess like that's where I felt the most supported...they really wanta make sure you have an internship and I didn't get one and they were like, yeah, but there's still time. You know, you can still do it. You can still get one. And I just had to say, you know, maybe it's not this summer. It's not the summer to do it.

Some transfer students ultimately created social networks at work and identified more with their work colleagues than classmates. Again, most transfer students have families, work at least one job, and are older than traditional students, thus they often do not have time to make social networks with peers at school. At times, the work environment and family are the only accessible social networks, given their circumstances. This was true for Chase, who is a full-time employee and identified more with her work colleagues. She had previously been working and requested a work transfer when she moved to the state.

But I'm very close with the people at my job. I mean, I think there's one person

who is actually in my age group but the rest are older, they're in their 30s, 40s and I would feel way more comfortable talking to them about my problems as opposed to someone here...they are a different support system. (Chase)

Chase recognized that this work support system is not the typical student support system.

Although her work colleagues are older, she feels comfortable finding support at work. Chase also has been working full-time for several years, so she is easily able to transition and create networks in her workspace. This is possible as a majority of her time is spent at work with colleagues, not in class with her peers.

Faculty and staff. Transfer students shared conflicting experiences with faculty. In this section, I talk about the ways transfer students found support through interactions they had with faculty members. Later, when I consider strategy, I discuss how there were also challenges within these same networks. Students mentioned attending office hours, talking to the professor after class, and being willing to ask for help from a professor as ways they found support. Some students claimed that it was the relationships with the faculty and university staff that gave them a sense of connection to the classroom and to the university.

There's a lot of really great staff support, faculty support, which actually surprised me...I wasn't expecting that...there are definitely people who are looking over my shoulder and "do you have all the credits that you need for this next step? Are you doing well in your classes?" Can we talk through whatever, you know, talk through a paper that I'm having difficulty understanding...I guess I only can go on appearance but it appears that most of the instructors for the classes are really, really engaged in what they are doing. They're here teaching at the university...often doing research in the field. Really just higher level of interest all around, I would say, which comes across in classes and makes the classes more interesting and exciting. (KC)

KC highlighted that it was the staff in her department who encouraged her and wanted to see her succeed. She was also surprised with the faculty support she received. Perhaps this expectation is testament to what she had been told would be the extent of a relationship with professors.

Bill and Monzerad reflected upon their experiences having one-on-one time with their

professors. Bill elaborated:

Yeah, I feel like all the faculty and staff definitely wanta see you learn...they're really engaged and like they're happy to see that you wanta learn, I guess. They're always open to office hours. I come in and they'll quiz me and stuff...I was having a little trouble on the first test so [my professor] said "I can quiz you" so I came in like once a week...It's kinda awkward at first but like I guess you get used to it cuz I'd never done that before with a professor. It's kind of intimidating. She's got a PhD and she's like a big, big-name teacher. It's cool that they do that.

In this case, Bill struggled with an exam and sought out assistance from the professor. Although Bill had attended multiple institutions, he still had to build a relationship with faculty at Liberty State University.

Several students spoke of having class-related internships and projects. For example, Chase shared that her professor was the creator of the program where she fulfilled her internship: "He really gets to know each one of his students in addition to the cases," so he adds a personal touch to the experience. She also stated that having a close connection to her professor would have benefits in possible future career opportunities.

Other students similarly shared Elvira's experience of talking to the professor after class. In this example, Elvira showed her vulnerability and trust in the professor:

Sometimes after class, I say, "Can I talk to you for a minute cause I didn't get what you mean. I don't understand the instructions." Maybe that's my skills, like maybe it's my English, my broken English...but can you please help me with this...All of them were able to give me feedback on my assignments and clarify, they clarify the instructions that they gave me.

Faculty support is not found solely in the classroom. Faculty were resourceful and provided other forms of assistance to students. Several students commented that faculty helped them secure employment and provided letters of recommendation:

I feel like a lot of the teachers in the College of Business really care about the students. They really care about the students, not just in their class but also helping them get jobs and writing letters of recommendation. I've met with a few professors and they've been just nothing but great resources on just about everything. I've never felt intimidated or challenged to go up to a professor and

just talk to them. (Jay)

Jay shared his interactions with professors and in his experience, felt that his professors have a desire to help him not only in his education but his career.

Advisors. Most transfer students did not state that advisors were supportive in their journey. Some mentioned that they had positive interactions but for the most part, there was minimal indication that advisors were significant in the transfer student experience at all. Most students mentioned the initial contact with advisors was at orientation to get their classes scheduled but that there was not much contact afterwards.

Still, some students shared positive experiences with advisors. Lydia described a good interaction with an advisor who helped her while she was in a different college.

I had a really cool advisor...even though it's their policy to not take all my credits, they got me in and got me out, you know, as fast as they could. And even though they're a liberal arts school and I had to take classes that I didn't necessarily think that I needed to take, it's still requirements for every student. But you know, they worked to get me those classes and they were really, really helpful. [I would visit my advisor twice a semester] usually at the beginning of the semester, sometimes if I had an issue with a class or a question about if I could take a different class and then another time to just make sure I was on the right track to graduate. (Lydia)

Jay described how the staff member in his college was a great resource in how to "game the system...She was even saying...take this class over the summer because it's a very difficult class so...if you do it over the summer, it's your only class, you're gonna do very well on it. She was giving tips and not just saying what you needed to do."

Olivia shared an experience where she had different interactions with an advisor in one program compared to her new advisor when she changed programs.

I talked to my human bio advisor very briefly about it and all she did was point me into the direction of the neuroscience advisor...she [the human bio advisor] was the one that I set up my classes with...back when it was transfer orientation day. And she seemed constantly busy. She seemed preoccupied with other things. And I really felt like a number with her...whereas like with my neuroscience

advisor, I understand that she's busy but the more that I meet with her, the more comfortable I'm getting. And even though we pretty much only meet to talk about my minor and to talk about like scheduling classes and trying to work it out to fit my minor...she makes me feel more like an actual person than just, okay, well, I have to finish up here cuz I have to do something else.

Olivia's comments of not feeling prioritized by her human biology advisor mirrored the showed up in comments of several transfer students about their advisors.

It was in reflection that transfer students shared what they struggled with and how they thought having a stronger relationship with their advisor would influence other experiences at the receiving institution. Shannon stated that she would advise future transfer students upon entering "a big college like this...[the student must] make sure you get to know your professor, your professor gets to know you. Make sure you like your advisor...Make sure you know them. Make sure you meet with them." She recognized that in a large university like Liberty State University, new students can feel lonely and thus it is important to make connections where possible.

In this section I discussed where transfer students found support networks: diverse student body, family, work faculty and staff, and somewhat with advisors. I now explain how those supports were created.

Creating Support Networks

I distinguish finding support as a passive experience whereas creating networks is a more active behavior. The sources for these networks were distinct. Students created support networks through various ways, including past relationships, living on campus, and in the classroom.

Past relationships. For those who attended the local community college, they unexpectedly found a connection at the receiving institution. Brandon shared that while he was attending the community college, he met other students with plans of transferring. Although he did not talk to them much at the community college, upon arriving at LSU, they "kinda helped

each other out” and sought each other out at Liberty State University. Conversely, some students spoke about the trivial relationships that they found in the classroom or in organizations.

I have a network of acquaintances...I’ve worked on collaborative papers and group presentations and group discussions but I mean, it’s kinda hard to build a friendship based on four hours a week so...I would say my network is more like people that I already knew before going to college. (Monzerad)

Even though Monzerad did not view these acquaintances as supportive, she still used these relationships to complete her goal of the class assignment.

Living on campus. The transfer students found multiple places to make connections. Individuals who lived on campus had the opportunity to build a social network, although there was no assurance that the result would be an instant network. Students who received deferred admission were required by the university to live on campus, and some other transfer students chose to live on campus.

Okay, [Residence Hall], it was great. It was great cuz I got to make friends. The social aspect of being in the dorms was amazing cuz you lived right on campus. And you had all these activities. And you made like, you made like great friends within the dorms. (Sam)

Deborah was required to live on campus as part of her admission decision but spent most of her time with her boyfriend who lived off campus.

I don’t know how you would ever make friends at LSU if you don’t live in the dorms. I didn’t make any living in the dorms but I think probably that’s the fault of my own. But if you don’t, like if you don’t live in the dorms, I don’t see how you could ever make any lasting friendships here.

She understood that living on campus can be a place to make friends, yet she made other decisions that kept her from making those connections.

Classroom. Several students mentioned that since they are in upper-division courses, classmates tend to be the same ones over and over. There are familiar faces and they made “good connections for study groups and group projects,” commented Jay. Some students mentioned that

it took them a while to make connections in class being new to the university. Lisa explained what she has learned about obtaining classmates' phone numbers:

Take people's phone numbers. I just started doing that like recently. I wish I would've done that this entire time. You know, don't be afraid to be like, hey, what's your email address?...Just because I don't feel like I should have to do this alone. You know, if everybody's working together, then I wanta work together, too, you know what I mean? And it's like I feel like that's helpful. Like I can see people benefitting from that, you know. And so just I started being like, oh, well, once I work out my problems, I'll text you. And we can compare answers. And then every time I've done it, it's always been like, oh, yeah, cool. You know, and then it works out...I was doing it on my own, yeah, and it's just, it's harder and then if you don't succeed, then it's like, that's your own fault, you know what I mean? So yeah, when you work with other people, it's better.

Again, through reflection, the transfer students were able to think about reasons it is beneficial to create social networks. Taking into consideration previous experiences and her current situation, perhaps Lisa would have made different choices.

It was the personal interactions that transfer students made with faculty and staff, including advisors, that mattered to them. However, those interactions seemed to be unidirectional, meaning it was left to the transfer student to take the initiative to create these connections.

While transfer students were able to identify and create supports, there were challenges that still occurred. These included experiences in and out of the classroom, maintaining networks beyond the classroom, and feeling solely responsible for their support in the university. I discuss the challenges in greater detail in the section on transitioning capital section later in the chapter. There were many challenges transfer students faced, but they talked about them in terms of how they were or were not trying to address these challenges.

Situation

Situation refers to the individual's assessment of transition and the sense of control they feel over what is happening (Anderson et al., 2006). Transfer students are clear on their goals

once they arrive at the senior institution. They experience the university by taking intentional steps to manage their existence, their classes, and their life at the university. The manner in which they assessed the transition meant that they used their personal characteristics and previous experiences to assess their current situation. To better understand the transfer student experience, I had to recognize that pre-transfer context mattered.

I construe situation in this section to include living within a native student paradigm, academic expectations, isolation, and transfer student stigma. Then I present the pathways that students took to transfer because the pathways influence how the situation played out. First I explain the situation constructs, and then I describe each pathway substantiated with a sample transfer student narrative.

Native student paradigm

Native student paradigm refers to the thinking, perceptions, and attitudes that focus on the freshman students who start at the university (Laanan, 2006). This influences how university resources, programs and policies are structured. Unfortunately, this situation leaves out transfer students who started elsewhere but for one reason or another changed institutions and entered the new institution via an alternate pathway.

Christian made this statement that invokes the sentiment of a native student paradigm:

When you originally apply here, come your freshman year, there are a lot of like programs that help students get to know the campus better. A bunch of tutorial things, like showing them where classes are. A bunch of all that stuff. But coming, I came here second semester and I literally got no, like I didn't get a tour of the campus. I didn't know where anything was. I just feel like they should create more programs that help students adapt to the campus better.

The feeling of being ignored is evident in Christian's comments. He recognizes that those students who started in the fall had a different kind of welcoming.

Amelia's sentiments supported this same feeling of being overlooked. She commented on

her experience during orientation:

It would've been nice if they could've at least acknowledged that some of the transfer students were a little bit older, had some life experience. I just felt like I was treated as if I was very young. You know, and there's, of course, I understand there's a lot of talk about finding your dorms and where you're gonna live and everything but just a little overkill.

Both students shared their initial experiences facing the native student paradigm and as a result, felt they were not recognized for being transfer students.

Academic perceptions

I use academic perceptions to entail the transfer student experience within the classroom walls. I discuss two areas: academic rigor and not fitting in.

Some students were indoctrinated with the concept that the senior institution was going to be more rigorous because they were coming from community college. But this did not by itself make a difference; rather, this fear was emphasized during orientation when they were told that they would more than likely suffer transfer shock and have a decreased grade point average their first year at the university. Transfer shock happened to Bill. He shared that he was placed on academic probation his first semester. He stated, "Before at [my other school], I was all As and Bs. So it was like, it was kind of a shock a little bit for me to see that grades [sic]." Bill did not transfer from a community college and he still struggled with transfer shock.

Other students, such as Lauren, were expecting a change. As she noted, "I knew it'd be a little bit more challenging. I didn't know it'd be as challenging [in] the accounting program. But I knew it'd be challenging because I knew it's a better school and they're like top 15 in accounting so I was expecting it to be harder." Lauren recognized that the courses might be more difficult but she did not mention any understanding of a drop in grades or transfer shock. Some students were in a more intensive academic program such as engineering and also struggled with the academic expectations of the program.

