

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE "TRANSFER
ZONE" AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY:
A CASE STUDY

By

AMY E. SIMMONS

Bachelor of Science

New Mexico State University

Las Cruces, New Mexico

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Thesis Approved:

A. Christian Morgan

Thesis Adviser

James Leising

M. Craig Edwards

A. Gordon Emslie

Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

“Colleges should foster development by providing an empowering balance of challenge and support” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 1).

Many students who transfer from community and junior colleges into four-year institutions tend to face challenges that may lead to early departure (Berger & Manley, 2003; Flaga, 2006; Johnson, 1992, Christopher, Lewis & Marks, 1993; Rhine, Milligan & Nelson, 2000; Townsend, 1995). As a transfer student makes the transition from a two-year institution to a four-year institution, he or she may become overwhelmed by the challenge of a new academic and social system. According to Tinto (1988), this overwhelming sense comes from the transfer student going through the process of separation, transition and incorporation of the new institutional environment. Many institutions have designed programs to facilitate this transition and integration into a new environment, including Oklahoma State University (OSU).

The goal of the university is to provide educational programming that will allow students to graduate and become knowledgeable, productive citizens; however, there is one aspect that should not be overlooked: student retention. “Student retention is a win-

win situation: the student gains an education and increased lifetime earnings, and the institution educates a student, fulfilling its mission, and gains tuition income” (Bean, 2005, p. 237). In the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources (CASNR), OSU, transfer students make up ten percent of student enrollment (OSU Student Retention Report, 2005). Therefore, it is important that programs are in place to help transfer students integrate into the university system with the ultimate goal of degree completion.

The Transfer Zone learning community was established by CASNR in the pursuit of facilitating the integration of students into the academic and social climate of a four-year institution (L.C. Martin, personal communication, February 1, 2007). This inquiry will use a case study to assess academic and social integration based on factors outlined in Tinto’s (1975) model of student integration. The study will also describe the Transfer Zone participants, their perceptions of the program and its living arrangements.

Profile of the Transfer Zone

The Transfer Zone was developed by the staff of the Career Success Center in CASNR at OSU in the spring of 2006. The program was initiated in the fall 2006, when eight transfer students enrolled in the program. The Transfer Zone was a designated living learning community for students who have transferred to OSU between their sophomore and junior year of college. The over all purpose of the Transfer Zone was to provide an academic, social, and living environment, which incorporates several of the components of Tinto’s (1975) student attrition model. The programming, which is

supported by faculty members, is based on course work, financial management, career planning, and transition into a career or graduate school. A community mentor facilitates the program and provides information, answers questions, and connects the participants with community resources.

The Transfer Zone is open to the first fifty applicants that major in agricultural subjects (CASNR Transfer Zone Fact Sheet, 2006). The benefits of a learning community such as the Transfer Zone should be a combination of psychological and academic development by a student encountering the same people everyday, therefore, perceivably decreasing the size of the university, and by increasing a student's social connections, i.e., working within networks that are comfortable, a sense of identity is made, and a students' voice can be heard (Talbert & Boyles, 2005).

Problem Statement

Transfer students are an important subgroup of CASNR's student enrollment, in some cases, constituting up to 70% of the students enrolled in a single major. However, their success has been limited; nearly a third (32%) of the transfer students who enrolled in the CASNR between the years 1999 and 2005 failed to graduate (OSU Student Profile Report, 2005). This statistic prompted administrators to create a special program for transfer students called the Transfer Zone in an attempt to provide a program that would facilitate social and academic integration and reduce dropout rates among transfer students (L.C. Martin, personal communication, February 1, 2007).

Previous studies have shown that programs, which encompass opportunities for students to interact in small living communities and become involved in academic activities, help students to remain at the institution until they have completed their academic degrees. Tinto's theory of student integration (1975) addressed several of the same concepts, i.e., a student will come to the university with personal characteristics and a degree of loyalty to the institution, but the institution must show early commitment to the student, positively impacting him or her academically and socially (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Most community and junior colleges only provide two-year degrees. However, for an employee to be in a position of leadership, it has become common in today's society for many professions to require a bachelor's degree, which is generally obtained from a four-year institution (Vaughan, 2006). Because of these societal demands for more education, many community and junior college students seek out four-year universities to obtain bachelor's degrees.

Earlier studies have evaluated the effects of retention programs on student commitment, social, and academic success, and how they played a part in retention (Zaho & Kun, 2004; Tinto, 2000; Vaughan, 2006). However, the literature is deficient in regard to transfer students and the role that learning communities have had on student retention, especially in the case of CASNR at OSU. This study will address that gap in the literature by evaluating the effects of a learning community specifically targeted for transfer students and their retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to describe the transfer students' perceptions of the Transfer Zone in the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University using Tinto's (1975) model for integrating transfer students into a four-year institution.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed.

1. What were the characteristics of the Transfer Zone student participants?
2. Why did transfer students choose to live in the Transfer Zone?
3. What were the participants' perceptions of the Transfer Zone programming and living arrangements?
4. Did participation in the Transfer Zone help students attain academic success?
5. Did participation in the Transfer Zone help students attain social integration?
6. Did participation in the Transfer Zone help retain students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and OSU?
7. What were Transfer Zone participants' suggestions for program improvements?

