West Chester University

Digital Commons @ West Chester University

Navigating The Higher Education Transition: Focused Support for Transfer Students

Scott Yannick
West Chester University of Pennsylvania, syannick@wcupa.edu

West Chester University

Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs

THESIS

NAVIGATING THE HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSITION: FOCUSED SUPPORT FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

Scott Yannick

May 2020

NAVIGATING THE HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSITION:
FOCUSED SUPPORT FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Science

By

Scott Yannick

May 2020

Abstract

Transfer students often face challenges when transitioning into a new institution. Transfer student orientation and onboarding usually consists of a broad overview that does not speak directly to individual circumstances and concerns. In this thesis, I will propose an alternative to traditional orientation programming that supports the transfer student transition through online modules that are focused on the student's individual needs. I use Critical Action Research as my framework to address these concerns. My proposed intervention, a Transfer Student Onboarding Experience, is described and includes an examination of funding and implementation challenges. This topic is important for Student Affairs practitioners because helping students succeed to graduation is a high priority and this helps increase the institution's retention rate.

Keywords: Transfer Students, Student Affairs, Onboarding, Retention

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Transfer students, students who begin their post-secondary education at one institution and then transfer credits to a new institution to complete their degree, often experience a drop in Grade Point Average (GPA) at their new institution based on the struggle they have with academic rigor, engaging in their new campus environment, and feeling like they do not belong (Hills 1965). This can lead to decreases in retention and graduation rates as they withdraw from their transfer institution without completing their degree.

Most universities provide a generic onboarding orientation for all transfer students as if they are a single homogenous group. I feel that each transfer student is unique and support should be available to address their individual needs. In this thesis, I will define different types of transfer students and identify resources they need to succeed in college. These transfer student groups will be defined by credits transferred in, as well as by age. Acknowledging that transfer students may require different types of supports, this thesis will focus on three categories: Academic Support, Career Support, and Engagement Support.

In Chapter 1, I will give a detailed description of my personal background and show how my life experiences have led me to the thematic concern of helping transfer students. I will organize this section into the following subsections that transfer students find as barriers: Early Family Background, Engagement, Sense of Belonging, Self-Authorship, and Career Experiences. This will lead directly into a broad introduction of my concern showing why it is important to help the transfer student population. The final section of this chapter will give a preview into Chapter 3, "The Narrative," that will look at philosophical positionality, historical background about transfer students in higher education, the current state of the concern, as well as other factors that help to frame my concern.

Early Family Background

My father went directly into the Air Force from high school. My mother was attending a state college studying home economics when she met my father who was stationed in the area. She left college after one semester, married my father in the Catholic Church, had her first child and began her career as a homemaker. After serving in the military, my father worked for my grandfather in the family-owned grocery business. Later, he left the family business and began working at a local pharmaceutical lab where he started as a janitor. He worked his way up through the organization until he eventually was a fermentation technician and supervisor.

Growing up, we were a one income family. My sister and I were taught a strong work ethic. Between school years, my family stayed at the beach and I had the opportunity to work six days a week the entire summer at a bait and tackle shop. I started working when I was thirteen years old and continued working that summer job until my final year of college. With money I saved while employed, I purchased a used car and paid for half of my college tuition and expenses.

There was never a question whether I would go to college or not. Both of my parents believed that a bachelor's degree was needed to secure a good job and to compete for promotions within a company. I knew I needed a degree to succeed in life, but I did not think it had to be in any particular field, as long as it seemed like it could lead to gainful employment. My real passion was acting, but I knew that my parents would not perceive studying acting as practical, or that it would lead to a steady reliable job.

In my senior year of high school, I only applied to two institutions—a local four-year state college and a private four-year college. I was accepted at the state college which was my first choice as it was closer to where I lived and to my job. It was also more affordable than the private college, which was a determinant factor since my family was only paying for half of my

tuition. I wanted to make a practical decision. I think it was a fine match for me. Since it was not too large a school, I had smaller size classes. I knew some other people from high school who were going to the same college, so I felt like that would make it easier to navigate with others I already knew.

Sense of Belonging

At that point in my life, I identified as "middle working" class. We had a moderate-sized house and trailer home at the beach where we vacationed. I was aware that other students in my high school had wealthier parents who bought them nicer, brand name clothes and their first cars, and who enabled them to pursue expensive hobbies like skiing. I came to college feeling positive about my socio-economic standing. I never felt like I wanted for things. But looking back on it, I realize that having to pay for my own college education meant that I did not have the free time to engage in college the way others did.

Undergraduate Experience & Self-Authorship

I had no idea what I wanted to do for work and so I was not sure what major to pick. I was interested in media and performing arts so I chose to study speech communications which I thought would be useful in many job fields. In high school, I was an average student and did not do well in math, so I thought I should study a field with minimal math so I could get better grades and successfully complete a degree. Many transfer students find themselves lost in deciding on a degree program. Balancing practicality and major choice with the ability to successfully complete a degree program may be a reason a student would transfer to another school, if they were having trouble succeeding in a specific major at their previous college.

Because I lived at home and worked full time at a local department store during the school year, I spent most of my time racing between classes and work. My goal was to pass my

classes and get through school as quickly as possible, to get that "piece of paper," in order to obtain a better job than the entry level retail position I was working.

I wanted to gain some experience in television production and performing and my college did not offer any broadcasting programs, so I tried to create my own concentration in media by taking all the television production and theater classes I could to fulfill my free electives. This was major growth in my "Self-Authorship" identity (Magolda, 2008). I was able to move from what others told me to do, to instead create what made sense for me.

Engagement

Although my main goal was to attain a degree as quickly as I could, I was also aware that I needed to be involved in something on campus to add to my resume. I participated in theater when I was in high school and thought I would love to be an actor, so I took many elective courses in Theater and auditioned for plays and musicals at the college starting in my sophomore year. I was very intimidated by the musical audition as it required participants to learn a song from the show with a vocal coach on campus and to complete a dance audition in front of a mirror. I literally felt like I was auditioning for Broadway. I was not experienced enough to succeed in getting cast but I was proud of myself for completing the process. It did not discourage me from continuing to audition for shows, and in my senior year, I finally got cast in a small character part in a comedy for the main stage. I really enjoyed the entire experience and finally felt like I got a true taste of what majoring in Theater would have been like.

In my second attempt at becoming engaged on campus, I participated in training on how to be a disc jockey on the college radio station. At the same time, I also investigated how to be involved with the school newspaper. I realized both of these activities would require a substantial amount of time, so I opted to continue with only the newspaper. This ended up being

a good choice, as I was later able to complete a minor in Journalism and had practical news writing experience as well.

During those formative years, perhaps because my college engagement was limited, I felt my true opportunity for personal growth, to learn self-sufficiency and responsibility, came from working a real job. I learned transferrable skills at work that aided my ability to be a successful college student. I learned to manage my time and handle the pressures that went along with deadlines, so I could complete assignments and school requirements in the hours in between my work schedule.

My social circle only consisted of my work teammates. I did not have time to form friendships with classmates outside of class. Even when I wrote for the college newspaper, it was isolated, independent writing assignments. When I performed in the play, I did have some social interaction, working with the other actors and production staff, but nothing deep. There were two theater professors who gave me confidence in my acting and encouraged me to audition for the university theater productions. It is my experience that having encouragement from campus staff, faculty, or peers can help a student engage on campus and to feel more a part of the culture. This is especially important for transfer students who are entering the institution mid-career with less time to make connections prior to completion.