In my study, some transfer students had higher academic expectations of the university and were disappointed with the lack of rigor. Jay explained that his class was not meeting the academic rigor he expected:

I do feel like in some cases...I almost feel like it's a refresher from high school almost. So I had an econ class last year or last semester and a lot of the stuff was incredibly similar to what I did in high school econ. And it was like, I almost felt like it was wasting my time going cuz it was just like high school.

The academic expectations of the classroom experience at times left the students feeling that they did not fit the mold, apart from academic ability. KC mentioned,

I walked in to my first class and...it is a room full of 20-year-old White girls, at least 85%. And then, you know, one male, still in the same age range and two or three people of a different racial background. But still in the same age range...Not what I was expecting...which left me feeling...like I completely stick out. And it took me quite some time to sort of see my status as having more life experience as a very helpful thing.

Patrick also shared how being homeschooled influenced his experience in the classroom. He stated, "It didn't cross my mind that I wouldn't fit into the typical college stereotype or role." His experience in the classroom made him feel different; there were topics he could not relate to especially when other students would talk about high school experiences.

Isolation

Transfer students enter a game that has already begun. They assess their new situation along a spectrum that spans from "isolation" to "fitting in." Some students were able to immerse themselves in the university environment and not feel like they missed out on much and fit in easily, while others felt isolated. While some students fit in, conversely the majority of transfer students mentioned that they did not have the full orientation experience like freshman students and felt like outsiders. The absence of similar types of experiences led to feelings of not fitting in.

Feeling “faceless” and insignificant were statements and sentiments of transfer students. Benjamin starkly noted this when he said he said he never could get individual attention from university administrators. Transfer students understood the university’s priorities in focusing resources on native students, but they also misunderstood the actual percentage of students at LSU. One example of this is when Mike rationalized that the university is “geared towards young, as it should be...I’m not in any way complaining...why would you gear something towards 1, 2, 3% of your population...you gotta gear it towards the 90, 95% and that’s okay.” Mike can see that the majority of students are younger students; however, since he cannot see who is a transfer student, he assumes that the only a small percentage of the student body are transfer students, when in fact, transfer students make up approximately 18% of the undergraduate student population at Liberty State University. Believing that there are so few transfer students led to further feelings of isolation for the students in this study.

Transfer student stigma

Transfer students commented on the stigma associated with being a transfer student. The transfer students themselves made reference to the perception that it is acceptable for transfer students to move from a two-year to a four-year institution, but any other path has a negative connotation.

One particular transfer student, KC, had dropped out of high school and had taken non-traditional routes toward her education. KC shared what it meant to deal with the transfer student stigma.

I can sort of see it. It’s sort of admitting that you weren’t prepared at the right place in time, you know, the place where you’re supposed to be, graduating from high school and looking toward college and putting in all of your applications and you either weren’t prepared, like we’re supposed to be, because that’s part of that white picket fence dream or you weren’t accepted. That’s, you know, that’s sort of the two things that it feels like admitting to say that you’re a transfer student.

Even while feeling a sense of stigma for transferring, these students for the most part intended to finish their degree at the receiving institution. They assessed their situation and knew that they have come into the new university context not as aware of the university culture as they believe the rest of the student body is, meaning those who began their education at this institution. As Claire stated, as “a sophomore or junior, you’re thrown in with everyone else that has kind of already been here...it’s weird. It’s just not a good feeling.” The stigma is enhanced through the native student paradigm.

The constructs of situation are living within a native student paradigm, experiencing this in the academic context, dealing with isolation, and addressing the transfer student stigma. In order to understand the transfer student situation, I now present the pathways.

Pathways

When it comes to understanding the transfer student experience, universities erroneously generalize the pathways students take and the experience that they bring with them. The participants in this study arrived via multiple paths. I categorized transfer students pathways into five groups: deferred admission, vertical transfer, lateral transfer, swirl, and out of state. I describe each pathway and provide a transfer student narrative to illustrate the influence of the pathway on their assessment of the situation.

Deferred admission. Some transfer students applied to the university but were offered deferred admission, meaning they were not admitted to the fall semester but rather the following spring semester. Although I did not necessarily expect such students to be in the transfer sample for this study, they are designated transfer students by the university. They met the criteria for this study of having attended another institution, having been at the site for more than one year, and being either first-generation or Pell-eligible. In my sample, four participants were deferred

admits. Before actually matriculating to LSU, Ryan, Christian, and Sophia attended a four-year university, and Brandon attended a community college. A fact that needs to be mentioned is that these students applied to the university and intended to be at LSU, but the university offered an alternative pathway to admission. They were not necessarily denied admission and were ensured admittance the following semester, but they were delayed in their original desired college choice. All had on-campus living experience; Sophia remains on campus but the rest moved off campus, across the street. Although deferred admission may appear to have been a straightforward process, one student, Brandon, who took an alternate path. Their stories show the paths taken and how the students thought about entry into LSU.

Brandon. Brandon applied to LSU and was offered deferred admission. While he was able to enter LSU in the spring, he decided to stay at the local community college for an academic year and take advantage of the low cost of tuition at the community college. He found out which courses were transferrable to LSU and knew that he could take care of some college courses required by the university. Upon transferring, Brandon found out he had not met the “credit limit that required [him] to apply to a certain college,” so he was enrolled at LSU for two semesters before he being admitted into the engineering program. He said he received admission to another school but as was evident throughout his entire interview, had a strong fiscally conservative side. He was aware of the financial challenges connected to attending other universities, saying,

I don't wanta say that if I got a full ride somewhere I wouldn't go cuz really, my only priority was the fact that I wanted to spend the least amount of money as possible, get the least of money in debt to go to college wherever I went, which is why I chose LSU. I could commute, not have to pay for living expenses. So LSU was pretty much the plan.

Although Brandon was not accepted into the university in the fall semester, he had a positive outlook that his academic plan would come to fruition. It was Brandon's financial savvy,

understanding of his own internal resources, and comprehension of how the university system works that influenced his decisions.

I knew coming out of high school that you're gonna grow up. You know, you're gonna do things that are gonna be more based on you. You're gonna go to classes and your parents can't make you go. Things like that. Most kids leave their house, things like that. I didn't really expect that because I knew that if I chose to go to a college or university that was gonna require me to live somewhere else, I could do that. That's fine. But because of financial reasons, I thought the smartest thing to do would be to live at home and go, come to LSU. And my expectations for college, knowing that I was always gonna be commuting to the local community college and LSU weren't really different from going to high school. Except the fact that I have more free time. I know I can control when I study, how I study. I can control when I take my classes, mostly. So more things were gonna be in my control. I also found out that big corporations or big businesses or big programs like LSU as a whole, when you go through a program, they can control certain things you do, like taking [humanities and science] classes, even though you don't want to. And sometimes that's just life and I don't really worry about it.
(Brandon)

The deferred admission pathway gave Brandon the ability to have the most straightforward transfer experience. He shared similar challenges that other transfer students discussed in maneuvering the LSU campus. He had to figure out how to get from one building to the next on the large campus; his community college experience was a smaller physical space. Driving around campus, figuring out where to park, and following the posted speed limits were part of his learning. He shared that his first classroom experience was with 150 other students who were not necessarily in engineering but needed the specific math course; during this experience he noticed that, "the bigger classes, teachers, were a little less helpful."

While Brandon further deferred his entrance to Liberty State University by staying at the community college for a full year, he understood his acceptance into the university. This assurance gave him the confidence to take advantage of the opportunities that the engineering center provided him. He went on multiple internships, one of which paid him well, and he was able to save money to stay on campus. He wanted to experience living on campus and did so for

a semester. He said, “I was able to do that, get my college experience kinda thing in, and it was fun but it’s just so expensive. I don’t know how some people that I talk to do it.” After this living arrangement for the semester, he moved to work at a new internship and was able to get an apartment.

One of the situations that most challenged Brandon was finding a place to study when he commuted to school and spent the day doing his work. He described that his housing situation did not allow space to study, so he would go to the library in his college to study and rest in between classes. Brandon shared the impact of a university decision to close down the college library. He assumed why the college changed the use of the space from the library faculty offices.

After two years of having the library, it kind of seemed like it was a routine for me. I’ll just go to the library and now it’s a little bit more of a challenge to find somewhere to go...I don’t agree with it. It’s definitely unfortunate...I think they’re gonna make it into an office space so that it can hire more teachers...they’re taking the space away from the students so... Especially for someone like me who doesn’t have a dorm that’s a walk away or doesn’t have an apartment that’s a 10 minute drive away. And so I struggle, people now just walk by an open classroom and [if] it’s open, I’m gonna go study in there [or eat my lunch]...it bugs a lot of people when they have to do something on the computer and somebody who doesn’t have a space to eat decides to use that desk as a place to eat and not use the computer.

Brandon explained that there were rooms added to supplement the library space that was taken, but it did not provide the same kind of space that he, as a commuting student, needed.

Vertical transfer. Vertical transfers are the most typically recognized as the pathway to transfer. A student enrolls in a two-year college to take general education courses that are nicely packaged to fully, or predominantly, transfer to the four-year university. This is presumed to be completed in two years and thus would curtail time and expense. Keeping costs down was a theme among the students in my study for why they enrolled at a community college. They also

indicated a concern that they would not be successful at the four-year university. However, of the twelve participants who began their studies at a community college, six of them had a path that was anything but the presumed norm.

Patrick was homeschooled and attended trade school at a young age of 16. He finished high school and received an associate degree. Lisa transferred from one community college to another that was larger and that offered an associate degree in her field of interest. Elvira did not start with the intention of getting a degree but rather to learn the English language. Interestingly, four of six participants who identified as married began their studies at the community college. This illustrates that the lives of transfer students tend to be more complex with more responsibilities to juggle. A transfer student that shows the complexity of the vertical transfer is Mike.

Mike. Mike is a 44-year-old transfer student who is also a veteran. He had an interesting path that might be more representative of the common experience of vertical transfers, where life happens, and they have to change course. Mike was at the community college for four years where he basically flunked out. He started working and went through a series of jobs. He married and bought a house; unfortunately, the Friday before they moved into the new house, he was let go from his job. He started to hustle to try to find work and provide for his family. From driving a delivery food truck service to truck driving, he was constantly working and gone all the time.

I wanted to make a change but I didn't have the money to go back to school and if I did, that meant I was working all the time and I didn't have time. It then came to [my] attention that the Army was a possibility. But because of the war, they were taking people who were older. So I looked into it. I wanted to go more into the IT, computers and stuff like that. And it just seemed like a good fit. They pay for your college plus you can get experience. They have IT people in the Army. So after a lot of deliberation between me and my wife and everything, we decided that's what we wanted to do so I joined. I got experience...I was deployed to Iraq while I was in Georgia, for 15 months. That was a horrible deployment. Missed two Christmases and two Thanksgivings because we were deployed.

After his deployment Mike returned to his local community college for a year and took courses.

I was already a student there, you know what I mean? Readmission there was a lot easier than trying to get into another college before I could get into a major college, you know what I mean? So it all seemed like it fit good and it was almost like a necessity. Not sure how I would've done it without doing it the way I did it, through [the community college] first and then once we were already established here, I'm not a single person. Can't just get up and move that easy. I've got a family and they'd have to change schools and so, yeah, once I was here, it was like, all right. It's kinda LSU or bust, you know.

Mike applied to Liberty State University and was asked by the LSU admissions office to prove that he could handle a full course load. After he obtained a 4.0 for the semester at community college, he reapplied to LSU and was accepted. He is using the GI Bill to pay for his education and commented, "It's a system that doesn't encourage people to just get in, get their education done and get out. It's like you've gotta play this game or I hate to say, work the system. I don't like to think I'm the type of person that works the system, but that's really what it encourages." Knowing that he has the GI Bill allows Mike to not have to work and to stay enrolled. Although he took courses while in the military, worked in the information technology field, and took courses at the community college, he said it will be four years before he receives his computer science degree from LSU. Mike resigns himself to this fact and decides that he is going to "work the system" and take advantage of the time and money that he is rightfully owed.

Mike was a vertical transfer but his experience was not the traditional path of enrolling at the community college for general courses and then transferring to the four-year university. He had to deal with bad grades, finding work, and life issues. The path he took illuminated how he was able to deal with the environment at LSU. He definitely did not fit the traditional community college transfer student mold that the university expects to place in the native student paradigm support system.

Lateral transfer. Lateral transfer is when a student transfers from one four-year university to another four-year university. Five participants in this study were lateral transfers.

A few students seemed to “fit the mold” and expressed a relatively smooth transition. They did not have much to share about challenges once they transferred. They seemed to understand how to integrate themselves into the university. Victoria attended a four-year university out of state and when she transferred, she immediately became involved at the university and also lived on campus. She lived on campus before at her first institution and knew that being involved was essential to her success. Claire knew a lot of students at LSU and had an instant network of friends. Claire lived with a roommate whom she had met at her first university and transferred to LSU as well. Claire also made an instant network connection at her workplace at the student newspaper.