Definition of Terms

Academic success : A student’s academic “performance and intellectual development during the college years” (Tinto, 1975, p. 104) as perceived by the student.

CASNR: College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Four-year institution: A university that awards bachelor’s degrees based on 120 hours or more of course work completion.

Goal commitment: The student’s “commitment to the goal of college completion... measured in terms of educational plans, educational expectations, or career expectations” (Tinto, 1975, p. 102).

Institutional commitment : The student’s commitment to the institution due to satisfaction and interaction from the academic environment.

Learning community: “a program designed to enhance their [transfer students] learning and integration into campus life” (Talbert & Boyles, 2005, p. 211).

OSU: Oklahoma State University, a four-year, land grant institution where the flagship campus is located in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Retention: A measurement determined by calculating how many of the students enrolled in the fall 2006 semester returned for the spring 2007 semester expressed in percentage.

Social integration: The “interaction between individuals with given sets of characteristics (background, values, commitments, etc.) and other persons of varying characteristics within the college . . . occurs primarily through informal peer group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and administrative personal” (Tinto, 1975, p. 107).

Transfer student: A student who transfers in from another institution that is not affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Transfer Zone: a learning community that houses transfer students majoring in agricultural subjects sponsored by CASNR and Residential Life at OSU.

Two-year institution: A community or junior college that awards degrees based on approximately 70 hours of course work.

Limitations of this Study

1. The Transfer Zone was not filled to its maximum capacity of students.
2. This study was limited to transfer students in the CASNR Learning Community, Transfer Zone, Spring 2007.
3. Results of this study should not be generalized beyond the population studied: Transfer Zone participants, Spring 2007.

Assumptions of the Study

1. Study participants answered the questions honestly and truthfully.
2. Students who transferred to OSU did so with the intention of completion.
3. The evaluation instruments and methods used in this study rendered valid and reliable answers from the participants.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because the Transfer Zone is in its infancy, and the impact of the program on students' social integration, academic success and retention has not been determined precisely. This evaluation, being a case study and highly qualitative, had the likelihood to reveal potential strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for future implementations. Therefore, this formative case study describes first year participant's

perceptions of the program including aspects of, social integration, academic success, retention, and students' suggestions for future improvements.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Over one-half of first year college students attend a junior or community college as an educational gateway to a four-year institution (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Lee, Lewis, & Marks, 1993). Lee et al. (1993) stated that “community colleges function as part of the American educational ‘sorting machine’ providing a second rate higher education experience for students less advantaged in terms of class, gender, race, and ethnicity” (p. 82). Many students who transfer from two-year institutions to four-year institutions generally do not have a successful transition, resulting in withdrawal from the university (Vaughan, 2006).

Vaughan (2006) stated further that “transfer students are freshmen twice” (p. 4); therefore, many transfer students commonly experience what is known as transfer shock. It is a phenomenon that is characterized by a decrease in grade point average and decline in academic success (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 2004; Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000). Rhine, Milligan and Nelson (2000) related that “Transfer shock has been seen primarily in students majoring in business, math, and science, whereas students majoring in education, fine arts, humanities, and social sciences have

generally reported an increase in their GPA following transfer to a four-year institution” (pp. 447-448). Transfer students in agriculture are studying the sciences, that pertain to their disciplines therefore, one could reasonably expect agricultural science students to experience a similar form of transfer shock.

Students that withdraw from a university usually leave for a specific reason, and their decisions to leave are usually decisive (Demos, 1968). A study conducted at the University of Florida found the reasons students withdrew from the university were “failing, finances, dislike of college life, feeling incapable of college work, desire to work, worry about a problem and other” (Barger, 1965, p. 85). Although the study was conducted in 1965, the literature continues to report the same reasons for withdrawal.

Christie, Munro, and Fisher (2004) concluded that it is not just one factor that influences students’ decisions to withdraw, it is a combination of several factors such as “poor course choice, difficulties with getting involved in student life, negative perceptions of the university environment, and financial difficulties” (p. 622).

Students who choose to attend a two-year institution with intent to transfer to a four-year institution usually choose to attend the community or junior college because it is seen as a “safe environment” for students to explore their career aspirations (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000). According to Kowalski (1982), 70% of students who choose to withdraw from a four-year institution have the intellectual capacity to successfully complete their degrees.

Tinto (1975) stated that it was “individual’s integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college”

(p. 96). Therefore the Transfer Zone was designed as a living learning community for transfer students to address their academic and social integration at OSU.

The Transfer Student

The transfer student is under the magnifying glass of many researchers due to the uniqueness of their situation, the additional stress of integrating into a new environment, as well as individualized perceptions regarding aspects of college. This section will discuss the perspectives, academic achievement and selected background characteristics of transfer students.

Flaga (2006) conducted a qualitative study that incorporated interviews of transfer students from a two-year institution to a four-year institution in the quest to gain insight into students' perspectives of the transfer process over time. The questions that were asked of the students were based on Flaga's dimensions of transition, which included learning resources, connecting, familiarity, negotiating, and integrating. Flaga found that transfer students believed they were overwhelmed and lost in the transition process. The study also concluded that advisors from two-year and four-year institutions needed to work in collaboration with one another to provide vital transfer information to the students.