One of the biggest hindrances of my college experience was the limited financial means of my family and myself, and the need for a close location which allowed me to work full-time. I am sure I would have had a completely different experience if I went away from my hometown to school and lived on campus. Even if I had not needed to work to pay my tuition, I am sure I would have been more engaged with all the organizations and events that happened on campus.

As it was, my experience in earning my Bachelor's degree was that it was a means to an end with the primary focus being obtaining gainful employment.

My Career Trajectory

In my final semester of college, QVC—a new television shopping studio, was built close to the college and my hometown. I immediately answered an advertisement to audition to be a "show host" on the program. When I did not get the show host position offer, I applied and was hired for a customer service position answering phones and placing orders. I worked on the phones for about six months, and then applied for a production assistant position in the broadcasting production area when a position opened. I was successful in obtaining that position, and continued to work my way up to a lead, then supervisor, then over the next fifteen years was promoted to Associate Producer, TV Sales Manager, and Talent Coordinator. In the last part of my career at QVC, I helped to start up a Studio Operation Center, and was promoted to the supervisor, and then manager of the department. I worked in this area for fourteen years, until there was a huge corporate restructuring, with hundreds of jobs eliminated including mine.

Transitioning to Higher Education

What brought me to the field of higher education as a vocation was the loss of a longtime job through a corporate restructuring, and trying to figure out where my life and work skills would best fit. I wanted a job I would find satisfaction with that involved helping people. After I began in the field, I felt like this was a great fit for my strong interpersonal skills and customer service expertise.

I was first hired at a four-year public state system university in a temporary role split between two areas. Three days a week, I was a Program Coordinator working as a support advisor for the Professional Studies Bachelors of Science degree program students. I met with

students to help assist them in scheduling their classes and to answer their questions about the program. It is in that position that I first started working with a variety of undergraduate students, but especially transfer students, and began to learn of their unique challenges and the barriers they were encountering while trying to complete their degree.

The second part of my job, two days a week, was to help support the Dean of Graduate Studies by acting as a point person for students with academic integrity cases and grade appeal hearings where I helped to explain the process to them and organize required hearing boards. In addition, I created process efficiencies in the records area by developing training sheets for graduate office procedures, creating academic hearing case tracking and results spreadsheets, and acted as the thesis format advisor for all student's submitting a Master's thesis.

After six months in this dual position, I was asked by the Senior Vice-Provost if I would be interested in taking on a new undefined role as Transfer Concierge. I immediately responded that I would like to take on this new role and develop it. Based on the interactions I already had with transfer students, I was aware of some of the barriers they were facing and the challenges they were experiencing in navigating the university. In the Transfer Concierge role at my university, I am charged with helping connect incoming transfer students to resources on campus to help them successfully acclimate to campus, engage on-campus, and ultimately to graduate. I act as an overall advisor for student success for this specific group of students, but do not advise for any specific degree programs.

One of the first things I noticed in my new role was that all transfer students—regardless of their prior college experience, class-standing, or the number of credits they were transferring in from their prior institutions—were given the same onboarding and information about connecting to campus resources. This meant a student transferring in with 15 credits or less was

treated the same way as a student who was entering the institution with a completed Associate's degree or Bachelor's degree. My work with this population has shown me that transfer students with varying degrees of prior college experience have very different challenges and need information and resources that are specific to their needs and at different points in their transition and continuing college career. In this thesis, I propose a programmatic intervention which will help address the need for onboarding and just-in-time resources that are specific to subgroups within the entire new transfer student population to help them overcome challenges to their success and completion.

One huge roadblock is the preconceived notions about transfer students that are held by faculty and staff who believe that these students do not need any help navigating the four-year institution (policies, procedures, processes around financial aid, advising, scheduling, tutoring, etc.) because they have already been to college. Another misconception is that transfer students were not strong enough academically to be admitted directly into a four-year school so they enrolled in a community college to start. It is important to re-inform the faculty and staff by sharing data that shows the reality of success that most transfer students have in degree completion, and the common first semester grade decline transfer students have because of challenges adjusting to a new university and its processes. It is through this critical action thesis of researching and redefining the different types of transfer students and the support needed by each group that I will advocate for these students to received different levels of focused support based on their individual experiences so that as a united population then are viewed as valuable part of the university.

Introduction to the Concern

Many schools classify all transfer students into a single category ("Transfer") regardless of their prior college experience (number of transfer credits) or age. The onboarding provided for them is a one-time, broad overview and general information about what campus supports are available. I want to help transfer students have the best chance of success – meaning an increase in retention and degree completion and campus and community engagement. In turn, this will help them minimize their degree completion time and reduce student debt. In my work experience in higher education, I heard first-hand about student's barriers and struggles with staying at a school successfully after their first transferred semester. This exposure has helped inform my concern.

Being able to focus on providing different levels of support in Academics, Engagement, and Career Readiness will help reduce student debt by keeping the students focused and supported with a clear path to graduation. It will also be a huge advantage for the institution itself, by reducing attrition (student drop-out prior to degree completion) and increasing the retention of students. This can also lead to increased enrollment and the institution's ability to receive more state and federal funding. There have recently been many states adopting new legislation to help cut down on student debt, by offering free tuition to students at a community college. As more and more states adopt this type of "free education" four-year universities will need to focus on how best to attract and support more students transferring in with Associate's degrees.

Preview of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 will contain five sections. In Section 1, I will discuss my philosophical positionality including my philosophy on the purpose of higher education, and what role student

and academic affairs play in this purpose. Section 2 looks at the history of higher education with a focus on the beginnings of student affairs, and the introduction of the two-year institutions from which many students transfer into a four-year school. Section 3 will take a look at the social identity and student development theories that frame my concern. Section 4 will examine the current state of my concern including statistical data on transfer students. Financial challenges that transfer students face along with high student debt will be unpacked. Section 5, the concluding section of this chapter, will examine my direct experience working in higher education that helped to inform my concern, along with challenges that exist in day-to-day work in higher education and managing these challenges when advocating for changes to help improve the transfer student experience.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, I consider the thematic concern and the conceptual framework that has guided the development of this concern. Included in this chapter will be a table of terms and definitions that are used throughout this thesis, and a final section where specific ACPA/NASPA professional competencies will be explored.

Thematic Concern Statement

My Thematic Concern is helping transfer students to successfully transition and progress to graduation with more focused onboarding and continued self-service access to information resources based on individual needs of these students organized by the number of credits transferred in and age. Every human has a right to pursue an education. With the completion of a college degree, people learn new skills (critical thinking, time management, interpersonal skills), have greater opportunity to pursue better employment and improve economically. People who have better jobs and are doing better financially are more likely to contribute to their community by volunteering and voting, which makes them more engaged members of society (Ma, Pender and Welch, 2016). For education to improve peoples' lives, it is not enough that there be equal access but there also needs to be appropriate support based on the different needs of students to ensure student success and completion.

Conceptual Framework

For this thesis I use Critical Action Research (CAR) to frame my approach. This type of theory helps to look critically at an issue and make recommendations for a change to improve the situation. CAR allows research to be done with more thought to personal values and more openness to feedback during the research that allows for a richer more complex way to look at things (Stringer, 2014).

With this type of research there is an acceptance that allows the research results to lead into a different direction and encourage additional research to counter outside research. "True critically reflective action research is characterized by a continuing program of reform. The eventual hoped for result would be a new kind of school and a new society. The main feature of this new rational society is the "organization of enlightenment" (Carson, 1990).