Although Sam had a straightforward transfer experience from one university to another, he still felt the stigma attached to being a transfer student. Sam transferred to LSU after researching his academic interests and was required to live on campus. He sought more independence when he transferred to LSU.

And when somebody refers to them as a transfer student, it makes it seem like...they're only $\frac{1}{2}$ or maybe $\frac{3}{4}$ of an LSU student that a person that came here their freshman year...Seeing someone as a transfer student would be like not seeing them as less of a person but just seeing them less a part of LSU than someone who came here straight out of high school. So that's my opinion. And why I wouldn't wanta be referred to as a transfer student. I would just wanta be referred to as a Liberty State student.

The other two lateral transfer students had more complicated paths. Bill attended three different four-year universities. He had multiple career interests and pursued those at the different schools. Bill shared that he worked in the university dining halls at LSU and acknowledged the benefits of living on campus, yet chose to live off campus to save money. He currently works with the university facilities department and enjoys his work and the autonomy.

He has maintained a sense of connection to the university through these employment opportunities. The other student who had a more complicated path as a lateral transfer student is Benjamin.

Benjamin. Benjamin started at a four-year university, transferred, stopped out, and then reentered at the same four-year institution. He showed perseverance and an awareness of self, especially with the experience he gained when continuing his education at LSU. He was a baseball player at another four-year university when that baseball program was canceled after he had been there for three years. He transferred to LSU with the intentions to walk on to its baseball team. While at tryouts, the coach notified him that he did not meet eligibility requirements and was no longer allowed to tryout. Benjamin attended LSU fall semester anyway but then stopped out for over seven years. While working professionally, he told others that he attended LSU. However, he got tired of explaining that he had not received a degree from the institution and eventually decided to return to LSU. He dealt with fees he had to pay and made the decision to stop working and become a full-time student. When he finally returned, he came back with a vengeance. The following narrative explains Benjamin's story:

Yeah, so I took 19 credits over last summer. I took 18 over the fall. I did a study abroad over winter break...[The study abroad was] just over three weeks, yeah. I got six credits there. So now I'm taking 13 credits this term and I'll graduate in May. So when I came back to school, I was, I mean, obviously a little bit more mature but I think I valued the education and the opportunity to come back was the real thing. I mean this had been a monkey on my back for a little while and I'm used to succeeding. I don't quit things. And I know I'm an intelligent person so it was...I said I finally, finally got to a point where I could and I dove right in and I was really nervous actually about having my practical experience block my educational experience. I didn't wanta be the person that said that's not the way it works in the real world. That's not the way it really is. And to be honest, I think I had a little bit of issue with the thought of not being the smartest person in the classroom. You know, part of me values that part of me was a little bit nervous about that, because I was out of academia. I was out of...I hadn't done statistics in so long. I hadn't written a paper in forever. I was writing emails.

Benjamin set his mind to finishing in three terms. He mentioned how he had developmentally matured and about his ability to multitask.

Being the oldest of a big family, I mean, between work and school and helping kids and all those things, I had to be, I think, an adult kind of early. Some of that was what I thought I needed to do and some of that, I actually needed to do. But I mean, through all that, I've juggled a lot of things and I feel like I don't think I've ever been able to focus on just one thing. So that was an opportunity that I really looked forward to and I was going to take advantage of. So when I came, and like people told me I was... I had counselors and advisors and a lot of people tell me, like don't take, they thought I was setting myself up for failure, taking that many credits over the summer. But I knew, I knew I could handle it and it was a big goal of mine to be able to get done in one calendar year. So three terms. I had one under my belt and I really wanted to get done in three terms and the way that it was working out was I would be able to do three terms: start in May, walk the next May. But I was gonna have to take a few credits online over the summer, which at that time was like I didn't really wanta do that but okay. But I excelled over the summer. I was able to. I loved it.

Benjamin took a different approach toward his living arrangements, choosing to live with undergraduates. He wanted to live with student athletes in order to find the environment that he was not getting at the university as a transfer student.

So yeah, I moved back to LSU in May. I found a house where I wanted to live with undergrads again...because that's what I was doing. I wanted to be back, I wanted to be in the environment. And if I wasn't gonna get it in the classroom, I was at least going to get it in my everyday surroundings. And then so I found a sublease for the summer. So I lived with like eight undergrads over the summer. I live with ten other undergrads now. Actually funny enough that most of them, all them that I live with now are all athletes. But I wanted to be in that environment. So I was successful over the summer. I got asked to do a research position in addition to my class load over the fall.

Benjamin's world revolved around baseball. Being told that after three years he did not have the credits to transfer and be eligible to try out was devastating to him. His experience at his initial university, a smaller school, gave him the confidence to address the challenges he encountered. He was able to have stronger relationships and connections to the staff at his initial four-year institution. He struggled in not having the same kind of connections when he was at LSU, sharing,

I mean, I pulled my transcript and I tried to see what transferred and what didn't on my own, but my experience that first term here was that there wasn't a lot. I didn't get much help from the university...I almost felt faceless here that first term here. And so I didn't think I was prepared for that, for not having that face to face, that one-to-one. And that's still my experience here now. However, I'm a little bit more mature and I know when and where to press. I know when and where to ask for things. I think I know a little bit more what I'm asking for, what I'm looking for, what I need.

This sense of resignation and not having someone to reach out to after being left without baseball kept him away for seven years. Although Benjamin said that he still feels that he is not connected to the institution, he relies on inner strength to push onward. This speaks to his strong internal characteristics that contributed to wanting to return to LSU and finish what he started.

I know I'm making a generalization here, but it's been my experience that the student that will be here, that's been here the four years does a lot more talking. The transfer student does more listening. And that might be a product of being more open-minded. It might be a product of wanting to take in more information about their surroundings because they're not as familiar with them. But I think there's something to be said for that. I think there's a presence. There's a lot of perception that happens there that they don't, they don't have as wide of networks as the people who have been here all four years. I think probably for the most part, I agree with it because it's about wanting to assimilate. I think it's simple human nature. Not wanting to be different. Wanting to be part of the group. I think in special circumstances where it might get them more attention, they might like it, right? People wanting to know their story. But for the most part, they wanta be part of the group. They transferred here to be, for everything Liberty State is. They wanta be a [LSU mascot] so they don't wanta be seen as different. (Benjamin)

Although Benjamin was a lateral transfer student with transfer capital, he still believed that the perception of transfer students is that they do not have networks. Benjamin pointed out that transfer students are more open-minded, noting the assets that transfer students bring to the classroom.

Swirl transfer. Surprisingly, five transfer students swirled in their path to LSU. Swirl refers to students' non-traditional enrollment in both two-year and four-year postsecondary

institutions while they receive a bachelor's degree. These students attended a four-year university, then enrolled at a community college, and then transferred to LSU.

Austin and Bronn both went to their respective universities to play football. Austin attended an out-of-state four-year university to play football. He was there a year and lived off campus, but he went back home and attended the local community college. Upon his transfer to LSU, he lived on campus. Bronn had a similar path, except he was not out-of-state and lived on campus. He had family issues that brought him back home, so he left his university and enrolled at the community college and lived at home. Bronn shared that he was constantly visiting friends at LSU, so it was an easier transition for him. Both Austin and Bronn grew up in close proximity to LSU.

Lydia and Amelia started at the same four-year university, but then their paths swirled in unique ways. Amelia began her postsecondary path having been admitted to LSU, but she wanted to get away and attended another four-year university. She then became pregnant and her plans changed. She returned home and attended the community college. She had another child while in community college and tried to both go to school and raise a family. She failed that semester, and because of the financial implications that grades have on financial aid, she was “in and out” of school. She is currently enrolled part-time at LSU and has been on this swirling path for over 10 years. Lydia attended the first four-year university for two years but felt unclear about her career path. She then enrolled in community college and attended for three years. This was where she found her passion for design and is now in a creative advertisement program at LSU.

I chose to highlight Shannon because of her positive reflection of attending multiple institutions as well as the reality of having found freedom and not learning to balance work and play.

Shannon. Shannon attended an out-of-state historically black university. She had a lot of fun but her academics suffered. Thus, she had to return home, live at home, and go to school. Her credits from the HBCU did not transfer to LSU. Because of the lack of credits, she had to attend a community college and also began working full-time. She then transferred to LSU and lived on campus. Shannon's experience was more challenging than she expected. "I expected it to be challenging but the other thing is like most of the time I had either one or two jobs while doing it [going to school] as well as having leadership positions within my sorority...I had to actually go inactive with my sorority so I could balance all my other obligations."

Shannon had a positive attitude toward her swirling pathway.

I feel like we might just have more experience...especially if you are in a situation like me...where you went to classes...and you found out your credits aren't transferrable, I feel like it really makes you wanta just get stuff done. Like you're really not trying to play around...part of me regrets it [not finishing at the HBCU] but part of me doesn't because it's like I have the experience of HBCU, a community college and like an actual state university. So I feel like it makes me more diverse. So I wouldn't take it back

Out-of-state transfer. There were four participants that had out-of-state experiences and for a variety of reasons, chose to attend a school not close to home. Deborah, Shannon, Victoria and Austin attended out-of-state four-year universities. Some appeared to have a sentiment of failure because they did not stay at the school where they started. There was also a sense of bitterness for some because LSU was not their school of choice, but it was where they were now attending.

Deborah. Deborah attended an out-of-state school. She commented that she came from a low-income household and noted that she mismanaged her money when she was out of state. She

returned home, and because she did not have transferrable credits from her out-of-state school, she entered as a freshman. I consider her more of a lateral transfer as her experience was mainly in two four-year universities even though she attended one summer semester at the local community college. She shared a particular classroom experience that solidified her negative experience of being at Liberty State University when it was not her first choice or first school.

I've not enjoyed my time here at LSU. I always never wanted to go to LSU. I don't want to try to badmouth LSU cuz I have like two jobs here and I grew up in this community but I never really wanted to go here. It's too big for me. I feel like the social work courses are just like repetitive, same thing. And they're filled with a bunch of students who are like White, privileged, middle-class, you know, grew up with everything handed to them and then they try to talk about privilege and checking their privilege and stuff and it's just like really annoying... They had us do this thing called the privilege walk or something in one of our classes which is like literally an activity where you, everybody stands in a line and then they say different things, like if you've ever experienced government assistance, step forward. It's really bad. It's meant for a classroom full of like all White middle-class, educated people but then they have me in the classroom and I'm like way across from everybody and it really alienates people. So that type of stuff happens a lot... It's only catering toward like the people who grew up, like wealthy, privileged type of stuff so... that's how I feel at least and I feel like the teachers here, they expect you to be a student who doesn't really work at all, who just is a full-time student. And I work like 55 hours a week, paid, and then I have to do a 60, or like probably 35 paid and I have to do like 20 hours a week at my social work field placement. You have to do this stuff. (Deborah)

Deborah's out-of-state university experience complicates the narrative of students who, according to the literature, tend to be from middle socioeconomic status and transfer because of academic fit. She did not say explicitly that she returned home because of any one reason. However, she did state she missed her social work program at her previous institution.

I presented the pathways of deferred admission, vertical, lateral, swirl, and also the out-of-state experience to provide a picture of the ways the students' assessment of the transition influenced their current post-transfer experience.

Transitioning Capital

Up to this point, I have written about the personal characteristics of transfer students and the support networks they identified, and I have explained the various assessments of the transition via the multiple pathways students took. Although Anderson et al. (2006) posited 4Ss, I replace the fourth S of strategy with transitioning capital (TgC). I conceptualize transitioning capital as the knowledge and nuanced understandings that transfer students gain while undergoing the transition at a new institution. I suggest that it is context specific capital that students acquire while navigating the new environment, even if they have acquired some capital while attending other institutions. Schlossberg and colleagues (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2006) posit that strategies are the individual behaviors used to undergo the transition, but this oversimplifies the transfer student reality. As a concept, strategies can be viewed as pedestrian, perfunctory and nicely packaged solutions to challenges that transfer students face. However, the complex reality that transfer students experience in a native student paradigm requires students to select strategies that are based on the students' self-characteristics, support, and assessment of the situation. All these factors create transitioning capital to facilitate the selection of an appropriate strategy. Transfer students use transitioning capital to different degrees depending on their needs and the situation they are trying to navigate. In order to understand the strategies, I explain the challenges transfer students encountered in assessing their situation and finding or creating networks to support their success within the university setting.

Transfer Student Challenges

All undergraduate students face social challenges, but typical challenges for native students are more likely known to the university and therefore, policies or practices are in place that mitigate that transition. Transfer students face many of the same challenges, but their

assessment of their current situation may have needs that go unnoticed by the university and unanticipated by the students themselves. For example, Patrick shared difficulties with the social transition:

I don't know...I didn't anticipate the social transition...everyone's a little bit more focused on themselves here...Not that it's bad, it's just everyone's here to get their degree and get a job so it's... I felt like it was a little more cutthroat. Definitely dealing with the professors, they weren't necessarily concerned with how I was doing personally. I was one of 150 in the class so it's definitely a big transition as far as teachers go from community college to here.