Lee et al. (1993) conducted a study that compared community college transfer students and non-transfer students in the university setting to evaluate probability of degree attainment and reported several significant findings. The research concluded that attending a community college did not disadvantage the transfer student socially or

academically. They also found that the social class of four-year students was considerably higher than that of students who attended community college and transferred into the university. This finding may imply why students chose to attend a community college versus attending a four-year institution from the beginning (Lee et al. 1993). However, the major finding of the study was that there was “no disadvantage of community college attendance for persistence to graduation” (p. 97).

Moor and Braun (2005) conducted a study that evaluated academic achievement and pre-collegiate demographics of students, over a 17-year period, in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Idaho. Specifically focusing on the findings regarding transfer students, the researchers concluded that transfer students had lower standardized test scores than did incoming freshmen. This finding would be consistent with the literature (Moor & Braun, 2005) in regard to students attending junior or community colleges in order to increase their grade point averages to meet university admissions requirements. Transfer students were also found to change their major less and came to the university more focused and goal oriented toward career plans. Moor and Braun (2005) also concluded transfer students may have lower SAT and ACT scores, but, by the time they arrived as juniors they performed at the same academic level as students who entered as a freshmen.

Townsend (1995) conducted a qualitative study to gain insight into how students perceived the transfer process from a two-year institution to a four-year institution, and how students perceived certain aspects of the academic environment. Responses to perceptions on the transfer process ranged from lack of support from the community college staff to thoughts of completing the transfer process on their own. Students had an

array of responses regarding the academic environment at the four-year institution as more difficult to no difference. Students also reported they believed the community college did not prepare them for the academic rigor of a four-year institution and that more writing assignments and assessments were expected of them at the latter.

The current study addressed transfer students' perceptions of a program in a four-year university. This section is important as it revealed transfer students felt overwhelmed and lost in the transfer process (Flaga, 2006). It also highlighted transfer students as having lower standardized test scores and attending two-year institutions in pursuit of increasing GPA and test scores to meet admissions requirements at most four-year institutions (Moor & Braun, 2005). Moreover transfer students believed the community college experience did not prepare them for the academic rigor of a four-year institution (Townsend, 1995).

Retention

An abundance of research has been conducted in the area of student attrition, yet researchers have not been able to identify why some transfer students persist, and others dropout (Tinto, 1975). Laanan (2004) stated that "preferences are important in education since they influence behaviors and goals, which in turn affect motivation" (p. 337) to persist in college. "The success and failures of community college transfer students at four-year colleges and universities have been attributed to a number of factors" (Berger & Malaney, 2003, p. 3) that focus on individual characteristics.

Zepke and Leach (2005) performed an analysis of 146 studies to understand environmental student support influences on student persistence outcomes breaking the results into support of social needs and support of academic needs. The study concluded that students' outcomes were improved when students were comfortable with the institutional environmental processes such as the enrollment process, advice on course changes, timetabling, and early contact between the institution and student advisor (Zepke & Leach, 2005). Moreover, the study concluded that learning communities had a positive impact on social and academic integration, by allowing a homogenous group to form and collaborate together to improve student outcomes. This section will introduce the variables that are associated with transfer student retention.

Family Background

“As has been true in other areas of educational performance, the likelihood of an individual's dropping out from college has been shown to be related to the characteristics of the family” (Tinto, 1975, p. 100). According to Hackman and Dysinger (1970), the commitment of a student and his or her parents to obtaining a college education significantly relates to whether or not the student persists beyond their first year after transferring to a four-year institution. Hackman and Dysinger (1970) studied 1,407 students at three Midwestern universities consisting of all students enrolling at one of the three colleges between 1964-1965. Institutional characteristics (e.g. tuition, fees, housing) for all three universities were similar. The study surveyed both students and parents.

Hackman and Dysinger (1970) discovered that parents of persisters were more likely to participate in the study, which could be interpreted as a strong parental commitment to educational goals. Arguably, parents with higher goal commitment to education provided a stronger background regarding the importance of education for their children (Hackman & Dysinger). Johnes and McNabb (2004) also discovered that parental or family background was an important determinant of degree completion and of voluntary attrition, respectively. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Johnes and McNabb found it was less likely for students to voluntarily drop out of a collegiate institution if their parents worked in managerial or professional occupations. In addition, dropout rates and academic failure were highest in students whose parents worked in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations. Slocum (1956) found that 81% of students who did not drop out believed their parents were very interested in them graduating college, however, only 35% of dropouts in his sample perceived their parents were interested.

Although the previous studies are somewhat dated, more recent studies show similar results regarding parental support and parental influence. Bank et al. (1990) revealed that there was a positive “impact of parental norms on persistence behaviors” (p. 216). Their study also revealed that “parents did tend to serve as a positive role model” (p. 217) for the participants in their study and that parental modeling had a positive correlation on students decisions to persist in college (Bank et al., 1990).

Allen (1999) revealed, “. . . higher levels of family emotional support were associated with [students’] higher levels of desire to finish college” (p. 478). This is congruent with Pantages and Creedon (1978) claim that the influence of parents is based on the level of the parent/child relationship. The stronger the relationship, the more

influential parental aspirations will be on the student regardless of parents aspirations for their child (Pantages & Creedon).