Table 1- Definition of Terms

Terms	Definitions
ACPA	American College Personnel Association (ACPA) is the top student affairs association whose work it is to help provide insight and research and guidance to help advance the student affairs to help engage and advance students with support to lead them to a successful academic and co-curricular engaged college experience to graduation.
Attrition	For this thesis, "attrition" will be the unit of measurement used to determine the rate of dropout of students who do not return for their second-year of enrollment at their transfer college (Tinto, 1975).
Engagement with Campus Culture	Students participate in academic and non-academic co-curricular activities that help make them more engaged in the college environment (Astin, 1984).

FASFA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a form completed by college students (undergraduate and graduate) to determine their eligibility for Financial Aid.
GPA	GPA stands for "grade point average," which is their grade average taken form the classes they have taken, and the numerical grades they received. This measurement of success is often a determinant for students being admitted to specific degree programs, and is used as a gauge for the student to be able to continue each semester.
NASPA	The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators is the leading student affairs organization focused on the success of students and enrollment management.
Post-traditional Transfer Student	A post-traditional student students ages 25 to 64 who are in the workforce but do not have a postsecondary credential. This group encompasses a wide range of individuals, such as adult learners, non-traditional undergraduates, part-time students, high school dropouts, and those with limited literacy or English language skills (Soares, 2013).

Retention	For this thesis is defined as a look at the percentage of students who transfer to a college and remain enrolled each semester, until completion of a bachelor's degree(Knoell & Medsker, 1965).
Self-Authorship	Marcia Baxter Magolda's developmental concept of self-authorship as a necessary foundation for adults to meet typical expectations they face at work, home, and school, such as the ability to be self-initiating, guided by their own visions, responsible for their experience, and able to develop interdependent relations with diverse others (Kegan, 1994).
Traditional Transfer Student	For this thesis a traditional student is an adult student 18-24 years of age. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/97578e.asp
Transfer Credit Evaluation	A report of how a transfer students' previous class credits will be brought into the new school they are transferring to.
Transfer Shock	"Transfer Shock" refers to the academic and social disorientation experienced by students following a transfer from one institution to another. This often is accompanied by a drop in GPA (Hills, 1965).

ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies

There are two main competencies related to my thematic concern. The first is "Advising and Supporting." This competency focus is providing support and direction to incoming transfer students on their academic path, by reviewing their transfer credits and clarifying how their credits have transferred into the new school, and how they can be used to meet the degree requirements for their program. Students are given guidance about filing a "transfer credit appeal" for classes for which they have not received a direct course equivalency at the new school. In the appeal process the student provides the syllabus from their prior institution for review. Once completed, a successful appeal brings that class in as an equivalent course that may help complete a degree requirement.

Potential students who have not even applied at a new school will often reach out to ask questions about transferring. During these conversations, the university begins to build a welcoming supportive rapport with the student. Once the student has accepted the offer of admittance, it is important to have supports and onboarding in place to help the student with what is needed for their level of college credit transferred in, as well as their age and experience level.

The second ACPA/NASPA professional competency that concerns my topic is that of "Assessment, Evaluation, and Research." This competency will play a significant role in deciding what types of supports are needed for each specific group of transfer student. For example, all of these support programs offered will need to be evaluated to help determine their effectiveness and impact on retention, graduation, and social engagement.

Data will have to be collected over the entire time the student is enrolled until graduation in order to see if the interventions proposed in this thesis do indeed lead to an increased retention and degree completion. Student surveys assessing engagement and learning outcomes will need to be administered as part of an online support module.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 will contain five sections. In Section 1, I discuss my philosophical positionality, including my thinking about the purpose of higher education and what role student affairs and academic affairs play in this purpose. Section 2 looks at the history of higher education with a focus on the earliest beginnings, the start of student affairs, and the introduction of the two-year institutions from which many students transfer into a four-year school. Section 3 explores the current state of my concern, related to the stresses and strains that contemporary transfer students face. It will also unpack the lack of funding and financial challenges that transfer students face along with high student debt. Section 4 presents social identity and student development theories that frame my concern. In section 5, the concluding section of this chapter, I briefly examine my direct experiences working in higher education and how they relate to the topic at hand.

Philosophy of Education

I believe that education should be accessible to all people regardless of their socio-economic level. Every human should have the right to earn a degree and be supported in their development as a person in society. Higher education's goal should not only be ensuring that students acquire basic skills like writing, speaking, and math, but should also help the student to grow as a person by enabling them to gain critical thinking skills, the ability to resolve conflict, and expose students to other cultures and world experiences necessary to their development. There should also be some level of career-readiness interwoven in their educational experience which can help prepare them for advancement in future employment.

Higher education helps to create individuals who are more likely to be employed in higher level jobs, and to raise an overall income level and boost the economy (Hanushek, &

Woessmann, 2010). Students who earn any type of degree also benefit from gaining life skills like learning how to make better decisions by using a critical lens, communicate better with others, and have a broader understanding of the world and its varied cultures and religions.

I believe each student is unique and needs to have focused support to help them succeed academically, as well as socially engage in their college experience. Further, I assert that it is the institution's responsibility to continually find the best ways to meet students where they are and adapt programs to fit the needs of individuals to support them through graduation, and in life.

In Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he writes about this "banking" concept of teaching, where the student is viewed as a bank and the teacher deposits information into the student. The teacher or larger society can later make a withdrawal and have the student recite back the information "deposited." This type of teaching would not work well for the population of students under consideration in my thesis because most transfer students have already experienced some form of higher education and have more life experience. They need to be able to participate in their learning and share their reflections on the material. Freire writes about this more suited type of education called "dialogue" in which the teacher acts as a partner and catalyst to help provoke open discussion about the material being taught (Freire, Ramos, & Macedo, 2014). Students who are taught in a dialectic way will become critical thinkers and gain a better understanding of their current role in society, and understand the conditions and limits placed on them, and may advocate for change (Giroux, 2010). To summarize, higher education should be a right for all people to grow in society and institutions should support students in an individualized holistic way. My planned intervention will help transfer students persist to graduation, and support bringing critical thinkers into society.

Historical Context

In this section, I will first provide a broad overview of the beginning of higher education. Secondly, I will explore the beginning of student affairs to show how this division was formed to support students in a more holistic way. Next, I will explore the start of community colleges and the beginning of transfer students and the divided politics around its purpose. Finally, I look at how institutions have evolved.

Institutions of higher education in the United States, modeled after England's Oxford and Cambridge Universities, were established by religious denominations to train the ministry (Purdy, 2018). Harvard was the first to be established in 1636. New schools began to form from other religious denominations, and continued to be focused on training new ministers of their specific faith, until Brown University began to accept men from other denomination (Pasque & Rimmer, 2016). Initially, students that attended were Caucasian males who were of a higher socio-economic level. African Americans were the first minority group admitted into Oberlin College in the 1830's. Mount Holyoke Female Seminary was the first women's college and was established in 1837 (Purdy, 2018). From that time forward, institutions continued to evolve and change to meet the needs of the increasing the number of students entering higher education with diverse gender, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds, and transfer status.

It is important to look at the beginnings of community college because this is where transfer students started moving from one institution to another. The first community college was established in 1901 as a two-year annex after attending Jolliet High School, in Joliet, Illinois (Handel, 2013). Progressives at the time felt that these junior colleges were a way to give more students an advanced education at a lower cost. One group of elitists looked at community colleges as a way to build the workforce and economy (Handel, 2013). Another faction of elitists

also looked at these two-year colleges as a way to divert the increased surge in high school graduates to head to a junior college, and keep the four-year institutions only for the more superior students (Handel, 2013).