Patrick had not changed; his context had. He still needed the same personal connection that he experienced at the community college, but like several other students, he struggled to find a network when he arrived on campus. Olivia also struggled to make a network of friends at the new institution:

I think it was hard because I finally made a network of friends at community college, and I made friends at work and I think it was really hard for me to kind of branch out...all of my really close friends were at home. All of my best friends, they don't go here. All of the people that I talk to every day...It was hard to adjust. Like I said, I feel like I would've made more friends, or it would've been a different adjustment if I actually stayed in the dorms.

Transitioning can be further complicated if a student desires to create a local network of friends at the new institution. Olivia felt that if she had lived on campus, she would have made more friends. While living in the dorm may help mitigate the difficulties of finding friends and may yield a higher probability of helping build a friend/peer network, one cannot automatically assume that this will be the result.

As I argued in the previous sections discussing support and situation, transfer students enter and are forced to exist within a native student paradigm. Transfer students must navigate how they process experiences in the classroom, make friends, and find ways to persist at LSU. The university functions in a way that places the native student paradigm as the standard for informing institutional policies and practices. For example, at LSU, residential housing is

required of all freshmen. A possible thought behind this policy is to help freshmen create a network. Networks are also sometimes made through student organizations. Students are constantly urged to get involved as opportunities for networking. Again, there is the assumption that students are traditional, with time and interest in joining traditional student organizations. Unfortunately, for transfer students, those are not the same norms that help them create networks.

Some students mentioned joining clubs during their tenure at LSU. However, it was more common that the transfer students said that they did not have time to be part of student organizations.

I got here and it was not that easy... I don't know. Like I have bills to pay. Things like that. Even when I lived with my parents, I also paid bills while I was there, helping them out, you know. So I have to work a part-time job not only because I want to but I kinda need to. So giving up that versus like volunteer work is not always very easy. And then the commute doesn't help. Especially cuz the buses to the commuter lot stop running at 7 pm so it doesn't help. (Monzerad)

Monzerad has to mitigate family obligations within a native student paradigm culture of student groups. These groups may meet at times that do not work for students who work full-time, live off campus, or have family obligations. She volunteered to further advance her experience in her area of study, but did not feel she had the time for participating in student organizations.

Other students joined clubs like wrestling, mixed martial arts, or dance to find a connection or to let off stress. It was Jay's final comment in the following quote that made a distinct point in the transfer students' unique experience.

Just trying to get involved and make as many friends as possible. That's been a big help. Joining organizations and doing different things like [intramural] sports and really just trying to treat it almost like your freshman year in the sense that you wanta go out and do things that you wanta do but at the same time, you know that you're a junior and you're taking different classes and stuff so you know your classes are harder and stuff. But in a way, you almost kinda have to treat it like the social aspect, I guess, you have to treat it like freshman year, almost, you know, as a new start.

He makes the point that transfer students have to start over. This minimizes all the students' previous time and energy spent making friends. Having to start over takes a lot of energy for transfer students that they may not have anticipated or have to invest.

For some students, the psychological energy is compounded with a sense of responsibility. Lisa feels responsible for not being involved.

I think that any of the challenges that I've encountered are my own fault, or like I said I really wanted to be a part of the food science club and maybe if I made more of an effort to come after, then that would be... I can't really attribute any challenges I've had to Liberty State. Let's put it that way. Like if I don't feel a connection to my peers, maybe I should try and take time and when they actually invite me to go places and study with them, maybe I should actually go. Like that's not Liberty State's fault that I don't live on campus, you know what I mean?

The engrained idea as they perceive what the institution and native student peers think is that transfer students are not the norm; they are the problem. In this example, Lisa did not mention the university structures or the native student paradigm in which she is not able to participate at the university. The onus is on the student and the student needs to adjust to fit the native student mold.

Assimilating into the mold may be much easier than having to address the feelings of not fitting in. As Bronn explained, for him the stigma of being a transfer student is in the subtle nature of his interactions with native students:

It just feels temporary. I have the intention to make this my home and it feels like home but as I've continued to say, it's the college experience of feeling like this is your place. But you tell someone you're a transfer, it just seems like it changes their perspective of you. Not in a bad way and sometimes maybe not in a good way. It just changes. I don't know how to tell you it changes. But as if, I mean, I shouldn't say, it's not as if you're a real LSU student. I mean, you're a real LSU student but that's sort of like the feeling some people get, just from what I've heard...it just feels temporary. It's like I haven't found my footing yet. I mean, until I get in the College and then I'll say, okay, I've made it. But right now, yeah, it still feels like we're fighting. Still feeling anything could happen. You could still fall out...LSU still might not be the place.

These comments explained how being new to the environment can be difficult and draining. There is the sense of not being rooted in this new institution and the fear of not being successful.

The academic challenges some students faced included experiences with professors, peers in the classroom, and academic advisors. Below I use the students' comments to illustrate these experiences.

Many times the students do not feel a part of the university but have hope that in building relationships with the professors, they can feel connected again. As previously mentioned, Benjamin had strong relationships with faculty at his initial university. He described how he felt "faceless" when he arrived at LSU and what he encountered when he used the typical method of getting to know his professors. When asked if he encountered any challenges at LSU, he stated:

The first one that jumps to mind was feeling faceless in terms of the university. That I didn't matter. I felt like a number here at Liberty State cuz there's so many people. I didn't feel, I never felt like I was able to get individual attention. That I wanted. I feel the same a lot of times with professors in my department. They, my professors, in my department, they are all very heavy on the research side as well and while they always make a point to say in classes that they are available outside and to come see me during office hours, I haven't found that to be the case in most cases. They're not all that willing to spend time...I don't want to go to them for help on like what does this theory mean? Or what does this mean? I wanta go to them to talk about what we're doing in class and make a human, make a personal connection.

In this example, Benjamin took up the suggestion the professor proffered as a way to make connections at the university. However, there seems to be two barriers. The first barrier is that Benjamin did not find his professors available when he went to their office hours. Another is that Benjamin wanted to make a connection but did not feel that he could take up the professor's time. These real and perceived barriers left Benjamin feeling disconnected.

Other transfer students mentioned that they struggled with the teaching methods or had difficulty understanding their instructors. They spoke of times they felt ostracized by a professor

due to the generalizations the professor made from a native student paradigm, such as being told that they already should know where certain offices or resources are on campus. The students recognized that having faculty at the university meant they were getting experts and leaders in the field, and there seemed to be a willingness to trade off the ineffective teaching for being taught by these experts. For example, Shannon commented:

It was one of those situations where the professor's brilliant and as educated but he doesn't know how to teach the information that he knows. Like he's so experienced in the subject that he knows it. I'm so happy you know it but I'm not getting it...he would write everything he said on the board, say it's like four different boards, it's literally chalk and just a green or a blackboard...But then he would erase two and instead of going back to one where he knows all of us have written down notes from one, he'll like erase two or three and it's like, sir, we have not even got done copying this and that was a discouraging. I'm like, I can't even take notes properly in this class and I'm a pretty good note taker. But I'm just like I can't, I can't. And I'm like the class is already hard so first of all, they already let you know it's a hard class so you don't even feel like you have hope. You get in there, you find out it is hard, then it's like, okay, so then I also can't even take notes in this class properly?

As Shannon expressed, there is a sense of questioning her skills such that she was not sure she could take proper notes. This added internal struggle is a challenge that students were not anticipating by moving to a new institution.

There are other experiences in the classroom where students felt that the professor's assumptions only reinforced the native student paradigm. For example, Monzerad noted:

I felt like they were kind of talking down on me, because I was supposed to know something that I should've learned freshman year, like how to write an annotated bibliography according to their standards. I would be like, actually, I'm a transfer student and I've never had to do this. And then they would be more understanding and willing to walk me through it a little bit and help me out, which I would say I'm a quick learner because it's really not that hard but sometimes, they just assume that you know all these things or you know all these previous concepts because you learned them in other classes.

It was not uncommon for transfer students to explain how these types of experiences with professors in the classroom only ostracized them even more. While the professor may

review the syllabus in the class, there was no certainty that the social aspects of the classroom dynamics and relationships were discussed. Elvira clearly felt like she was not part of any groups in class:

Most of my classmates, they know each other from the freshman year and they had, you know, these groups of people already formed. And they had their phone numbers and they had everything. And I didn't have any of that so I was just new. Cuz the first day of classes, they knew kind of, well, I don't wanta say they knew each other but they have more friends, you know, in the group. And I didn't see anyone like sharing phone numbers or anything because they already, oh, I can do that later or I know this person who knows that person and then I can get the number... The first semester, I didn't do much. It was just, okay, I'm just gonna focus, go to class, do my homework and turn in my papers. I didn't do much the first semester.

Elvira endured an entire semester feeling isolated in the classroom. Several students who struggled in the classroom echoed this challenge of isolation.

Transfer students also reported challenges with interacting with their academic advisors. For the most part, any academic advising experience that was mentioned by the student was a neutral to seemingly negative comment; there were few positive comments on advisors. The initial interaction transfer students had with advisors was during orientation. The primary role of an advisor as deemed by the transfer students was to create a schedule of courses. Some of the reflections about advisors were that students had minimal engagement with them. One student, Shannon, described her experience with her academic advisor. She went to her advisor to try to get out of a class because she knew she was not doing well and wanted to figure out what to do in order to not waste credits or time. Shannon lamented about the following interaction with her academic advisor:

And my advisor [said] stay in there. Try to take in what you can take in and if you fail it, just retake it. That advice, I will say I feel like advisors should not tell their students because then you're wasting credits. And you can only take so many credits over so my thing is that was a waste for me. Especially if I had time to drop it before the time before they say that you can't. I definitely don't think you should give that advice because my thing is I was not motivated. I rarely went to

the class cuz I did not wanta be there. I was not learning. I wasn't learning anything. So I was just like that was a waste and now I'm at a point where I think I can only have three more credits left because of advice like that and I think I have the same type of situation another semester with organic chemistry also. They even said this is a weaning class. It weans people out. It's hard. A lot of people don't do well in it. It is what it is. (Shannon)

Shannon was extremely frustrated recounting this story. Again, she was the student who put a positive spin on her transfer situation from an HBCU. Yet, this type of advice from advising staff weighs heavier on transfer students because they do not have time, money, or resources to waste. Their time is limited because they are balancing multiple obligations. It is also very expensive to retake courses. The challenges in social transitions and lack of advice that takes into account the needs of transfer students can influence their success in four years. Other transfer students also shared being ill-advised on their courses by advising staff. Many of the more negative comments had to do with a lack of personal rapport that students identified.

I wrote about the challenges transfer students faced within the social and academic space. The feelings of isolation and stigma, as well as academic perceptions, perpetuated a lack of connections and social networks.

Strategies

There were multiple strategies that the participants in this study utilized to address the challenges they faced. These strategies are a negotiated set of actions based on transitioning capital. I discuss six strategies that the transfer students utilized: identify other transfer students, embrace school spirit, purposefully choose housing arrangements, leverage work experiences, engage in classroom leadership, and capitalize on university resources and opportunities.

Identify other transfer students. Transfer students attempted to find peers who identify with their own situations. At times, these peers ended up being their professors because of age or life situations, such as having children. While this might be a way to connect, it also makes

transfer students different from native students. One particularly interesting strategy was that transfer students found other transfer students to fight feelings of isolation. Perhaps this was due to not having a network created by the university, but instead, they utilized their resilience in finding a community to which to belong. For example, KC shared that she was in class and saw another woman she recognized from her previous institution, and when they saw each other, there was a bond that said, “Hey, look, we both made it.” Another student, Bronn, shared his experience meeting other transfer students: “When you meet another transfer student, you connect instantly.” The common experiences were a way to respond to the stigma and isolation of not fitting in at the university.

Another student, Jay, appreciated living with another transfer student who knew what he was experiencing.

I would definitely say it was helpful [that my roommate was a transfer student too] because he was technically a sophomore and I was a junior and so it was helpful in the sense that we were both transfer students so in a way, we knew similar experiences cuz he came from a community college as well. So we knew that we had similar backgrounds and what not and so it made it easier to go out with each other and, you know, live with each other, first off, but also make friends together and, you know, participate together.

Identifying other transfer students as peers provided validation of an experience that was mostly isolating.

Embrace school spirit. Several transfer students mentioned the university spirit, describing it as something that connected them to the university. The LSU mantra that unified students around school spirit allowed transfer students to feel entitled to be included in the community, as they did not see it as solely intended for native students. The strategy of embracing school spirit allowed students to manage conflicting feelings for the university, as they wanted to be a part of something. Patrick made this point in his comments:

Yeah, I mean, once you get used to the environment, it’s fun to participate in

going to the games, being [part of the school spirit]. That's really cool to say that you're part of. Positive experiences, at least the environment, culture here is very supportive. If you ask for help, people will always help you, unless it's financial aid. But as far as students go, students are very helpful. Professors are usually helpful, too, if you ask. So those have been awesome, to get help like that but anything to do with administration is frustrating.