Institutional Characteristics- Student Academic Performance and Intellectual Development

According to DesJardins et al. (1999), a students' GPA was negatively relational to his or her likelihood of becoming a dropout. Students who receive good grades had a stronger chance of persisting than those who received lower marks (DesJardins et al.). Johnson (1992) conducted a study on transfer students in a College of Agriculture and Home Economics and found that transfer students had a lower level of academic aptitude than non-transfer students and contributed transfer students' low standardized test scores to the entrance requirements of community or junior colleges from which they transferred. According to Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2000) “. . . student academic success as demonstrated by GPA and the completion of the maximum amount of transferable credit hours at a community college, predicts student persistence in completing a bachelor's degree” (p. 446).

Okun and Finch (1998) investigated college attrition. Their study included 240 in-coming students at the fastest growing university in the United States. According to Okun and Finch, the strongest predictor for institutional departure was cumulative GPA. As students' GPA's increased, the likelihood of dropping out decreased. Perry et al. (2005) explained that GPA may be linked to withdrawal rates because, “students pursuing with better cumulative GPA's may work harder, obtain better grades, and

therefore withdraw from fewer courses or leave the institution” (p. 558 - 559). Perry et al. also found that students committed to high GPA’s may strategically withdraw from courses in which they do poorly, but do not withdraw from the university entirely.

Peer-Group Interaction

According to Tinto (1975), social integration is a precursor to initial institutional commitment. What is more, Okun and Finch (1998) found that students with “higher levels of institutional commitment were more likely to perceive themselves as being integrated into the social system of the college” (p. 249). Organizational involvement was a predictor of social integration, but neither number of friends nor living in residence halls were significant predictors of social integration (Okun & Finch, 1998).

Newcomb (1962) believed social integration was the most influential factor in developing student attitudes about the institution, educational goals, and life in general. Pantages and Creedon (1978) explain, “. . . it is precisely these attitudes that contribute to the probability of persisting in college. If the students’ social interactions with her or his peer group are positive and satisfying, the chances are that the student will be ‘successful’ in college [i.e., receive a degree]” (p. 70). Mohr, Eiche, and Sedlacek (1998) found that “personal contact was positively correlated with campus involvement” (p. 348). They also discuss the correlation between alienation and the lack of personal guidance and attention from teachers and advisors (Mohr et al.). Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2000) asserted that students from community or junior colleges enjoyed the individual attention they were given at the two-year institutions versus the university

environment where some students reported just being a number, or perceptions of anonymity.

Bank, Slavings, and Biddle (1990) found that peers had a significant indirect effect on persistency in college. Students had friends that did not persist in college were more likely to not continue. Bank et al. concluded “that social influence matters substantially for undergraduates for such issues as decisions to stay in college” (p. 222). Students who perceived the university setting alienated them reported finding it difficult to get caught up in student activities (Christie, Munro & Fisher, 2004).

On the contrary, Tinto (1975) concluded, “excessive interaction in the social domain may, beyond a certain point, tend to distract time spent on academic studies and therefore lead to lower academic performance and eventual academic dismissal” (p. 108). Therefore, equilibrium has to be achieved in social integration if students are to perform well academically.

Financial Implications

Many students may attend a community or junior college as a way to reduce their financial cost on, obtaining affordable postsecondary education (Rhine, Millingan & Nelson, 2000). When considering a cost benefit analysis of the college experience “a person will tend to withdraw from college when he perceives that an alternative form of investment of time, energies and resources will yield greater benefits, relative to costs, over time than will staying in college” (Tinto, 1975, p. 97-98).

Johnson (1994) elaborated that, “it is possible that individuals vary in their capacity to tolerate financial hardship, or perhaps financial hardship is associated with other variables such as student age, level of independence, and extent of personal decision” (p. 347). Mohr et al. (1998) concluded that the top reason students withdrew from the university was due to economic factors and the need to start paying off school debt.

Consequently, the study by Christie et al. (2004) revealed that students who were considering withdrawal from the university “were more worried by the total amount of debt they were accumulating (including student loans, overdrafts and other commercial debts)” (p. 629) and financial issues played a large part into their decisions to withdraw or persist.

However, Allen (1999) found that there was no direct effect of financial aid debt accumulation on student persistence, but they did find that it had some level of influence on the overall college effect. They concluded, “the indirect nature of finances might affect the student’s academic integration, social process, and resolve to persist in college” (Allen, 1999, p. 479). Rhine et al. (2000) reported transfer students as stating “. . . the community college made it easier to attend school and maintain a job . . . others believed that it was easier to get financial aid at the community college than the university” (p. 449).

This literature on their findings is important as it addressed research questions that are factors for Tinto’s Model. These factors are crucial for student commitment and ultimately for student persistence. Family backgrounds and grade point average are considered precursors to academic and social integration, which is important because

both factors were found to influence how students perceive and respond to the academic environment. Moreover financial implications and peer interaction were found to have a strong impact on student commitment toward college.

Residential Learning Communities

Learning communities are an optimal way for transfer students to be introduced into the campus environment through the close proximity of other students and access to university conveniences. These communities have also been called living learning communities, academic study groups or learning clusters. This section will discuss the characteristics of a learning community, as well as the perceived benefits and negative consequences they may hold for transfer students.