One of the biggest changes with the start of two year colleges was that transfer students were now being admitted to four year institutions and allowed to pursue a bachelor's degree (Handel, 2013). Students today have the ability to transfer in different ways, other than just from a 2-year school to a four-year school.

Traditionally transfer students transferred after completing two years of study at the community college, called a "vertical transfer" but today students now transfer in a variety of ways including a "lateral transfer" from a two year to a two year school or four year school to a four year school, or "reverse transfer" from a four year school to a 2 year school (Jacobs, 2004, p. 3)

The Role of Student Affairs

Student affairs plays a pivotal role in supporting transfer students. The profession of student affairs began from a need to help control students who were residing on campus and act as a parent, also known as "in loco parentis" (Nuss, 2003). Higher education in the United States began with most institutions being residential with tutors providing discipline to students living in the halls. The first role of student affairs was assumed by the Dean of Students (Nuss, 2003). Later Student Affairs roles evolved focused on supporting the students including Admissions, Housing and Dining Services, Mental Health Counseling and Wellness Services, New Student Orientation and Programming, Gender Equity, Social Equity, Multicultural Affairs, among others. These services were important to support students in a more holistic way, to help them adapt and thrive in the campus culture.

Current State of the Thematic Concern

In this section, I will look at some statistical data regarding the number of students that transfer as a whole, the trends in the departure of transfer students, and transfer student retention and graduation rates. Then, I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of orientation programs offered by institutions to help transfer students with their transition to the new university.

Transfer students as a whole make up a large proportion of higher education enrollment. In a study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), where they tracked entering students over a six year period (1995-96 to 2000-2001) they found that over one-third of the students had transferred during their college career, 42% transferred from a two-year school while 23% had transferred from a four-year school (Jacobs, 2004).

It is important from an enrollment management lens to understand how many students who transfer to a new institution persist to graduation. In 2011 study by NCES 81.4 % of students enrolled at a community college intended on completing a baccalaureate degree or higher, but in reality only 5.9% of those students received a baccalaureate degree and 13.1% received an associate's degree within 5 years (NCES, 2011).

It is also important to examine data on transfer student persistence after their first term at their new institution. In a study by the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange in 2017 of over a million community college students transferring with 30 or more credits to one of 135 different universities and colleges between fall 2006 and fall 2015, only 82.1% of these students persisted to their second year at the transfer college. On average, 104,187 students transfer into these institutions each year, and only 82.1% persist to the next year. This means that each year, at these 135 institutions, there are approximately 18,600 transfer students from community

colleges who are no longer enrolled a year after they started (CSRDE, 2017). This data shows that a huge percent of transfer students do not persist to graduation.

While lack of financial resources can play a large role in student attrition, there is also the challenge of integrating into the campus cultural and the lack of clear connections to campus support resources that can lead to students dropping out. Universities must work to provide early focused support to students. Janet Marling, the Executive Director of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS), highlights the need to help provide early support for transfer students:

> These students may be experts at where they've come from, which we should celebrate, and now they are in a new institution with a different language and different expectations. If you went to a new community that had no signage, what would that be like for you? You'd muddle along, of course, and eventually figure it out, but how much would be lost in the process? (Marling as quoted in Handel, 2020, p. 25)

Orientation for transfer students at most institutions provides a broad overview of the university and it services, regardless of the academic credits being transferred in, their age, or their need for campus engagement. For example, a transfer student who has only spent one semester at their previous school, could easily require support to help decide what major they should pursue, whereas a student coming in with a completed Associate's degree may need more guidance in how to pursue a co-op or internship opportunity. A more focused orientation model, as I propose for my intervention, can help more students with their individual needs.

Financial considerations

One of the largest reasons why students make the decision to transfer schools or to start their college careers at a two-year school is finances. Transfers students also experience many

financial barriers when transferring to different institutions. Many low-income students choose to start at a community college to take advantage of more affordable costs planning to later transfer to a more expensive four-year college or university to complete their degree while students in better financial situations are able to attend a four-year college or university from their first semester as a freshman. Often students in high financial need will have to work while attending school in order to pay their expenses, or even to earn money to help support their families. When these two groups are thrown together on a college campus, the transfer student may feel second class or not included.

Financial concerns are frequently cited as a reason students leave institutions. Bettinger (2004) explains that "Twenty percent of first-time freshmen withdraw or transfer from four-year colleges after their first year in Ohio" (p. 210). Research conducted by Bettinger showed that higher levels of need-based aid are correlated with a lower chance of graduation. Students who come from families living in poverty are more likely to drop out, but they are also more likely to receive a higher level of need-based aid. While there are plentiful scholarships for other diverse groups, transfer students have limited scholarship opportunities (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

When transferring to another school, students often get less in financial aid money for many reasons.

> First, your new school may award you less institutional aid. This could be due to your financial situation or theirs. Some schools simply have less money to give out. Much campus-based aid, including Perkins loans, is limited and disbursed on a first-come, first-served basis. So, it's possible that funds that were once available to you are no longer an option (Lane, 2015, para. 9)

Any campus based loans a transfer student may have had at their previous school, will not transfer to their new school. Depending on when the student transfers out of a school, this might also limit the aid they will receive, especially if they transfer mid-year. "You don't fully earn financial aid until you're 60 percent through a semester. Leave before then, and your school returns the unearned aid, loans first, to the federal government. This could affect your borrowing maximums at your new school" (Lane, 2015, para. 11).

Providing students the knowledge and access to take advantage of all qualifying loan and grant options, ensuring that they are aware of the impact of early departure from their programs, creating programs that capitalize on transfer students, and integrating them into their programs more fully, will all help minimize the impact of student loan debt and create a positive outcome.

If more lower income students and non-traditional adult students now have access to free community college, and will be transferring into a four year college that has a population of higher income students who started as freshman, these three different groups will be thrown together in the 3rd academic (junior) year. There could possibly be a gap in inclusion with lower income students and adult learners now in classes with the higher economic younger students. Campus leaders will need to figure out ways to create inclusion, diversity, and understanding about all socio-economic people, at all ages, and find ways to help these create a better campus climate and culture.

Even with proposed legislation to improve the financial aid process and provide more affordable access to schools for lower economic students, there still needs to be advocacy to change the culture around college as a privilege instead of a right.

If higher education is to provide equal education opportunity, we must commit to developing and maintaining political and economic institutions that guarantee a minimum

standard of living and a more equal distribution of the resources we all collaborate in producing. Higher education cannot be treated in isolation, nor can movements for higher wages, racial justice, or more financial regulation (The Debt Collective, 2016, p. 11)

The goal of my intervention, providing transfer students with focused supports, may help to alleviate student debt by increasing student retention and graduation rates and simultaneously decreasing time to degree.

Framework Influencing the Thematic Concern

Below, I will discuss three student development theories as they apply to transfer students: Schlossberg's theory of "Mattering and Marginality," also her theory of "Transition," and finally, Tinto's theory of "Departure."

Nancy K. Schlossberg's' theory of Mattering and Marginality looks at the way students often feel marginalized and that they do not fit into their new college environment (Schlossberg 1989 as quoted in Patton et al., 2016). Schlossberg breaks down the aspects of mattering in five ways: "*attention,* the feeling an individual is noticed; *importance*, the belief that the individual is cared about; *ego-extension*, the feeling that someone is proud of what an individual does, or will sympathize with their failures; *dependence*, a feeling of being needed [... and] *appreciation*, the feeling that others appreciate the individuals efforts."(Patton et al., 2016, p. 37). Transfer students often feel like they are in a lower-class status compared to students who started at the institution as a freshman. They have a hard time connecting socially with other students who have already formed friendships prior to them starting at the institution.