Patrick has conflicting feelings of being proud to be a part of Liberty State University but also feeling frustrated with the bureaucracy he has faced. He recognized that it is both the student's and professor's responsibility to create a positive experience. Other students like Lauren stated that since the university is very school-spirited, "trying to fit in and find that school spirit within yourself is something that transfer students may have to go through." This recognition of school spirit and its integration to community was another way that students existed in this university.

There's competition here and I feel like there's more probably in other colleges, but the competition in the natural science college is more for yourself. You're not competing with this other student to get the best grade and I've noticed like in the physics labs... your competition is more within yourself than with others at Liberty State and I really like that. I really like how everyone here is pretty much really friendly. You can make friends very easily if you choose to decide, if you choose to make friends. If you choose to be like, okay, yeah. I'm going to make friends. It's, or I'm going to make sure I reach out. It is pretty easy. Everyone here is really nice and oh, you went to Liberty State? Awesome.
(Olivia)

Purposefully choose housing arrangements. When students were asked about their living arrangements, those that chose to live on campus were aware that they could gain a social network because of that decision. Some said that they met friends at orientation, but more said they maintained friendships with those they encountered in the residence halls. On-campus living at LSU was required of transfer students considered deferred admits or who fell under 28 transferable credits. A majority of the transfer students who attended a four-year university at first also lived on campus at that initial institution. Some lateral transfers lived on campus when they transferred to LSU. Some who initially went to a community college chose to live a semester on campus at LSU to get the "college experience." In essence, they were saying that by

not living on campus, they were not true college students at LSU. Unfortunately, there was no assurance that living on campus built long-lasting friendships or established an instant network.

The majority of students chose to live off campus. There was a mix of students who chose to live off campus but lived right across the street from campus. Essentially, they were able to take advantage of the university resources by being so close to campus. Those students who lived off campus and did not live right across the street had a harder time and struggled with issues such as parking, eating meals on campus, and having to plan out their days in a more thoughtful manner because of their commute to campus. As Sam explained about his choice of living situation:

People living off campus, they feel isolated. That's why they usually come back to campus...my criticism would be like schools need to make the off campus students feel more, more connected to the school. And not like they're living alone, commuting to school because that's one of the big problems my friends tell me they have with like living in apartments. And that's why next year, I'm moving to Next Door Village because I can feel like I'm part of the campus again. And I'm not like way off to the side.

This strategy to live directly across the street from campus was a way to have the best of both worlds for Sam. He used his transitioning capital to acknowledge the importance of finding community but at the same time holding on to his independence.

Leverage work experiences. The work experiences of the transfer students were ways in which they persevered in financing their education. They found supportive networks and as Lauren stated, she held multiple jobs because it “gives me balance. I’ve always been working.” Lauren’s previous work experience and need to have balance was her strategy for transitioning and succeeding at LSU.

The location of the transfer students’ work became especially interesting because there was a difference between those who worked full-time off campus, whether it was one job or two, and those who worked on campus. The reasons that transfer students chose to work mostly

involved finances. Some transfer students were savvier with their finances and more financially literate. The majority of transfer students who had a job had full-time employment. Some transfer students who worked full-time stated that their work colleagues comprised their social network. These students identified more as employees and less as students.

Some students, such as Patrick, were used to working full-time prior to coming to LSU and used the strategy of working on campus.

I think there's a lot of transfer students who work while they go to community college because they can, where the four-year university is much more demanding. And it's not designed for people that work. Or at least this university, I should say. I mean, there are some universities that are designed for working people but they don't have the reputation Liberty State does and they don't have the resources....Like the infrastructure, the campus here is not designed for people to drive to campus. It's not designed, the class schedules aren't designed for people that work. When I was at community college, I never had a problem finding a class at night because it was designed for people that work. So that was nice. But this, you have class at 12 on Monday. That's right in the middle of a workday and it's an hour and a half long, two hours long. That's longer than a lunch break so it's just not designed for people that work. (Patrick)

He wanted to come to school full-time and knew he was going to have to give up his full-time job. He used his on-campus job as a strategy to reach his goals of taking classes and keeping up with his financial desires.

Engage in classroom leadership. When the transfer students shared that they were isolated in class, it was their perseverance and intentionality that drove them to become leaders in order to get what they needed from the class or from peers. For example, KC used her age to her advantage in the classroom:

I'm a little bit older and that my role with a lot of my classmates kind of becomes mom...[I would say] shall I set up a date for all of us to get together and work on it...it's just sort of my role and I'm becoming okay with it but one of the things that I really appreciate about transferring here and you're getting to, we're all getting to a place in our education where we are in a particular field with the same people who are also in that particular field, and you're seeing the same people over and over and over in classes and getting a little bit of a chance to actually form some bonds or friendships or, because I'm not generally incredibly

outgoing, working on it. Getting better. But in large group settings, but it is nice. It is helpful and it really, it really actually makes school easier.

KC accepted that she had to take on a motherly role. She entered the group formation by assuming this role and used it to integrate herself into the networks of classmates. As she continued in her courses, she saw the same people in class and was able to make connections with them sooner.

In other cases, having the same people in class did not create an instant group. For example, Mike would join the study groups hosted by the professor or teaching assistant, but he was not part of the informal groups. In this quote, he shared his experience:

These people were learning outside of class and I just wasn't in that. Yeah, that was a real struggle to try and get people to study with... Well, most of the classes were smaller groups, 300-, 400-level classes were pretty, pretty small. It was people I was around and finally, I kinda got a sense I had to get with people who were struggling a little, too, because they were the ones who were more open... the other people didn't wanta take away from their social time to meet with some dude they just talked to once in class. You know, started talking to them, asking them to study, they were kinda like, uh. Nah, kinda busy, whatever. You know, but yeah, usually I tried to set up something steady, like hey, on this day, do you wanta meet? What would be good for you? Cuz I live off campus obviously. And so I have to come back on campus if it's not like right after class or between classes or whatever. So it was interesting but I needed it. You know, so I was just like, hey, what's good for you. As long as I can make it, you know, I'm good. I'll come whenever the time is good for you because I needed it and that definitely helped. I'm not sure. I think I would've failed one or two of those classes. I mean, a zero, like completely failed it if I hadn't done that. And that was such a huge, huge struggle, but you know, and that's what it is.

In this situation, Mike had to form his own group to attempt to gain a better understanding of the material covered in class. He recognized the age gap and created a group himself. He was flexible in trying to accommodate the other students' schedules although he had his own family obligations. Taking leadership in class was a strategy that the students used after assessing how they were isolated in the class. They took initiative to ensure their academic success.

Capitalize on university opportunities and resources. Another strategy that the students used to feel a part of the university was to make use of what the university had to offer. This included using the reputation of the university, opportunities to study abroad, internships, and some student services on campus.

Transfer students knew that using the brand of the university was beneficial to their future plans. They were aware of the alumni connections and how they could best be utilized. Again, this knowledge was gained while they were at the university. One student, Bronn, noted that he was aware of the reputation of the university and he wanted “to take advantage of that. It’s LSU. It’s a great school. So I think that’s the difference between a lot of transfer students, they realize there’s a lot more to take advantage of at LSU.” Another student, Lauren, was direct and intentional about her attendance at LSU: “My goal was the opportunities that I could have [at LSU]. Study abroad, jobs, going to a better school...that was the main reason I came here. So I mean, I accomplished that.”

Another opportunity that students utilized was enrolling in study abroad. Six transfer students spoke of the opportunity to study abroad. They named places like Argentina, Cuba, Japan, Rome, China, Costa Rica and New Zealand as locations for their experiences. The time they spent abroad varied from three weeks to a month or several months, and they resoundingly spoke highly of their experiences. The diversity and exposure to different peers from across the world was a benefit that transfer students recognized. They understood how this exposure would benefit them in the future.

Transfer students also spoke about how they would take advantage of university opportunities to build their career skills. Some students spoke of career fairs where they could meet potential employers, again using the networking and reputation of the university for

support. Others spoke of internships that allowed them to gain a better understanding of how their classroom learning could play out in the real world. These were opportunities through their college or department and were heavily focused in business and engineering. Brandon spoke highly throughout his interview of the resources he had through the College of Engineering:

In the engineering building is basically a place where students can go to help them get co-ops, get internships and get full time jobs. They help with recruiting and getting the career fairs and all that stuff going and notifying the students about all the different things that are going on. Getting the companies to come to the College of Engineering to recruit or even if they're not there to recruit, just to promote their business and tell students about their company and stuff. And I owe a lot of my co-ops and internships to them, so that's been a huge, huge thing.

Brandon raved about the experiences he gained while in these internships. He was able to use his internship to save enough money to pay for a semester in the residence halls so that he could gain that campus experience. Brandon felt he would not have been able to live on campus if he had not worked the previous summer in a paid internship.

Several other students spoke of internship opportunities that led to employment and other internships. The business school seemed to have provided valuable opportunities for some students, like John:

Coming to LSU and then starting to attend professional events and seeing like Fortune 500, like all the companies that I could've ever imagined are here, looking for students. I think it's definitely one of the biggest things that kept me coming back because I was like, hey, this is way more than I could've ever imagined and the opportunities are way greater than I could've ever imagined. And so I think that's definitely a big thing and just the chance to talk to those recruiters, finding out how much internships pay, all those things are just things that, you know, definitely motivated me along the way.

John was pleased to be able to gain business experience at organizations such as Target and Ernst and Young. He had prior work experience but these opportunities expanded his understanding of kind of jobs he could have with his degree.

Like other students, Lauren realized that she was interested in pursuing one career over another. Even though she transferred as an accounting major, it was through an internship that she found her interests were more closely aligned with human resources. Lauren shared that the internship also provided the work experience needed to make her competitive in the job market, and she has obtained a full-time job with an internationally recognized consulting firm after she graduates.

The transfer students identified three student services that they frequently used as resources: math tutoring labs, the writing center, and the counseling center. Several students commented that their math classes were the courses they struggled with the most. One of these students, Chase, said, “Math isn’t my forte,” so she would go to the math center for help. Other students had to take a number of math courses for their major, like Brandon, who said,

I would say the math learning center was a huge help. That’s the subject I needed the most tutoring in was mathematics, so they’re always awesome about helping. It didn’t matter what it was. Like all the tutors there were awesome at helping, too. That was probably the biggest benefit to me personally.

The students also identified the writing center as a resource that they used. Ryan stated, “I would use the writing center a lot for my writing class...because I’m like weak in that area.” The counseling center was a third student service transfer students frequently mentioned. Some students stated they received direct service or knew of other students who had; others spoke instead about the stigma associated with counseling that kept them away from using the service.

Equation of Ss

There are multiple factors in the strategies that the transfer students used to adapt to the transition. I believe it is a culmination of all the 3Ss (self, support, situation) plus TgC that enables students to exist within a native student paradigm. Based on their personal characteristics and supports and the way they assess their situation, transfer students created strategies that work

for them. I present these strategies as an equation: Self + Support + Situation + Transitioning capital = how the student survives in this native student paradigm. In the following section I provide some narratives to dissect and explain to understand the Equation of Ss.

Lisa. I use Lisa's experience to illustrate transitioning capital. Lisa had a distinct start to her postsecondary education. After she graduated high school, she spent a year taking on significant life changes such as getting married and filling out paperwork for her foreign-born husband to move to the United States. These factors moved Lisa out of the traditional college student description.

Lisa stated that she wishes she had lived the "college experience". When asked to clarify by what she meant by that phrase, she discussed where she would have lived and how she would have been involved, and then goes on to explain her strategy in the classroom:

Like going to the dorms and like getting out of, you know, living there, on your own, 100% independent without the support of your husband or your mom, anybody. Nobody supporting you. You're just here by yourself. Maybe I would've wanted to do that and see how that would've been, you know...be involved. That's something I have not done. You know what I mean? Try and be involved. Don't be afraid to like ask people, your peers what they got for number three. You know what I mean? Like you're all working together and they're gonna tell you. Like they're gonna help you.

In her comments, Lisa reflected on her college experience and examined it in contrast to the traditional experience of pursuing college after high school. While she did perform mature, independent acts such as getting married, she stated that she missed out on experiences that are typically considered part of the college experience, such as living alone. She also mentioned her hesitation to ask her classmates for phone numbers. Again, it is the challenge of not feeling comfortable in the space.

When asked what spurred her to get other students' contact information, Lisa stated:

Just because I don't feel like I should have to do this alone. You know, if everybody's working together, then I wanta work together, too, you know what I mean? And that's helpful. I can see people being benefited from that, you know. And so just I started...once I work out my problems, I'll text you. And we can compare answers. And then every time I've done it, it's always been like, oh, yeah, cool. You know, and then it works out...So I was doing it on my own, and it's just harder and then if you don't succeed, then that's your own fault, you know what I mean? So yeah, when you work with other people, it's better. Yeah. Get people's contact information, especially if your major's like a smaller major, smaller-ish major.