A qualitative study in the pursuit to understand the way transfer students perceived the transfer process found that students “indicated that living on campus increased opportunities to integrate into the academic, social, and physical environments, and helped students find their niche faster” (Flaga, 2006, p. 15). McKegg (2005) stated that “all learners need an environment in which they feel culturally safe, surrounded by like minds, in order to make sense and meaning from their learning” (p. 296). Peer support, through collaboration and providing a sense of caring, helped students navigate difficult times, both academically and socially, to become socially integrated into the university through the learning community (McKegg, 2005).

According to Rao (2005), many non-traditional students find it difficult to persist in college due to the lack of connections to other students and support services on

campus. Many times “social support may be crucial in a successful transition” (Rao, 2005, p. 1) to the university from a two-year institution.

Tinto (1997) conducted a longitudinal study on the effects of learning communities and found that the learning community allowed students to develop a network of peers that assisted them toward persistence in the postsecondary setting. Students who participated in the learning community also found that it facilitated persistence by “bridging the social-academic divide” (Tinto, p. 13) by providing a mechanism for students to engage in a network of peer support through themed groups of classes, such as agricultural classes, that provided a foundation for students to voice their views, and experiences (Tinto, 1998). Tinto (1998) discussed two common components of learning communities: shared knowledge and shared knowing. Shared knowledge occurs when students share an educational experience due to the courses being centralized around a common theme. Shared knowing is a phenomenon that occurs due to students feeling comfortable to interact on a social level. Tinto (1998) stated “learning communities are important when they provide both academic and social support” (p. 3) that is particularly needed by transfer students as they enter into a new environmental setting.

Stassen (2003) reviewed five criteria of residential and non residential learning communities.

1. Linked courses (two courses independent of each other, but with common students)
2. Learning clusters (courses linked by content)
3. Freshmen interest group (courses linked by theme)

4. Federated learning communities (faculty as linchpin)
5. Coordinated studies programs (where all the students' course credits are associated with an integrated, theme-based, interdisciplinary curriculum designed through intensive faculty collaboration) (p. 584)

Stassen (2003) found that students who participated in learning communities had substantially higher GPA's than students who did not. Higher retention rates and lower dismissal and withdrawal rates were found to be true of learning community participants than that of non-participants as well. The study also found that participants in the learning communities when measured for social and academic integration, scored higher in both categories.

Zaho and Kuh (2004) conducted a study that examined the relationship between participation in learning communities and involvement in academic and social activities. The results revealed students who participated in learning communities were more likely to exhibit increased academic effort and higher rates of participation in social environments such as student organizations, fraternities and sororities.

Learning communities have been found to encourage active learning in the classroom setting, encourage social engagement as a catalyst for academic engagement, promote an enhanced quality of learning, and produce a collaborative environment where students can interact and express themselves with others who share similar interests (Tinto, 2000). What is more Vaughan (2006) summarized that,

Without the opportunity to live on campus, it is unlikely that transfers will ever be able to integrate fully into the life of their new institution; thus every effort should

be made by the four-year institution to integrate transfers into campus life, including offering them on campus housing. (p. 5)

These research findings are important as they revealed literature focused on the impact learning communities had on retention, involvement and grade point average, which is the focus of this case study evaluation. Stassen (2003) found students who participated in learning communities displayed higher GPA's than those who did not. This is significant as transfer students are characterized as having lower GPA's (Moor & Braun, 2005). Learning communities were found to place students in close proximity to social activities (Zaho & Kuh, 2004), which in turn results in social integration.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's Student Integration Model

Tinto's theory asserted that "the match between an individual's characteristics and those of the institution shape two underlying individual commitments: a commitment to completing college (goal commitment) and a commitment to his or her respective institution (institutional commitment)" (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992, 144). Tinto (1975) explained that students enter an institution with varying family backgrounds (socio-economic status, cultural attributes), ability, demographics (age, gender, race), and experiences that effect performance in college. Tinto (1975) developed a conceptual model for student dropout which:

. . . argues that the process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and

social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measured by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which led to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94)

Within this model, family background, individual attributes and prior experience are all factors influencing educational expectations and student commitment to goals.

Institutional commitment includes educational expectations. Both student goal commitment and institutional commitment are important predictors, as well as reflections of student success or disappointment in their collegiate environment (Tinto, 1975).

According to this model, it is imperative to student persistence that individuals become integrated into academic and social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto (1975), the higher the degree of integration into these systems the higher the student's commitment to the institution and the goal of completion.

Tinto (1988) discussed *The Rites of Passage* by Van Gennep in relation to the college student's career path. Accordingly students will go through three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation as they move through their college experience. First, the separation stage is a time for students to disassociate from past communities, such as the home community or junior college, and may prove to be the most difficult for students (Tinto). The second stage is a transition period. This is a process where students begin to interact with new members of the group; in this case, other four-year college students and university organizations (Tinto). This is a time of "stress and sense of loss and bewilderment, if not desolation, that sometimes accompanies the transition to

[a four-year institution and] can pose serious problems for the individual attempting to persist” (Tinto, p. 444).