Schlossberg's "Transition" theory looks at the impact that any transition, which is described as any event or non-event, that results in changed "relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). Transfer students transferring into a new

university require a multi-layered support system to help them acclimate through the transition. If transfer students do not have a way to easily connect to on-campus resources that they need in their first semester, they will often experience a drop in GPA (Hills, 1965).

Vincent Tinto's (1975) Model of Institutional Departure states that, to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems (Tinto, 1975 as quoted in Patton et al., 2016). His model theorizes that students who become integrated with the campus culture and increase their commitment to the institution are more likely to persist to graduation (Tinto, 1975). Most transfer students are likely to depart a university after their first semester, where they often have trouble connecting socially with other students and faculty. Universities must invest in ways to integrate transfer students into the campus culture as soon as they arrive on campus.

These three theories really stood out to me to show the transitional challenges that transfer students face when transferring into a new school. Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" shows the reasons transfer students leave a university, including them having the feeling of not belonging, and they not being engaged in the campus environment. This feeling of experiencing a transition, like transferring into another institution, and the effects the transfer student feel as change in their relationships with their school, other students their families, etc. is described in Schlosberg's "Transition" theory. The result that many transfer students feel during their first semester at the new school they transferred into is one of not belonging, and feeling "less than" when compared to other students who have already been at the same university for two years ahead of them is described in Schlosberg's other theory of "Mattering and Marginality." With my intervention I hope to help transfer students onboard and engage before

their semester begins, so that they can adjust easier, find ways to connect to other students and campus resources, and persist to graduation.

Experience that Informed the Thematic Concern

When I began at my university as a support advisor in the Professional Studies program, I met with students to confirm their degree progress. It was in these meetings that I first encountered a transfer student who said he was so frustrated at the university and the way he was advised when he transferred in and the he could not wait to get out. He said his experience as a transfer student was frustrating because he had not been advised correctly, and now needed to take extra classes to fulfill his degree requirements. He said there was no one on campus who could guide him towards resources he needed when he first started.

When I was asked by the Vice-Provost if I would be interested in creating a new "Transfer Concierge" role at my institution, which was described as a point person to help transfer students with their transition to our university, I said "yes" right away, as I knew there was a need for this role. My initial focus was to help students get connected with an advisor for course scheduling. I quickly opened up my outreach to include reaching out to newly admitted students to answer any questions they had impacting their decision to accept their offer of admittance and come to the university. I also created student programming in this role to help new transfer students connect with other transfer students and feel welcomed.

As my position has evolved, I now present sessions at transfer orientation, facilitate workshops for transfer students around connecting to resources and scheduling, and participate in Admission's potential student days and accepted student days. I also helped launch a Transfer Student Association for which I am the university staff advisor, and manage transfer student

focused social media platforms. It is my continued work with improving the transfer student experience, which has led me to my proposed intervention.

Chapter 4

Most schools offer orientation to help acclimate incoming students to campus and introduce resources that are available to them. Some institutions have just one type of orientation that all students, both transfer or first-year, are required to attend. Other institutions do have a specific orientation dedicated to new incoming transfer students. These transfer-designated orientations will often provide the same type of information that is presented to incoming first year students. At my current institution, in-person orientation is not required for any students transferring in 60 or more credits. In lieu of in-person orientation, these transfer students are sent an online version of orientation which includes information about university policies and available resources. Orientation sessions can be a full day which requires a student who works to have to take the day off. These one-day sessions are tightly packed with an abundance of information. Resource offices are often relegated to information tables at the end of the event, when students may feel already fatigued by an overload of information they have just received.

Academic departments sometimes have their own onboarding process, where they will have a meeting during the beginning of classes to share broad information about the department and speak to policies. The first advising appointment for a new transfer student is crucial to help them acclimate to a new campus. Often these appointments focus on how their transfer credits fit directly into the program and what courses they have left to complete to obtain their degree. Along with degree requirements and transfer credit discussion, there is often information about the transfer credit appeal process, an effort to bring a transferred class in as a direct course equivalency that can help add to the progress of degree completion. The next focused piece of the appointment is course scheduling advising, which classes to enroll in for the upcoming semester and helping the student navigate that process. Usually this information takes up the

entire appointment, leaving little time for any discussion about what the individual student's experience has been to date. There is very little time if any to discuss their goals, career readiness, campus engagement, and tutoring or other resources.

Resource offices provide great support for students, for example, in areas of mental health, physical wellness, food and housing insecurity, academic coaching and tutoring, and career services. The challenge with the current resources is that the student has to be motivated enough to reach out to obtain them. Students also do not realize what type of support offices can provide and they often miss out on taking advantage of these resources until there is a crisis. Tutoring is another significant resource that is available to help students succeed academically, but even tutoring sessions can sometimes be hard to use because of barriers, such as high demand for tutoring, not enough tutors, limited time slots, and the absence of evening hours.

Career services are often underutilized by students who may not realize what services they can receive through the office. Most students only think to use the career center when they are close to graduating and need to begin job hunting. They are not aware that the career center can be a great resource for students to help them identify their strengths and then assist them in understanding how to use these strengths to pursue and thrive in specific majors.

Philosophical Positionality

As explained in Chapter 3, my philosophy of the purpose of education is that I believe each student is unique and needs to have focused support to help them succeed academically and to socially engage in their college experience. It is the institution's responsibility to continually find the best ways to meet students where they are and adapt programs to fit the needs of individuals and to support them to success in graduation and in life.

Below are four assumptions that are made based on my expertise with transfer students and as I craft this intervention.

1. Not every transfer student is the same.

2. Transfer students need more focused support making a transition into their next college experience.

3. Career readiness, academic skills and campus engagement are critical for retention.

4. Online engagement meets the student "where they are" and allows access to information in non-traditional ways.

Providing support services focused on the individual needs of a student would be a positive educational experience. Offering a more generic overall information session about resources in general would be considered a mis-educative experience. Students who are given general information will still need to sort out what level of support to meet their specific needs. If this information is unclear during the first semester at the new institution, it can lead to a student having a Grade Point Average (GPA) decline, or make them feel as if they do not belong on that campus.

Transfer students often experience "transfer shock," defined as an academic and social disorientation experienced by students following a transfer from one institution to another. This experience often is accompanied by a drop in GPA (Hills, 1965). By understanding transfer retention rate data and the issues and barriers that cause students to leave an institution, I have created an intervention to break down these barriers by providing focused multi-leveled support resources based on the individual student's needs.

Student Development Theories

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are three student development theories that inform my thematic concern. Please see that section for further detail. These three theories support the need for specific transfer student focused onboarding support.

Action Research and Framing

This intervention is important because institutions are invested in helping all students succeed and progress to graduation. In my experience almost half of the students who graduate from my institution started at the university as transfer students. Transfer students arrive on campus with many different lived experiences and need focused resources that will help them succeed. Critical Action Research (CAR) is the best choice to frame my approach, as its goal is to help bring about change. This type of research helps to look critically at an issue and make recommendations for a change to improve the situation, as discussed in Chapter 2.

CAR allows research to be done with more thought to personal values and more openness to feedback during the research that allows for a richer more complex way to look at things (Stringer, 2014). With this type of intervention, the need to continually assess the results through quantitative retention data along with qualitative data from student focus groups is vital. This CAR combined with my knowledge gained by working exclusively with transfer students and hearing their challenges and barriers to success, will help bring about the strongest impact for students.