Lisa acknowledged the importance of having the social support of peers. In the classroom, she assessed that it was essential to get phone numbers of peers to be successful in finding support. She further recognized that the answers to the challenges previously discussed could be easily addressed with living on campus, getting involved, or building a peer network.

I dissect Lisa's story to exemplify her personal characteristic of being aware that she is not like other students and that she diagnosed that she needed peer support to have greater success in the classroom. Although she did not enact all of this knowledge, such as living on campus, it is her comment, "and then every time I've done it," that demonstrates transitioning capital. This learning allowed her to understand how these acts could be helpful in her experience.

Patrick. Another transfer student's story illuminates a different set of equations that can explain transitioning capital. Patrick used his work ethic throughout his transitioning experience at LSU. Patrick was home-schooled, attended community college, and also worked full-time prior to enrolling at LSU. He took the initiative to find a job prior to the first day of classes; with self-awareness, he said he could not drop from being a full-time employee to not having a job at all. He said his first job on campus was difficult because his supervisor was a micromanager, but now he has great supervisor support. He compared these two experiences:

[At the first place] it was hard for me to build confidence and get comfortable at the job when someone's constantly critiquing me on something. You could've

done that, you could've done that. I'm like, I'm learning. What do you want me to say? Sorry. I definitely learned to survive the first three months or six months in that department but when I got an opportunity to leave, it was totally different. It was way more independent. The culture there fit my personality. They're like here's the skills that you should know, here's how to learn them. Go do it. This is what you're expected to do. And that's my style ...that was definitely nice to have the different work environment.

In this experience, Patrick mentioned learning to survive the first six months of his time at LSU.

He demonstrated his desire to have independence in his work environment. He is pleased with finding the right place to work on campus.

Patrick shared that he had expected to make more friends, and that perhaps he would do that through joining a student organizations, but it proved difficult upon arrival because of the transition to a new place. When asked what influenced his ability to persist at LSU, Patrick replied,

[I] can see the development intellectually. I mean, I've been doing all 3-, 400-level classes now and I'm successful in them so...I see the progress. My grades have steadily improved. I've gotten promoted several times at my job, getting put in more leadership roles. Getting a few raises, too. You can see all the progress and I can equate that to the development I've gotten from being in class, being in the environment, culture. Learning, growing. So that's been fun. That's the good part of it, just seeing, you know, hard work pay off.

When Patrick uses the words *learning* and *growing*, he is referring to the learning that has happened along the way, or rather, the transitioning capital he gained. He noted the positive changes in his transition; better grades, leadership roles, and more money are due to his experiences and how he adjusted to the institution.

Lisa and Patrick are showcased to explain transitioning capital as it is cultivated through everyday experiences. Their use of transitioning capital influenced which strategy they employed to exist at LSU. Lisa identified peers in order to be more successful in the classroom. Patrick used his work environment to help engage in a more positive path for his education.

Summary of Findings

To close this chapter, I provide a summary table below that identifies the key themes and mechanisms related to each of the 3Ss and transitioning capital.

Table 4.1 Summary of Key Themes and Mechanisms

| 3Ss +TgC | Key Themes | Mechanism |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Self | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Perseverance▪ Resilience▪ Intentionality▪ Self-awareness | Exercised through pre- and post-transfer experience |
| Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Peers▪ Family▪ Work▪ Faculty▪ Advisors | Created through <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Past relationships▪ On-campus housing▪ Classroom |
| Situation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Native student paradigm▪ Academic expectations▪ Isolation▪ Stigma | Explained through pathways <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Vertical experience▪ Lateral experience▪ Swirl experience▪ Out-of-state experience |
| Transitioning Capital | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Identify peers▪ Embrace school spirit▪ Choose housing experiences▪ Leverage work experiences▪ Initiate classroom leadership▪ Exploit university opportunities and resources | Addressing challenges of the post-transfer experience <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Academic▪ Social |

Taking into account the 3Ss plus transitioning capital and how they interact with one another, in the following chapter, I am not going to explain them discretely. Rather, I explain what I have come to understand of the post-transfer experience. I argue that transitioning capital illuminates ways in which the transfer student narrative can be transformed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I present the following: (1) an overview of this study; (2) discussion of findings; (3) implications for practice, policy, and theory; and (4) recommendations for further research.

Study Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the post-transfer experiences of underserved transfer students at Liberty State University (LSU). The study highlighted the perceptions of students existing within a native student paradigm. I investigated how transfers students utilized different strategies to address challenges they encountered at the institution. Building upon Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, I identified the internal resources and personal characteristics of the transfer students, their support networks, their understanding of their situation, and the strategies they employed in their post-transfer experience. This study contributes to the existing literature focused on transfer students as it extends the investigation past the initial transfer experience and into the transitioning process.

The participants in this study were first-generation and Pell-eligible transfer students who were non-student athletes and had been at Liberty State University for over a year. I used Pell-eligible and first-generation as criteria to define underserved transfer students, who were the focus of my study. These participants discussed their experiences in academic and social spaces after having transferred to LSU. The transfer students also discussed their familial and social constructs as support networks. Participants shared the experience of their path to the institution. An overarching theme that influenced transfer students at LSU was the way that the native student paradigm influenced their post-transfer experience. This discussion is organized by the following research questions:

Research Questions

- What are the post-transfer experiences of underserved transfer students related to transitioning?
 - What challenges do underserved transfer students encounter?
 - What strategies do underserved transfer students utilize to mitigate those challenges?

Discussion of Findings

Schlossberg's (1984) model provided a complete package, but the reality is that the messiness of everyday experiences cannot be fully understood in those four sections. Thus I conceptualized transitioning capital to encompass the fourth S of strategy.

To provide a holistic description of the transfer student experience, I explain the pre-transfer experiences and the multiple pathways students utilized to enter to the university; then I describe the native student paradigm environment they entered. The selection of strategies they used to address the challenges throughout their experience is entangled with the transitioning capital they acquired as transfer students at Liberty State University.

Pre-Transfer Experience

The impetus of this study was to understand the experience of transfer students after they transferred to the receiving institution. Cumulative knowledge and experiences of higher education environments promote successful adjustment for students transferring from a community college to a four-year university (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2010). I argue that these experiences include any type of transfer student, such as lateral, vertical, or swirl. The personal experiences and characteristics of transfer students are carried throughout their experiences at the new institution. The participants in this study possessed transfer capital, which

is knowledge that includes academic experiences, perceptions of the process, experiences with faculty, and learning and study skills (Laanan, 2007). While Laanan's study focused on community college students, my study includes all transfer pathways. I further the concept by stating that transfer students are in the act of transitioning and existing within a native student paradigm. This means that transfer students continue to gain understanding, awareness and knowledge of how to exist in this native student paradigm.

The dominant narrative written about underserved students perpetuates a deficit model of transfer students (Porter, 1999). This is problematic because it reinforces the myth that transfer students are not academically prepared for university studies. The internal resources and personal characteristics that came to light from these participant interviews illustrated a different story. From a critical perspective, the personal characteristics and internal resources that the transfer students portrayed in their interview cannot be attributed solely to experiences gained after they transferred to the new institution. The framework I used gave me a lens with which to examine the results. The findings in my study are counter to the dominant narrative that underserved transfer students are not academically prepared for college. I make reference to these personal traits as I further explain the transfer student experience.

For universities, the initial interaction with transfer students is primarily bureaucratic. In the transfer admissions process at LSU, students fill out an application, the university confirms credit hours, and students either are allowed to enter the university or they are not. The process is actually more complicated than this, but essentially is the extent to which most universities interact with transfer students. For example, with the limited enrollment of most majors at LSU and the large number of freshmen applicants, there is minimal recruitment of transfer students. Thus, the university does not place much value on the pre-transfer experience in relation to how

this can influence persistence (Herrera & Jain, 2013). This study elevates the experiences of transfer students from a deficit perspective to an asset.

I selected particular demographics for my sample and was inspired by the characteristics that arose from students' stories. While I cannot determine that these students had these characteristics prior to entering LSU, these traits were of students who did persist and are still attending LSU.

In the section discussing self, I wrote about perseverance, resilience, intentionality, and self-awareness. The ways in which transfer students recounted their experiences illuminated these traits. The participants persisted in spite of the challenges they encountered; they found a way to navigate within a native student paradigm. Another trait that I saw portrayed in the transfer students was resilience, a combination of their transfer capital along with their personal characteristics. They were able to take lessons learned and apply them to this new environment. Intentionality was evident in how they approached their experiences at LSU. For instance, they were intentional in how and where they spent their time. The participants' characteristics of self-awareness, independence, and confidence were evident in their stories. Whether they possessed these characteristics prior to transferring to LSU is not clear, but that they now can be described in this way is a testament to the student's ownership of a new narrative.

Multiple Pathways

The various pathways to enter the senior institution were significant in how students experienced their transition at LSU. The definition of a traditional transfer student, two-year to four-year transfer, is changing, as is evident with the multiple pathways that the participants in this study took. I review three types of pathways that arose through my participants' stories: vertical, lateral, and swirling pathways.

The majority of transfer student research is focused on vertical transfer (Gilroy, 2013; McGlynn, 2013b; Whissemore, 2014). The discourse around the rising cost of higher education is relevant to transfer students (Simmons, 2012). Several students in my study mentioned that they started at community college because they believed they could save money and had an aversion to debt (Dowd & Coury, 2006). Also, participants discussed holding multiple jobs to address these same concerns. While some students discussed the network of support at work, they also mentioned that it was difficult to balance work and school (Wood, Harrison, & Jones, 2016). The participants in this study did not discuss their associate degrees as a factor toward their success at LSU, even though the literature pointed to associate degrees as being a strong indicator for student success toward obtaining bachelor's degrees (McGlynn, 2013b). In this study, only six of the participants had associate degrees. Of those students, three had planned to pursue an associate degree; students starting at a community college might have had enough credits for an associate degree but were not aware of it or did not take the necessary steps to receive it. There were a few students who said their initial goal was to transfer and get a bachelor's degree, and so may or may not have intended to also get an associate degree.

Monzerad explained,

I had all the general requirements necessary for LSU and then when I had gone to ask if I could apply for the general associate's, they said no because I had to take these other courses that were required from [the local community college]. And I thought it was pointless.

She further shared that she met with an advisor at her community college who told her that if she was going to pursue a bachelor's degree, there was no point in getting an associate degree. Not obtaining an associate degree or following articulation agreements complicates the discourse around finding other ways to help ensure more underserved students obtain bachelor's degrees.

The research on four-year to four-year transfers indicates that the challenges lateral transfer students faced were similar to vertical transfers (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007) and as a consequence, their experiences tend to be overlooked by the focus on vertical transfers (Li, 2010). However, while similar challenges held true in my study, to the extent that the participants shared with me, there was a particular feeling of disillusion regarding what they held as the ideal college experience. In my study, the lateral transfer students described the complexity of starting at one four-year institution, perhaps with a pause at a two-year school before they transferred to another four-year university, and not feeling a stable connection to any institution. This is similar to Strauss and Volkwein, who found a lack of institutional commitment of the transfer students in their study (2004). Surprisingly, more than half of my participants began their path at a four-year institution although the majority of these transfer students had not planned to attend community college but that was the path that evolved.

I was surprised to find that 14 of the 27 participants of this study started at a four-year university. Some initially attended out-of-state institutions. Existing literature described students who engage in lateral transfers as middle-income students who are more likely to be able to transfer because they can afford it (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). As shown by my study, such a belief about this type of transfer does not tell the full story. There are factors to consider in lateral transfers other than just being middle-class. For example, students went to the initial four-year institution because they received a scholarship for academics or sports, as Li's (2010) study found. It is insufficient to understand the decision-making and lived experiences by only looking at socioeconomic class. The participants in my study did not have a change in SES but rather their circumstances changed, which resulted in their transfer.

Swirling is the pathway that includes attending multiple institutions (e.g., two-year to a four-year to two-year) before reaching an academic end goal such as a certificate or degree. As the swirling pathway becomes more popular among students (Borden, 2004), it is also clear that there are multiple ways to swirl. Several students started at a four-year institution, then swirled to a two-year and then to a four-year institution. The students who attended out-of-state schools but then returned to LSU showed that in addition to the challenges of transitioning to a new university, there was an added layer of resentment of being at a university that they had not originally intended because the return was not a voluntary choice for them.

Transitioning Capital

I extend my idea of transitioning capital, modeling after Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework. Community cultural wealth addresses the issues that Communities of Color face when they are marginalized. Yosso discussed community cultural wealth in six forms of capital: aspirational, social, linguistic, familial, resistant, and navigational. Similar to navigational capital, my concept of transitioning capital is maneuvering through social institutions that are primarily native student dominant. Analogous to Yosso using other scholars to create her theory, I use Schlossberg (1981, 1984) and colleagues (Anderson et al., 2006; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984) and Laanan and colleagues (2007; 2011) to develop transitioning capital (TgC). Parallel to community cultural wealth, where the "various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77), transitioning capital is a fluid development. The progression of TgC is dependent on the transfer student's varying needs. For example, if a student is self-aware, he may be more likely to take initiative and approach a professor or a classmate and recognize that meeting peers can make him successful in the classroom. Through the post-

transfer experience, I argue that transitioning capital is a vehicle to transform the transfer student narrative from a deficit model to a narrative that highlights the strong characteristics of students that are beneficial to the success of students and the university.