Tinto (1988) stated further that

. . . commitments have much to do with individual responses to the stress of separation and transition . . . and the unavoidable fact is that some students are unwilling to put up with the stresses of transition because they are not sufficiently committed either to the goals of education and/or to the institution in which entry is first made. (p. 445)

Incorporation, the stage where the student becomes involved with the new environment, will begin to take shape as the student establishes new patterns and interactions with new members of the group (Tinto, 1988). Tinto described this time as a chance for the student to “find and adopt norms appropriate to the new college setting and establishing competent membership in the social and intellectual communities of college life” (p. 446). Ultimately, some degree of desire must exist for the student to persist in their college career (Allen, 1999).

Berger and Malaney (2003) emphasized the fact that “adjustment to college life involves more than performing inside of the classroom; there is a wide range of academic and social interactions and outcomes that must be considered in a comprehensive view of the college adjustment process” (p. 4). A study conducted by Lee et al. (1993) found that community college transfer students in a four-year institution were satisfied with the academic aspect of their college experience but were consequently less satisfied with the social side of college life.

In Tinto's (1975) model, it is the relationship between goal commitment and institutional commitment that will determine whether a student persists or withdraws from an institution:

Presumably, either low goal commitment or low institutional commitment can lead to dropout. Given prior commitment to the goal of college completion, the lower an individual's commitment to the institution, the more likely he is to dropout from that institution. Whether or not he transfers to another institution or simply leaves higher education altogether depends both upon the varying levels of the person's goal and institutional commitments and upon the level of the institution at which the person is registered . . . Largely the result of the person's experience in the academic domain, the person may reevaluate his educational expectations and decide to withdraw voluntarily from the institution. This may occur despite his having been socially integrated into the institution.

(p. 96)

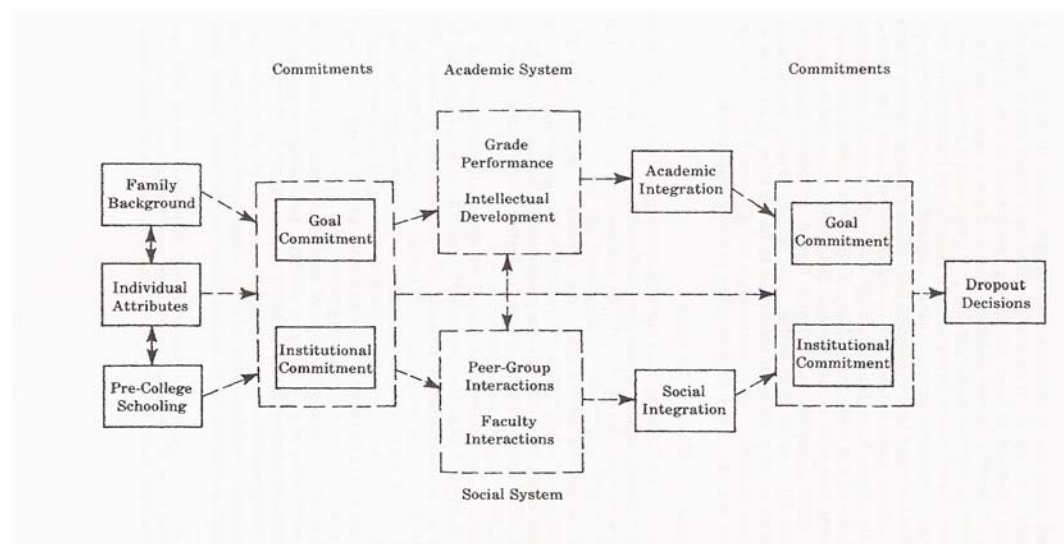


Figure 1. Tinto's Model of Student Integration (Tinto, 1975, p. 95)

Previous Studies of Transfer Students that Used Tinto's Model

Berger and Malaney (2003) found that transfer “students were more likely to spend time socializing with peers and studying while enrolled in the [university setting] than when they were attending a community college” (p. 17). Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) conducted a study that compared Tinto's model of student integration and Bean's model of student attrition to examine which model provided better insight to the phenomenon of college persistence. The study concluded that Tinto's model provided a stronger insight into understanding the factors of social and academic integration contributing to institutional fit (institutional commitment), which in turn affected intent to persist. It was also evident that the non-intellective factors of Bean's model played a part in students' decisions to persist in college.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature examined showed transfer students overwhelmingly perceived they were lost in the transfer process from a two-year to a four-year institution (Flaga, 2006). Transfer students characterized by a lower socioeconomic status and non-traditional students who were not of the average college student age or status were found to show no disadvantage in the university environment (Lee et al. 1993). In most cases transfer students earned lower standardized test scores and high school grade point averages, which may warrant the need to attend a junior or community college to improve academic scores and meet four-year institutional admission requirements. Frequently,

transfer students expressed the two-year institution prepared them for a four-year institution (Townsend, 1995).

The literature revealed that students, including transfer students, withdraw from the university for many reasons, none of which were universal. When evaluating potential factors that influence student dropout, parental influence strongly affected students' educational decisions (Allen, 1999; Banks, Slavings & Biddle, 1990; Hackman & Dysinger, 1970; Slocum, 1956; Tinto, 1975). It was apparent that high school grade point average positively related to college grade performance (Perry et al., 2005), however, rank had no significant impact on college dropout (DesJardins et al., 1999). The literature revealed that students with high college grade performance (GPA) were more likely to persist to degree completion (Johnes & McNabb, 2004; Okun & Finch, 1998; Tinto, 1975). Transfer students who reported a higher level of social relations and a positive peer influence were found to be more satisfied with their college experience as well as the decision to persist (Mohr, Eiche & Sedlacek, 1998; Newcomb, 1962).