Purpose of Intervention

The purpose of my intervention is to help increase retention and degree completion for transfer students. This program will provide transfer students with additional and intentional

support so they can persist to graduation and be successful. By supporting the transfer students in a more focused way during their first semester, they will proceed in a steady pace to degree completion. Such support will also help reduce additional student debt that may be incurred by transferring from one institution to another, a process that often leads to credit transfer loss and additional time to degree.

Transfer Student Onboarding Experience

My intervention is a series of six online modules posted in the student's learning management portal. These online modules will be broken up into three categories--academics, career readiness, and campus engagement. Each category will contain two levels. One of the unique features of this program is that it acknowledges that not all transfer students are the same. These modules are designed with student demographics in mind. Each module has been created to deliver content to students based on their age (traditional and post-traditional) and number of credits (less than 30 and more than 30) that they are transferring into the institution. The student will receive a $25 bookstore credit for each module completed, up to $100 per semester. If the student choses to complete more in later semesters, they will also receive a $25 for each credit.

The goals of this program will be to acclimate students to campus, provide a way to directly connect them with campus resources, increase retention, and increase student persistence to graduation. Reaching the goal of persistence to graduation may also save the student from additional debt that they would normally incur if they left the university without finishing their degree.

Program Objectives to the Intervention

In order to accomplish these goals it is important to:

1. Define the transfer student groups, based on these demographics (Table 1).

2. Recommend an individual onboarding "curriculum" to transfer students (Table 1).

3. Provide students with opportunities to make direct, in-person meetings with resource office with individual appointments (Tables 2, 3, and 4).

4. Provide a financial incentive (book scholarship) as the student complete modules.

Table 1- Recommended Curriculum Breakdown

Age	Credits Transferred In	Recommended Programs
Traditional- under 24 years	30 or under	Academics 1 Engagement 1 Career 1
Traditional- under 24 years	31 or more	Academics 2 Engagement 2 Career 2
Post-Traditional- 24 years and up	30 or under	Academics 1 Engagement 2 Career 2
Post-Traditional- 24 years and up	31 or more	Academics 2 Engagement 2 Career 2

Comprehensive Program Learning Outcomes

As a result of this experience students will increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities to navigate their new university environment to maximize their success to graduation. Transfer students will be given tools and be led to supports on campus that will (a) help them reach degree completion successfully and in a timely manner, (b) become engaged on campus and in the community, and (c) be prepared for the next steps for them whether it be employment or continue education.

Program Implementation

Incoming admitted transfer students will receive a card with information describing the Comprehensive Transfer Student Onboarding Experience, in their acceptance packet from

Admissions. Once the student is matriculated, they will find a link to the intervention listed on their student portal under "Tasks" that will lead them to their recommended curriculum based on their age and amount of credits transferred in. Students will always have the option to complete any of the six modules, if they want additional support. Each module will contain a direct link for the student to make a one-on-one appointment with a staff member from the specific resource office. The category levels and the content for each level along with the learning outcomes from each module are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4 below.

Table 2 Academics

Program	Content	Learning Outcomes Students will be able to:
Academics Level 1	General Overview of Institutional Academic Culture	Identify the tutoring center and how to sign up for tutoring
	Basic Study Skills	Create schedule for studying
	Academic Support Resources	Increase test preparation and test taking skills
Academics Level 2	General Overview of Institutional Academic culture	Identify the Academic Success Office and how to sign up for an academic coach
	Advanced Study Skills	Demonstrate an understanding of academic writing (i.e., use citations appropriately)
	Advanced Academic Resources	Utilize online tutoring

Table 3 Career

Program	Content	Learning Outcomes Students will be able to:
Career Level 1	Complete a Focus 2© Strengths Test Resume writing Handshake© overview	Identify their strengths and what majors and careers align with those strengths Understand the components of a strong resume Utilize the Handshake© platform for job searching
Career Level 2	Advanced Resume Writing Cover Letter Writing Overview of Job Searching Online	Demonstrate how to adapt resume to fit job Write a strong and effective cover letter Articulate how to submit to online employment sites

Table 4- Engagement

Program	Content	Learning Outcomes Students will be able to:
Engagement Level 1	Overview of Student Organizations Overview of Campus Events Tips For Making Connections	Connect to student organizations Identify re-occurring campus culture events Identify ways to connect with peers on campus.
Engagement Level 2	Post-Tradition Support Group Overview Networking Tips Engaging on campus with limited time and availability	Understand how to connect to other post-traditional student. Access a network of peers Identify ways to engage on campus with limited time and availability

Program Incentives

Typically, these types of interventions are made mandatory which places barriers on students. Transfer students have enough barriers to overcome when transitioning to a new institution. Additionally, it seems impossible to really hold students accountable for completing these modules when they are not attached to the curriculum. Therefore, I am proposing an incentive model. As students complete each module, they will receive a $25 campus bookstore voucher, up to $100 per semester, to be used the following semester to offset the cost of textbooks and school supplies. Following their first semester, students can continue to complete modules earning $25 vouchers, which also helps them to continue to utilize the resource throughout their time at the institution.

Funding

In my experience, transfer students are often a population that is overlooked and underfunded but necessary to the enrollment goals of the institution. Funding for this intervention will be imperative to help us accomplish the institutional and student success goals.

A web designer will need to be employed to set up a template for this type of online module. Someone would need to write the content for each module. It would be important for the modules to have some consistency in format, so that they can be evaluated on content and not on varied delivery styles. Representatives from academic affairs, student affairs and career development will be engaged to help to build the content for their assigned modules.

Funding for these modules to be built and then maintained, would need to be obtained from various sources. The funding will be used towards purchasing software, human resources to be able to pay or hire staff to assist in the building and maintaining of these modules, and to be available to help sponsor focus groups to assess the success of this intervention. Also, funding is

needed to pay for the incentives offered to the transfer students that completed these modules. I would reach out to the Provost's office to get funding, along with New Student Programs, Career Development Center, Office of Student Success, as they are stakeholders in supporting transfer student success. Please see Table 5 for a detailed budget.

Table 5- Intervention Budget

Item	Explanation of Cost	Cost
Incentives	Budget for $25 campus bookstore vouchers	$50,000 *variable depending on participation
Marketing Materials	Admissions Packet information card	$400
Web Designer	Web designer to build modules	$0 cost covered by university employee
Graduate Assistant	GA to monitor and access modules	$20,000 for academic year including summer
Focus Group Catering	Catering for focus group assessments	$600 for academic year
Total		$71,000

Timeline

In order to build the program, we would need at least six months of preparation and testing. We would want to launch the program in August, but we need to be able to advertise it students prior to their enrollment. Ideally the program would be ready and available by March, following Spring Break. All six modules would launch simultaneously and be available for each semester.

Challenges

Transfer students are often overlooked and it is taken for granted that they will just easily transition. There are assumptions by some faculty and staff that transfer students are all coming from community colleges, are of traditional age, know how to navigate the campus environment, have superior and well-honed study skills, and need less guidance and support. It will be important to educate campus partners with data that shows that transfer students have varied experiences, which necessitates the importance of supporting them individually and meeting them where they are.

I acknowledge that this recommended curriculum is based on my expertise in my role as "Transfer Concierge." I have learned that traditional and post-traditional students have different needs. I also understand that the needs of students who have little experience in college and the needs of students who have more experience in college will often dictate how much support they need. To meet the challenge of meeting individual student needs, I have made all modules open for students to choose their own. Students may opt to start at the beginner level regardless of the recommendation to start at the more advanced level.