Although I used Schlossberg's (1984) framework to understand adaptation as persistence, I recognize that it is transitioning that makes the most sense. I contend that it is the ongoing transitioning experience that allows for learning. What is not emphasized in Schlossberg's framework is that through the transition experience, learning is happening along the way, such that this knowledge is acquired consciously and unconsciously. I believe that this is a way of creating a positive narrative around the strength and tenacity needed for transfer students to exist in a collegiate environment that does not place them at the center of its policies and practices. Yet, in my study, the structure of a native student paradigm at the senior institution continues to exist and creates a challenging environment for transfer students.

Native Student Paradigm

A major finding in my study was the extent to which the native student paradigm influenced transfer students' post-transfer experience. Despite the fact that transfer students enter with transfer capital, the university overshadows those assets with the native paradigm embedded in various policies and practices. Transfer students know they will be entering a new space with which they are unfamiliar. When transfer students enter this context, I argue that they face isolation and the stigma that they may have internalized. Yet, the university perpetuates a native student paradigm for its own benefit. There is no need to change this orientation because the majority of the student population remains native students, even if there are more transfer students than ever before.

Besides the students who were offered deferred admission, only a handful of students had intentional plans of attending LSU at the beginning of their postsecondary journey. Most students who transferred to LSU felt like they ended up there by chance. I argue that there is a relationship of indifference between the transfer students in my study and the university affecting their post-transfer experience, which perpetuates a lack of connection to the institution (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004). This is exacerbated by the native student paradigm that transfer students enter upon matriculating to the university.

A native student paradigm mistakenly conceptualizes undergraduate students as those who matriculate at the university immediately after graduating from high school and are eager to enter a relationship with the university (Quaye & Harper, 2015). The students are assumed to live on campus and work part-time jobs that situate them as students first. While some universities have predominantly traditional students, it is important to recognize that the demographics of postsecondary institutions are changing. To oversimplify and use the native student paradigm as an all-encompassing perspective is misguided as it does not take into consideration the diverse student populations such as non-traditional age returning students. Universities make assumptions about the undergraduate student population and place the onus of fitting in and adjusting to the university on students even if they do (Laanan et al., 2011). Many students in this study did not fit the mold, and the native student paradigm did not mitigate the experience of transfer students in a way that helps them transition. If universities are where knowledge and growth occur, then they need to foster that for all students, including transfer students.

Transfer Student Challenges

The challenges that the students discussed in my study are not unknown to other transfer student studies, as several scholars have shed light on these findings (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Moodie, 2007). I argue that the academic and social challenges students encounter within a strong native student paradigm create an invisible identity. Although transfer students know that they transferred to the university, there is no recognition that they hold this status. When transfer students are in class and there is no recognition, much less a discussion of their previous experience at other universities, transfer student identity becomes invisible, which leads to transfer students facing their experience in isolation.

The academic challenges students in this study faced included the transfer students' perception that they were not capable of completing the work and did not deserve to be at the university. This also perpetuates the perception that their previous academic institutions were not as academically rigorous. Students, like Monzerad, felt that they did not belong. She shared:

Sometimes I do feel like when you tell people you're a transfer student, they kinda look at you differently, especially when you tell them what college you came from. They think that you took the easy way. They're like, oh, those classes are easier.

Transfer students shared how some experiences in the classroom also contributed to not fitting in, and this lack of connection factored into their invisible identity. This invisible identity in classroom contributes to transfer shock. Students need time to transition to a new place and to be advised adequately, taking into consideration their previous experience and future goals, as well as students creating networks of support.

The participants in my study were eager to have stronger relationships with faculty, much like other studies that showed relationships with faculty are imperative for students to have positive experiences (Barnett, 2011; Rendon, 1993). The challenges in doing so were time

constraints due to the professor's availability or the student's personal schedule. The other challenge was that students felt that they were not recognized in class. The professors made no distinctions between transfer and native students and therefore, did not create space for transfer students to be appreciated for their previous experiences.

One main facet of the transfer student narrative is the expectation that students will experience transfer shock, meaning they will have a drop in grades (Laanan et al., 2011). While there are multiple reasons why students experience shock, the most commonly understood and researched explanation is that students are ill-prepared for the academic rigor. My findings push this understanding further, in that the transfer students in this study pointed out the lack of informal academic support as an important reason for their shock. Students relied on their transitioning capital to accommodate for this lack of support. One way they did this was to create informal groups by obtaining classmate phone numbers to get help or taking initiative to be a leader in the class.

Strategies

Transfer students employed various strategies to address the challenges they encountered. Transfer students are working within the native student paradigm to create space for themselves. I discuss six strategies that the transfer students utilized: identify other transfer students, embrace school spirit, purposefully choose housing arrangements, leverage work experiences, engage in classroom leadership, and capitalize on university resources and opportunities.

Identify other transfer students. Transfer students' connection to other transfer students substantiates the need to have a network of individuals who shared similar identities. The transfer students in this study spoke of feeling validated or rather not feeling as isolated when they met other transfer students.

Embrace school spirit. Embracing school spirit means students were seeking a way to be a part of something, to be connected to the institution. The students who mentioned being part of the LSU family mentioned the benefits that were associated with being the network of the university. Transfer students felt that they were as much a part of the university as any other student and embraced the school spirit.

Purposefully choose housing arrangements. A unique strategy that transfer students used while at the university was to decide where to live. Some students lived on campus, and others wished they had done so, but most importantly, the participants changed their living arrangements. Moving was mostly from on-campus to off-campus housing, but what students defined as off-campus housing may have been only across the street from the university. The proximity to the university provided students with both the benefits of campus and the freedom they wanted.

Leverage work experiences. Students identified work as a way to find a support network. In the support section of Chapter 4, the way that students discussed their relationship with work and how they used that space to fill the support network gaps was most interesting. In a native student paradigm, work has been found to provide structure and experience for students. Universities typically do not focus on work as a primary avenue for social integration (Perna, 2010). However, for transfer students, the purpose of their job was to have gainful employment and provide for themselves and family. For example, students worked full-time at banks and in government agencies. This is an alternate narrative to the one of a student holding a work-study job on campus. Many transfer students held multiple jobs, so they were spending more time in those spaces than on campus.

Engage in classroom leadership. The participants in my study used classroom leadership as a strategy to find connection and decrease isolation. These strategies are similar to Strauss and Volkwein's (2004) study that argued classroom experiences are strong predictors of a student's commitment to the institution. My participants used their intentionality to stay focused on obtaining a degree. They recognized the need to take control of finding their own supports to learn in the classroom.

Capitalize on university resources and opportunities. The ways in which students were intentional in taking advantage of institutional opportunities and resources showed how they had maneuvered through the university. Transfer students did not feel that the university sought to integrate them; rather, it was more the student taking initiative. Quaye and Harper (2015) argued that the university should intentionally provide ways to integrate students, and I agree that this continues to be an area for growth in serving transfer students. Universities also tout student organizations as places where students can find social support networks (Tinto, 1993). For the most part, transfer students in this study were intentional in how they rarely participated in student organizations. They were strategic in how they spent their time and would not pursue the student organization for making friends. They saw that being a part of a student organization was instrumental in furthering their career network.

Study Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

What this study brings to the literature is an understanding of how transfer students are successful at the receiving institution, despite existing in an environment that can be isolating and indifferent to their needs. The findings from this study could make an important contribution to practice, theory, and research concerning transfer student populations. First, I discuss implications for practice and theory. Then, I provide recommendations for future research.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study are important and can be helpful to students, faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrators. The transfer students' comments inform my recommendations in how to better serve transfer students. First, the concept that transfer students felt invisible should be concerning to institutional actors (e.g., faculty, staff administrators). Any initial communication with students through websites and personal interaction should reflect the vast experiences of transfer students. Once students are enrolled at the institution, faculty and staff could try to mitigate the invisible transfer student identity by providing information that is more inclusive of transfer students. Faculty could discuss the diverse pathways that students use to enter the university by making the class aware of different starting points.

Students suggested that their college or department provide a transfer student mentor that could be an ally and provide another avenue to learn about the university and institutional culture. These mentors would also be transfer students who could begin to break down the invisible student identity for and with the newly transferred student.

During the interviews, transfer students mentioned orientation as an early interaction with the university. They wanted to be able to have transfer student orientation leaders who could understand the challenges that were unique to transfer students. At orientation, transfer students also remarked that the advising they received lacked a nuanced understanding of what they needed.

This study could be helpful in highlighting the plight and unique experiences of transfer students. As noted in the study, faculty may not realize the diversity and unique needs that transfer students bring to the classroom environment. Faculty members at the receiving institution may also fail to make themselves available to transfer students in the way that

students expect, given their experiences in their previous institutional setting, or at times that provide access for those commuting to campus. Faculty behaviors can take into account the transfer students in their classroom and make sure that the curriculum and class dynamics are more welcoming; for instance, they could invite transfer students to talk about their experiences, thus giving voice to transfer students (Rendón, 2006). Another example of how this could occur is for faculty to create small groups and encourage students to exchange phone numbers, emails or connect via social media. Whether the student is a transfer student or not, this would be a way to address what the participants noted as a way to be included in the new environment.

When administrators are examining policies and practices about student success, the native student paradigm should be acknowledged. If the university accepts transfer as an ongoing learning activity, then just providing a one-time orientation or a pamphlet is not sufficient. A more nuanced approach, such as a new student paradigm, would include all students who are new to the university. The Initiative on Transfer Policy and Practice (2011), in collaboration with the College Board's Advocacy and Policy Center, support that the continuous method of providing services would be to create a transition center for all students who have never attended the university.

Implications for Policy

The investment in higher education for underserved students continues to be an area of focus for policymakers ("Number of associate degrees for transfer awarded nearly doubles in california community colleges over the past year", 2015). As more legislative and institutional policies are instituted to make transferring less cumbersome for students, policy makers should keep in mind that policies should reflect more than credit hours. There are financial incentives for students to start at these institutions. However, what is not discussed are the ways that

transfer students will be supported at the university once they transfer. Policymakers should also be focused on the institutional resources that can be made available to better serve transfer students at the local university. Perhaps community colleges could have liaisons at the university to help community college transfer students know more about the process of transferring through introductory seminars or other events.

Implications for Theory

This study used Schlossberg's transition theory (1984) to inform the data analysis. Transition theory positioned me to think of transition as a very static and linear process. There is an event, there are environmental and personal factors that affect the event, and then there is an outcome. However, it is the culmination of the experience of the 3Ss plus transitioning capital that allows transfer students to continuously transition which is needed to persist post-transfer. Schlossberg's theory did not sufficiently describe my findings. To this end, the post-transfer experience is influenced by the previous experiences of the transfer students. The students' own personal traits or need for support varied; thus, there is a flux of the transition that is specific to each experience.

While the goal of the transition theory is denoted as adaptation, this study suggests that adaptation is an evolving process. Adaptation is not finite or a one-time episode; rather, it is fluid such that students experience different aspects of the transition process over and over again. Schlossberg's (1984) model is unidirectional in the way the influential factors of self and environment impact adaptation.

Also, I used Laanan's transfer capital (2007) as a benchmark understanding of transfer capital. However, I was confounded with trying to understand how this capital included the ongoing acquisition or accumulation of capital. I challenge the finite point that once a student

transfers, the process is complete and transfer capital is acquired. As transfer students navigate the native student paradigm, they are continuously faced with trying to fit in. Thus, I use transitioning capital to include the ongoing building of the knowledge base of information for students to adjust to the new institution.

Recommendations for Future Research

I recommend four areas for further research on understanding the post-transfer experience of underserved transfer students. First, researchers should consider conducting longitudinal studies on the experiences of transfer students. In the current study, the participants were only interviewed once. Interviewing transfer students when they first arrive to the senior institution and following them throughout the duration of their college career would provide a rich and in-depth understanding of transfer student experiences. This could be done at different kinds of institutions where there is a larger or predominantly transfer student population. Researchers would need to keep in mind that the presence of a significant number of transfer students does not negate that the university may still be operating in a native student paradigm.

Second, research studies should focus on students who have stopped out. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that students who failed to recognize how to utilize transitioning capital may not have figured out how to continue in the native student paradigm which could lead to dropping out. As that population is difficult to identify, perhaps it would be important to study transfer students who are currently struggling academically before they stop out. Such studies could be conducted using a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research design.

Another area of research could include an examination of the impact of articulation agreements, dual enrollment, and transfer credit policies and practices once the transfer students completed their bachelor's degree. Researchers could inquire about the transfer student readiness

in its relation to such policies and practices from the perspectives of admissions counselors, student affairs professionals (e.g., academic advisors) and students. These studies could identify ways to improve transfer student access and success.