The literature also demonstrated that college students handled financial hardships differently (Johnson, 1994) as well as perceptions about the value of the college investment (Tinto, 1975). Students showed a high level of concern with the total amount of debt incurred (Christie, Munro & Fisher, 2004), and financial stress due to limited finances may affect academic integration and the social process (Allen, 1999) resulting in dropout.

What is more, the literature showed that learning communities were connected with improved academic performance and integration of academic and social experiences (Zaho & Kun, 2004). When transfer students participated in learning communities, they

were presented with “increased opportunities to integrate into the academic and social environment” (Flaga, 2006, p. 15). The literature also revealed that students who participated in learning communities had higher GPA’s than students who did not, and had a lower occurrence of dismissal or withdrawal from the university (Stassen, 2003).

Based on the literature review, the researcher determined that Tinto’s model of student integration was an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. This model encompasses the aspects of social and academic integration as well as goal and institutional commitment to evaluate transfer students’ attitudes regarding persistence toward earning a college degree.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used in conducting the study and includes the details regarding research design, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis. This case study was used to describe transfer students perceptions of the Transfer Zone based on factors associated with Tinto's model of student integration. To accurately gather data and answer the research questions, participants were identified and data were collected during the spring semester in 2007.

In qualitative research the bias can never be completely removed. The researcher admits to interaction with transfer students on a daily basis. Awareness of personal bias was accounted for through reflective practice.

Research Design

The research design employed in this study was a case-study approach used to determine the participants' perceptions of social integration, academic success, and commitment which Tinto (1975) explained would ultimately lead to persistence in

college. The researcher chose a case study design because “it draws heavily on qualitative methods, but can employ both qualitative and quantitative methods” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004, p. 307). Case study allowed the researcher to examine a group of individuals bound by space and time to gain in-depth understanding of their situation (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This design allowed the researcher to quantitatively gather information regarding the participants through the use of a questionnaire while subsequently gathering qualitative information through interviews. The approach was used based on the reasoning that a questionnaire could be valuable in describing opinions, behaviors, attitudes, or characteristics of the population (Creswell, 2005), while the interview technique provided similar information but allowed for the “opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see . . . which allows for serendipitous learning” (Glesne, 1999, p. 69) that only interpersonal interaction can elicit.

The variables measured in this study were 1) academic success, 2) social integration (commitment), 3) participant characteristics, 4) perceptions of program, and 5) retention. These variables reflected the variables presented in Tinto’s model (1975).

Population

This case study focused on transfer students who populated the Transfer Zone in the spring of 2007. Prior to the study, it was decided to exclude Transfer Zone participants whose first semester was spring 2007 from the study due to the lack of opportunity to become familiar with the institutional setting in such a short period of

time. In the fall of 2006 there were eight transfer students enrolled in the Transfer Zone. By the spring 2007 there were six remaining participants. One participant declined to participate in the study so the researcher administered the questionnaire and interview to the five residual participants.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Oklahoma State University requires all research studies involving human subjects to have approval prior to commencement of the study. A proposal was submitted and approved by IRB and found to be in compliance with OSU and federal regulations protecting the rights of human subjects. The following research number was assigned to this study: AG075 (see appendix A).

Instrumentation

Two data sources were utilized to formulate conclusions: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The instrument and interview questions were supported by existing questionnaires used by D'Souza (2003) and Lannan (2007). Each of the questionnaires, The Freshman in Transition Questionnaire and Lannan Transfer Student Questionnaire (L-TSQ), were considered because of their successful prior use to evaluate transfer students in a similar college residential learning program. Items were omitted from each of the questionnaires that did not apply to the research objectives and only those applicable to their study were used. The questions were asked in their original

context; only program names were changed to fit this study. All questions used in the study were supported by the theoretical framework of Tinto (1975). The questionnaire was developed to gain information regarding selected personal characteristics. The semi-structured interview question sections were organized into five main sections: perceptions of the program, programming and activities, academic success, social integration and university commitment and retention.

The demographic section, gathered information from the transfer students that allowed for the research to develop a demographic profile of the participants. This section identified age, GPA, race/ethnic background, gender, degree aspirations, and educational attainment of students' parents.

The first section of interview questions was designed to elicit information regarding participant's perceptions of the Transfer Zone experience. This provided the researcher important knowledge to construct a picture of the participants' perceptions of the program.

The second section of interview questions was the opportunity to gain insight into participants' perceptions of the programming and activities offered by the Transfer Zone. This section was designed to gather data regarding participant satisfaction with the Transfer Zone program and activities.

The purpose of section three was to gain insight into students' perceptions of academic success and to determine if the Transfer Zone facilitated academic success. These questions were based on Tinto's (1975) constructs to determine students' perceptions of academic success, satisfaction with current academics, and in depth descriptions of the level of influence the program had on academic success.

The fourth section of interview questions evaluated participants' social involvement and integration into the OSU system and if the Transfer Zone facilitated it. The questions investigated student experiences with faculty, clubs, organizations, and the Stillwater community.

The fifth section investigated participants' institutional commitment to OSU through their retention. The items evaluated were satisfaction with the decision to transfer to OSU, level of satisfaction with the university, and the importance of graduating from OSU.