As I stated earlier, one of the major challenges to this intervention is misperceptions of transfer student needs is prevalent throughout higher education. There may be stakeholders who do not see the importance of investing in helping transfer students acclimate to a new environment. As institutions are tasked to meet enrollment, retention and graduation goals, it is imperative that we help all students acclimate and transition to their higher education experience. We can develop interventions that help all students but it is critically important to also take into account the individual student's needs and experiences.

<center>**Chapter 5**</center>

Leadership in higher education and assessment will be the focus of this chapter. I first look at the way leadership can have best practices and some of the barriers that will need to be navigated in relationship to the hierarchy of structured top-down leadership. I discuss how leadership will play a role in the implementation of my proposed intervention. The final section shows the value of assessment and the use of data to help gain momentum for the intervention. I will also address some of the limitations and challenges this proposal may face.

Leadership in Higher Education and Student Affairs

My perspective on leadership is that it is important for all leadership to come from a good place and for leaders to work collaboratively to reach common goals. It is important to include a diverse group of people to engage in the project, especially individuals who might not be initially supportive. It is important to hear as many perspectives and challenges as possible and try to answer them before fully implementing any change.

I tend to work as a participative leader, offering guidance and valuing input from a team, but I do make the final decision (Northhouse, 2009). I also tend to use the servant leadership style which shares power, serves others, and has concern for all stakeholders when making decisions (Northhouse, 2019).

As part of the relationship building strengths from the Gallup© Strength-Finders assessment, I possess the strength of individualization. This strength of individualization is a skill that is important in helping to understand the unique qualities of each person, and then understand how individual people can work together well. It also helps to have people with various strengths together on a group project, as they will have different perspectives. It is

important to have great thinkers, planners, executers, and leaders who value individuals, on the team who are attempting to create and implement change.

Class status can also come into play when navigating leadership of a university – the differences between faculty and student affairs professionals, as well as administration, have many gaps that will need to be considered. In my work as an advocate and connector for transfer students, I constantly communicate with tenured faculty and department chairs. When I first started working in the higher education field, I immediately identified that there was a hierarchy and class system between university roles.

When I stepped into the newly created role of Transfer Concierge, I conducted one-on-one meetings with all resource office key personnel. I introduced myself and shared my prior work experience and my goal of the new role, which was to partner with them to help in student success. I asked them to tell me about the services their office offered to students and to find out the best way to help students connect to them. I also asked them if they would be a point person for me to contact when a student is having trouble connecting to their office. As I made these rounds and had these one-on-one conversations, I was leading the effort to help transfer students, albeit as a relational vs a positional leader.

It is important as a good leader that you "Model the Way" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) where you set an example for others, by being clear on your personal values and beliefs, focusing on key priorities, and helping others to achieve their goals. When leading a team or working in a group, you need to "Inspire a Shared Vision" by being clear about the objectives and purpose of the group (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). You must always be willing to "Challenge the Process," and find innovative ways to improve the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). You must be comfortable with thinking outside the box, and be accepting of failure and change.

Relational leadership, where one leads a group not from the title of power of their position, but through trust and respect of others who they have built relationships with is an effective way to lead when you do not have positional power. It is important to use collaboration to gain support for change, as opposed to an authoritative approach.

Leadership and Transfer Student Onboarding Experience

In order to implement my intervention, I will need to partner with other institutional leaders to gain their support and then solicit funding and resources. It is important to use a common goal of transfer student success to gain support for this intervention. By engaging the leaders in the various resource areas, one can also benefit from their expertise and get recommendations for an intervention. Often leaders have been through the process of proposing a new intervention and can share their advice on how to make it come to fruition or point out something you may have missed.

To lead this intervention from my current role of Transfer Concierge, the first thing I would do is present my CAR information to my direct supervisor, who is the Registrar for the university. I would then ask for feedback from her and who she would think would be good to partner with to form a project group. I would definitely look to use my participative leadership style to work collaboratively with others to gain their support for this important initiative. I would also make sure to bring in coworkers who might challenge this initiative to make sure and hear all perspectives.

Assessment, Evaluation and Transfer Student Onboarding Experience

Evaluation and assessment are vital for any intervention to succeed. Assessment and reflection is a significant part of CAR which is used to frame this concern (Stringer, 2014). Action research "is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action.

The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the 'actor' in improving and/or refining his or her actions" (Sagor, 2000, p. 3).

Consistent ongoing assessment will provide data that will be used to make changes and improve on the program to meet the current needs of students. The best data is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to paint the clearest picture if the program is succeeding its goals and how it can be improved. It is important to have a survey completed by the participants as close to the event date, so that it is fresh in their mind. I find it is important to ask some questions that ask for numerical ratings, so you can compare it to future events and hopefully show improvement. Quantitative data is helpful to decision-makers. It is important to also ask open ended questions, to get feedback about what the participant thought of the program. For example asking questions such as, "What part did they like the best?", "What part did they like the least and why?", and "What would you change?"

Facilitating a student focus group or interviews are effective ways to obtain qualitative data to capture the true voice of the subjects participating. When I have conducted customer service focus group sessions in the past, I have recorded them so that I can use quotes from participants in my outcome report to help provide additional perspectives and evidence to substantiate the reason for a change. Another advantage to focus groups and interviews is the facilitator could also ask for clarification on an answer or topic being discussed.

The main goal of this intervention is to help transfer students persist to graduation. The other goal is to help meet the students where they are and help them easily connect to resources they need to successfully navigating the campus culture. Below is the data I will gather to evaluate the program:

1. How many students participated in completing any module?

2. What was the average number of models completed in the first semester?

3. How many students completed the recommended curriculum models?

4. How many students who completed the modules persisted to the next semester?

5. How many student persisted to graduation?

6. How many students made direct appointments with resource offices from the module?

7. How did they rate the module they completed on ease of navigation, usefulness, appropriate for their needs?

For this intervention, I would track the information above and facilitate a survey to students after the first semester regarding their experience with the modules. I would also facilitate a focus group with a small group of students who completed modules during the semester to get additional feedback. See Appendix A for the questions to be asked at the focus group session. I would work with our institutional research office to track retention, graduation rates and GPA to see if there has been any improvement in these measures after implementation of the Transfer Student Onboarding Experience.

Most resources for assessment will be funded by normal university operating offices like the Office for Institutional Research, and Information Technology. I will use the university survey software Qualtrics© to conduct surveys. I have budgeted for catering to host focus group sessions. I also budgeted for a graduate assistant to help in tracking data, monitoring module responses, and organizing focus group sessions.

I would partner with the following three offices to help build content and assessment measures for the Transfer Student Onboarding Experience: (a) Tutoring Office/Academic, (b) Career Center/Career, and (c) Office for New Student Programs/Engagement. Each area might

have their own assessment measures that might be able to inform the programming of the
Transfer Student Onboarding Experiences.

Limitations and Looking Ahead

For the pilot of this intervention, I used my expertise to categorize the transfer students
by age and the amount of credits the student brings in to the institution into two groups. Going
forward it might be better to organize the students by more specific age levels and credit
amounts. Assessment measures might be able to inform the decision to create more specific
groups based on age and credits. I would also hope to expand on additional curriculum modules
and categories, in the future, so that there would be modules to be support students for every
semester in their academic career.