Finally, I recommend a qualitative study that investigates the experiences of institutional actors and how they understand their role in the transfer student experience. In the current study, I informally interviewed institutional actors to inform the context of the study. However, throughout these interviews, I discovered the importance of what the university states as its goals for all students and how each individual college enacts those objectives. These findings, though outside of the scope of the current study, warrant further attention.

Conclusion

This study examined the post-transfer experience of underserved transfer students. I used Schlossberg's (1981) transition model to understand this experience. Findings from this study shed light on the challenges students face entering into an environment that does not prioritize transfer students but instead focuses on native students. This exists so strongly that transfer students feel faceless and unrecognized. Transitioning capital allowed students to use their personal characteristics (perseverance, resilience, intentionality, and self-awareness) as resources to overcome feelings of isolation and stigma to exist and persist. The post-transfer experience is marked with continuous learning and knowledge production. What matters most from this study is that the transitioning capital students gain continues to add to their strengths.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Lateral Transfer

The literature on four-year to four-year transfer was minimal. Students who transferred between four-year universities had a myriad of reasons for their transfer decisions. For lateral transfer students, reasons they transferred were that they may have gone out-of-state or to private colleges and could not continue to afford them (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). For example, they had not been originally offered admission to their first choice university and so they attempted to seek admission as a transfer student.

What we do know was that “four-to-four [year institution] transfers were seldom facilitated by state policies...(and) may take longer to achieve their academic goal” (Li, 2010). The four-year to four-year transfers were comprised of middle socioeconomic status students who had the financial means to make this change. Students from affluent high schools were more likely to transfer to a four-year institution (Niu & Tienda, 2013). Kirk-Kuwaye and Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) explained that “little is known about the LT [lateral transfer] student transition experience and how their previous experience and institutional types may affect the success of their transition” (p. 11).

For transfer students specifically, the persistence rates focused on vertical transfer and less was known about four-year to four-year transfer rates. Even though, institutions neglected to recognize that transfer students had also shown their persistence through the transfer process, this did not mean that students persisted post-transfer. My study focused on the transfer student experience including both vertical and lateral transfer.

APPENDIX B: IRB Approval Letter

February 1, 2016

To: Dr. [Advisor]

Address

Re: IRB# XXXXXX Category: Exempt 1

Approval Date: February 1, 2016

Title: Post-transfer Experiences of Underserved Transfer Students

The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that your project has been deemed as exempt in accordance with federal regulations. The IRB has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for the protection of human subjects in exempt research. Under our exempt policy the Principal Investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects in this project as outlined in the assurance letter and exempt educational material. The IRB office has received your signed assurance for exempt research. A copy of this signed agreement is appended for your information and records.

Renewals : Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. If the project is completed, please submit an Application for Permanent Closure.

Revisions : Exempt protocols do not require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a new initial application will be required.

Problems : If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the IRB office promptly. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the IRB.

Follow-up : If your exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the IRB office will contact you regarding the status of the project and to verify that no changes have occurred that may affect exempt status.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at xxx-xxx-xxxx or via email at IRB@LSU.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

SIRB Chair
c: Student

APPENDIX C: Participant Solicitation Letter

Greetings—

My name is [Student Name], and I am currently a doctoral candidate in [Program Name] at Liberty State University. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a study on the experiences of transfer students. This research is important because the experience of students who have transferred is not often studied so you will help us know more about the opportunities and challenges you face as someone who did not start their college experience at this institution.

Your story will help me better understand the experiences of a student after they have transferred and provide information that may be useful in the future to help other transfer students as they work to achieve their academic goals. The information from the interviews will be for completion of my dissertation on the experiences of transfer students. Participation will include an interview of 45 to 60 minutes with the possibility of a second interview to further my understanding. Interviews will be in person in a location of your choosing and will accommodate your schedule.

My goal is to conduct interviews in February and early March. Any identifying information will be removed from final documents and analysis. As a token of appreciation for your time, **you will be given a \$10 gift card to Amazon.com for your participation.** If you are willing to participate, please fill out the information form through this link and I will be in touch as soon as possible:

<http://bit.ly/xxxxxxx>

I appreciate your willingness to consider participating in this study. Also, please feel free to forward this email to any friends that would fit the needs of this study. Participants need to be transfer students at LSU who have been at LSU for one full academic year, meaning fall and spring, first-generation college students, and/or Pell grant eligible and non-student athletes.

Thanks!

Student

Doctoral Candidate

Liberty State University

[Program Name]

IRB# XXXXXXXX

APPENDIX D: Profile Demographic Questionnaire

The information that you provide below will be kept strictly confidential. You reserve the right to refrain from answering any question(s) that you do not wish to answer.

1. First Name: _____
2. Last Name: _____
3. To protect your identity, please provide a pseudonym in place of your full legal name: _____
4. What is your citizenship status? _____ U.S. citizen _____ Permanent Resident _____ Other
5. How do you identify? Please check all that apply:
_____ Black or African American
_____ White (Not Hispanic/Not Latino)
_____ Hispanic or Latino
_____ American Indian
_____ Asian
_____ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
_____ Multiracial (Having parents of more than one race)
_____ Member of race not listed above: _____
6. What year were you born?
7. Do you live on campus? Yes _____ No _____
8. Do you work on campus? If so, how many hours?
9. What is your current major?
10. Email: _____
11. Phone number: _____

THANK YOU

APPENDIX E: Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant:

This study is intended to understand the post-transfer experiences of underserved transfer students. Your participation in this study will help me better understand the factors that lead to the persistence, including the challenges you face and the strategies you used to address those challenges. This is an invitation to participate in a 45-60 minute interview. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures and will be conducted by [Student] under the supervision of Dr. [Advisor]. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms prior to analysis, and all identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis. As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$10 gift card to Amazon.com for your participation.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty for doing so. However, if you are under the age of 18, you cannot participate in this study. You can choose not to participate at all, or not answer some or all of the questions. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. The interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. If you agree that I may do so, you can request at any time that I turn off the recorder. It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing your experiences and if so, I remind you that you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate the interview. Digital recordings will be kept in a secure location until three years after this study is completed, at which time they will be erased. I will use a pseudonym of your choice in transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data. The information form, on which you indicate your name, contact information, and chosen pseudonym, will be maintained by the researchers in a secure location until three years after the end of the study, when it will be destroyed. The information form will be kept in a separate secure location than that of the digital recording. Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact the researcher: Researcher Name, (xxx) xxx-xxxx, xxx@LSU.edu, or my faculty member Dr. [Advisor], Professor in [Program Name], Address, Liberty State University, by phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx, or email: xxx@LSU.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Liberty State University's Human Research Protection Program at xxx-xxx-xxxx, Fax xxx-xxx-xxxx, or e-mail xxx@LSU.edu or regular mail at address.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (please print)

APPENDIX F: Demographic Survey

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Now can you tell me your story prior to Liberty State University?
 - a. Where did you go to college before Liberty State University?
 - b. How long did you go to that school(s)?
 - c. Why did you transfer?
3. Why did you choose Liberty State University?
 - a. What is your current classification? i.e. Sophomore, Junior, Senior
 - b. Tell me about your classes, major, college/department.
 - c. What do you enjoy about them? What has been difficult?
4. On the survey you said you lived XYZ [based on the survey response]
 - a. Did/ do you live with friends, family, or alone?
 - b. Is this living arrangement the same as before you transferred?
 - c. How has this living arrangement affected your college experience?
5. Tell me what you thought college was going to be like.
 - a. What were your expectations?
 - b. Where did these expectations come from?
6. Now that you've shared those expectations, do they differ for Liberty State University?
 - a. Where did these expectations come from?
7. Describe your transfer process.
 - a. Did you participate in any Liberty State University specific activities focused on transfer students?
8. Since transferring to Liberty State University, can you share

- a. Any positive experiences you have had?
 - b. Any challenges you have encountered? How did you address those challenges?
9. Tell me about a typical day for you.
10. Can you speak to any factors that have pulled you away from being your ideal student?
11. What do you think is unique in the college experience for transfer students, as opposed to those who started here, if anything?
12. What do you say to those who say "Transfer students don't want to be recognized as transfer students."
13. Tell me how you are connected to things on campus other than your classes. Were they supportive in your college experience?
14. Tell me about any ways you have found support since coming to Liberty State University. Is there an experience where you think that the university has helped or aided you coming back year after year?
15. Now in contrast tell me about an experience where you did not think you would come back. Is there anything specific the university did or did not do that contributed to you feeling this way?
16. How do you think all the things we have been talking about today i.e., expectations, successes, and challenges) influence your ability to continue on your path in higher education? What keeps you coming back?
17. What suggestions do you have for campus educators to better serve transfer students?
18. For future transfer students what are some warnings, you'd offer?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about what we have discussed today?

20. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX G: Comprehensive Participant Demographics

Table G.1 Participant Demographics, Pathways, College, 1st Generation College Student Status and Pell-Eligibility Status

| <u>Student</u> | <u>Race/ Ethnicity</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Gender</u> | <u>Pathway</u> | <u>College</u> | <u>1st Gen</u> | <u>Pell Eligible</u> |
|----------------|------------------------------|------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| KC | White | 34 | Female | 2-LSU | Social science | No | Yes |
| Brandon | White | 23 | Male | DA-2-LSU | Engineering | Yes | Yes |
| John | Hispanic or Latino | 23 | Male | 2-LSU | Business | Yes | No |
| Lauren | Black or African American | 23 | Female | 2-4-LSU | Business | No | Yes |
| Jay | Multiracial (White/Asian) | 22 | Male | 2-LSU | Business | Yes | Yes |
| Patrick | White | 24 | Male | 2-LSU | Communication Arts & Sciences | No | Yes |
| Ryan | Member of race not listed | NA | Male | DA-4-LSU | Natural science | No | Yes |
| Deborah | White | 22 | Female | 4(OOS)-2-LSU | Social science | Yes | Yes |
| Olivia | Multiracial (White/Hispanic) | 23 | Female | 2-LSU | Natural science | Yes | Yes |
| Mike | White | 44 | Male | 2-ARMY-2-LSU | Engineering | Yes | Yes |
| Christian | Asian | 22 | Male | DA-4-LSU | Engineering | No | Yes |
| Sam | Arab American | 21 | Male | 4-LSU | Social science | No | Yes |
| Chase | Hispanic or Latino | 23 | Female | 2(OOS)-LSU | Social science | Yes | No |
| Shannon | Black or African American | 24 | Female | 4(OOS)-2-LSU | Agriculture & Natural Resources | No | Yes |
| Lisa | Multiracial (White/NA) | 24 | Female | 2-2-LSU | Agriculture & Natural Resources | No | Yes |

Table G.1 (cont'd)

| | | | | | | | |
|----------|------------------------------------------------|----|--------|------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Benjamin | White | 30 | Male | 4-LSU | Communicati on Arts & Sciences | Yes | Yes |
| Bronn | White | 22 | Male | 4-2-LSU | Engineering | Yes | No |
| Lydia | White | 25 | Female | 4-2-LSU | Communicati on Arts & Sciences | Yes | Yes |
| Victoria | Hispanic or Latino | 23 | Female | 4(OOS)- LSU | Communicati on Arts & Sciences | Yes | Yes |
| Bill | White | 25 | Male | 4-4-4- LSU | Education | Yes | Yes |
| Monzerad | Hispanic or Latino | 23 | Female | 2-LSU | Residential college | Yes | No |
| Claire | White | 21 | Female | 4-LSU | Communicati on Arts & Sciences | Yes | No |
| Sophia | Asian | 21 | Female | DA-4- LSU | Natural science | Yes | No |
| Amelia | White | 29 | Female | 4-2-LSU | Social science | No | Yes |
| Jacob | White (Not Hispanic/Not Latino) | 23 | Male | 2-LSU | Social science | Yes | Yes |
| Elvira | Hispanic or Latino | 34 | Female | 2-LSU | Social science | Yes | Yes |
| Austin | Multiracial (White/ African American) | 23 | Male | 4(OOS)- 2-LSU | Education | Yes | No |

Description for pathways listed above

| | |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2-LSU | Student transfers from a 2-year college to Midwest State University |
| 2-2-LSU | Student transfers from a 2-year to a 2-year to Midwest State University |
| 2-4-LSU | Student transfers from a 2-year to a 4-year to Midwest State University |
| 4-LSU | Student transfers from a 4-year to Midwest State University |

Table G.1 (cont'd)

| | |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4-2-LSU | Student transfers from a 4-year to a 2-year to Midwest State University |
| DA-2-LSU | Student initially applied to Midwest State University and was offered deferred admission the following spring semester. This student went to a 2-year college then to Midwest State University |
| DA-4-LSU | Student initially applied to Midwest State University and was offered deferred admission the following spring semester. This student went to a 4-year college then to Midwest State University |
| OOS | Denotes if a student went to an Out of State school |

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