A large public institution is a good setting to support this type of intervention because
there are fully staffed offices with employees that are available. Smaller private institutions may
have a smaller staff to support their learning technology, and this type of intervention might take
longer to design and implement. Funding also might be more available at larger public
universities that are part of a state system of schools but might have to go through a longer
vetting and approval process, which could delay or deny supporting an intervention that is not
deemed a priority among all the other proposed projects.

The position I hold at my university is not a high-level position, so I have to partner with
and solicit support from higher level offices so that this intervention can be approved and funded.
If I was working in a higher position of leadership, I might be able to get a quicker response and
put together a task group to more easily implement this type of intervention.

My future plans for this intervention would be to propose and implement this intervention
to help transfer students succeed. They would be connected to resources that they need at the

level they are which in turn might contribute to degree completion. I am currently a member of a campus transfer student success task force and would first share my intervention proposal with them to see if this is something the group could and would put into place. I believe this group would be excellent advocates for this intervention to become a sustainable program for transfer students.

Many years ago when I was an undergraduate student, it was not common for students to transfer from college to college. Now, in 2020, transfer students, especially students making a horizontal transfer (from community college to four year institution), make up a significant number of incoming students each year. It is only recently that colleges and universities have started to pay attention to the needs of transfer students as they matriculate into their new institution in an effort to increase student retention rates and enrollment numbers. As the cost of college rises, many students choose to start their education at community colleges, incurring less debt. At this very moment as I write this thesis, we are in limbo, not knowing if classes will be on campus in the fall or what enrollment number may look like in late August. As students and parents weigh the cost of college during the COVID-19 crisis, many will choose community college as their first step, with plans to later transfer into four-year institutions. They, and all other transfer students, deserve to be welcomed to the institution and be given intentional support as they make this very significant transition.

Appendix

Transfer Student Onboarding Experience (TSOE) Focus Group Questions

1. What was the reason you have transferred to this university?
2. What is your reason for wanting to complete your degree?
3. Prior to starting classes at your transfer institution, what were some of the questions/concerns that you had?
4. What was your initial feeling about the TSOE?
5. Did you follow the recommended curriculum and complete it? If not, why not?
6. Thinking of the Academic Level 1 module that covered _____, were there specific questions or concerns that you had that you thought should be in that module that were not covered? (This will be asked of each curriculum unit.)
7. When you signed into your portal, were you able to quickly and easily find your module path?
8. While completing your path, did you explore other modules that were not specifically recommended on your path?
9. Did you make any resource office appointments directly from the module?
10. During your first term, how often did you revisit the module portal to find information? What types of information you were looking for and were you able to find what you needed?
11. Thinking of your recommended module curriculum, were there modules that you found particularly useful and why? Were there modules that you felt did not apply to you? Which ones?
12. If you were going to design additional modules, what topics would you cover? What specific questions and concerns did you have that you could not find in the modules?

References

ACPA/NASPA (2015). *Professional competency areas for student affairs educators.*
Washington, DC: Author.

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. Journal
of College Student Personnel, 25(4), 297–308.

Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2008). Three Elements of Self-Authorship. *Journal of College Student
Development 49*(4), 269-284.

Bettinger, E. (2004). How financial aid affects persistence. In *College choices: The economics of
where to go, when to go, and how to pay for it* (pp. 207-238). University of Chicago
Press.

Carson, T. (1990). What kind of knowing is critical action research? *Theory into Practice*, *29*(3),
167-173.

Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange

Freire, Paulo, Myra Bergman Ramos, and Donald Macedo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Thirtieth
Anniversary ed. 2014. Web.

Gallup. (n.d). How Educators Use CliftonStrengths®. Retrieved from
https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com/home/en-us/cliftonstrengths-for-educators

Giroux, H. (2010). Lessons from Paulo Freire. *Chronicle of higher education*, *57*(9), B15-B16.

Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., & Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition:
Linking practice with theory*. Springer Publishing Co.

Griffin, R. (2018, October 17). The Student Debt Crisis is About to Get Worse. Retrieved
October 08, 2018, from https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-17/the-
student-loan-debt-crisis-is-about-to-get-worse

Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2010). Education and economic growth. *Economics of education*, 60-67.

Handel, S., & Marling, Janet L. (2013). The Transfer Moment: The Pivotal Partnership Between Community Colleges and Four-Year Institutions in Securing the Nation's College Completion Agenda. New Directions for Higher Education, 2013(162), 5-15.

Hills, J. R. (1965). Transfer shock: The academic performance of the junior college transfer. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *33*(3), 201-215.

Ishitani, T.T. How Do Transfers Survive after "Transfer Shock"? A Longitudinal Study of Transfer Student Departure at a Four-Year Institution. *Res High Educ* **49,** 403–419 (2008).

Jacobs, B. C. (2004). The College Transfer Student in America: The Forgotten Student. *American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)*.

Kegan, R. (1994). In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life.

Kelderman, E. (2018, November 08). A Divided Congress Is Unlikely to Compromise on Higher Ed. But What if It Did? Retrieved October 03, 2018, from https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Divided-Congress-Is-Unlikely/245035

Knoell, D. M., & Medsker, L. L. (1965). FROM JUNIOR TO SENIOR COLLEGE--A NATIONAL STUDY OF THE TRANSFER STUDENT.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1987). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lane, R. (2015, January 21). How Transferring Schools Can Affect Student Loans. Retrieved December 8, 2018, from https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/student-loan-ranger/2015/01/21/how-transferring-schools-can-affect-student-loans

Ma, J., Pender, M., & Welch, M. (2016). Education Pays 2016: The Benefits of Higher

      Education for Individuals and Society. Trends in Higher Education Series. *College*

      Board.

Magolda, M. B. B. (2008). Three elements of self-authorship. *Journal of college student*

      development, *49*(4), 269-284.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). Web tables: Community college student

      outcomes: 1994-2009. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012253.pdf

Northouse, P. G. (2009). Leadership: Theory and practice (5th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nuss, E. M. (2003). The development of student affairs. *Student services: A handbook for the*

      profession, *4*, 65-88.

Pasque, P. A., & Rimmer, J. (2016). Today's College Students: A Reader ed. by Pietro A. Sasso

      and Joseph L. DeVitis. *Journal of College Student Development*, *57*(1), 112-114.

Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido, F. M., & Quaye, S. J. (2016). *Student development in college:*

      Theory, research, and practice. John Wiley & Sons.

Purdy, William C. (2018). Higher Education and a Living, Diverse Democracy: An Overview.

Sagor, R. (2000). *Guiding school improvement with action research*. Ascd.

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., Nathan, A & Hwang, Y., A. (2017,

      April). *A National View of Student Attainment Rates by Race and Ethnicity – Fall 2010*

      Cohort (Signature Report No. 12b). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse

      Research Center.

Soares, L. "Post-Traditional Learners and the Transformation of Postsecondary Education: A

      Manifesto for College Leaders." American Council on Education. January 2013. pp. 1-2.

      http://www.acenet.edu/news- room/Documents/Post-Traditional-Learners.pdf

Stringer, E. T. (2014). *Action research*. Sage publications.

The Debt Collective. (2016, October 10) Take, Remake, Liberate: A Higher Education Platform.

http://blogs.lt.vt.edu/anewvoice/files/2016/10/TakeRemakeLiberate_AHigherEducationPl

atform_DebtCollective.pdf

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research.

Review of educational research, *45*(1), 89-125.

Tobolowsky BF, Cox BE. Rationalizing Neglect: An Institutional Response to Transfer

Students. *Journal of Higher Education*. 2012; 83(3):389-410