Instrument Reliability

Creswell (2005) defined reliability as “means that individual scores from an instrument should be nearly the same or stable on repeated administrations of the instrument and that they should be free from sources of measurement error” (p. 587). To insure stability of the instrument over time i.e. reliability, the L-TSQ was put through a test-retest regimen. Lannan (2007) diagnosed a correlation coefficient on the test results and found the correlation to be a .75. This analysis demonstrated that L-TSQ results would not be expected to significantly vary over time. D'Souza's (2003) instrument proved a consistency for reliability rating 0.53 on a Cronbach Alpha test. Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1996) implied when measurement results were to be used to draw conclusions in relation to a group or for research purposes, a reliability coefficient in the range of 0.5 to 0.6 was satisfactory. In the case of the L-TSQ and D'Souza Freshman in Transition Questionnaire each exhibited a Cronbach Alpha of over 0.5.

Laanan (2007) addressed construct validity through conducting an extensive review of the literature. To insure face and content validity Lannan pilot tested the questionnaire twice with different groups of students to insure the questions were valuable as well as organized and worded in a way that was understandable to the population. D'Souza (2003) proved validity by pilot testing and referring the instrument to a panel of experts.

The researcher of this study addressed external validity by not generalizing the findings beyond the group of given students during the program's particular year. Utilizing questions from L-TSQ and D'Souza's instruments in the same context and grouping, but by only striking and adding the words of this evaluation, insured face validity.

As a part of this case study, interviews were utilized. To insure validity and reliability of the data collected the researcher conducted cross-checks of the work through member checks and audits of the narrative (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). This triangulation insured the participant's ideas were accurately reported and representative of the interview.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were used to determine the effectiveness of the Transfer Zone on academic success, social integration, institutional commitment and retention. On March 4, 2007, Transfer Zone participants were contacted via e-mail to inform them of the forthcoming evaluation and schedule a meeting time.

Participants were interviewed individually during March 9 –13, 2007 in Agricultural Hall, room 450.

The quantitative procedures included a paper questionnaire administered during the scheduled meeting time. Participants were advised of the purpose of the study and their rights as participants and signed a consent form. Questionnaires were completed and submitted to the researcher prior to commencement of the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. This method allowed the researcher to be guided by a set list of pre-determined questions with the freedom to ask additional questions to gain more substantial information and knowledge on a particular topic. All participants participated in the interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for accuracy. Interview transcripts were sent to the interviewees to review and examine for accuracy, and to make changes as needed.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe participants' demographic and background characteristics gathered through questionnaire responses. Microsoft Excel was used to determine frequencies and percentages.

The researcher analyzed the data using ATLAS TI, which is qualitative data analysis software that allows a researcher to analyze and code text into consistent themes. This software was chosen because of its availability to the researcher and by suggestion of D'Souza (2003). This program allowed the researcher to code and theme the data within the context of the evaluation objectives. Clear themes consistent with studies

goals emerged which were academic success, social integration, retention, perception of Transfer Zone, participation, expectations for Transfer Zone, faculty interaction, and suggestions for future transfer students and the Transfer Zone. The findings from this analysis are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the case study. The findings are presented in accordance with the research questions stated in chapter 1. Research question 1 was answered using quantitative methodology in the form of a questionnaire. The remaining six questions were answered utilizing a qualitative semi-structured interview. To protect the identity of the participants each interviewee was assigned a number. Participants will be referred to by their participant number or by using a generic term so the gender of the respondent will remain confidential.

Research question 1: What were the characteristics of the Transfer Zone participants?

The participants ages ranged from 20 to 22 years. Three of the participants (60%) were female, two (40%) were male. The majority of participants (80%) were White/Caucasian (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Selected Characteristics of Transfer Zone Participants
Age, Gender and Race*

Measure and variable	<i>f</i>	(%)
Age		
20	2	40
21	2	40
22	1	20
Gender		
Male	2	40
Female	3	60
Race		
White: Caucasian	4	80
Native American	1	20

Participants of the Transfer Zone lived an average of 151 miles from their parent's home/their hometown with the farthest living 450 miles and the closest living 50 miles from home. The majority (60%) of participants lived 60 miles or less from Oklahoma State University before attending the university (see Table 2).

Table 2

Distance Transfer Zone Participants Lived From Home

Miles	<i>f</i>	(%)
50	1	20
55	1	20
60	1	20
140	1	20
450	1	20

Almost all participants (80%) were employed during the Spring 2007 semester. Of the participants who were employed, three (75%) worked at jobs away from the Oklahoma State University campus. Only one Transfer Zone participant indicated he or she had a full-time (40 hours a week) job (see Table 3).

Table 3

Transfer Zone Participants' Employment Status

Measure and variable	<i>f</i>	(%)
Employed		
Yes	4	80
No	1	20
On campus		
On campus	1	25
Off-campus	3	75
Hours worked per week		
5	1	25
15	1	25
20	1	25
40	1	25

Participants were asked to note their parents' highest educational level. The majority (60%) of participants noted their fathers had some college education. Two mothers of Transfer Zone participants have obtained an associate degree. None of the parents had obtained a Baccalaureate degree or higher (see Table 4).

Table 4

Highest Educational Level of Transfer Zone Participants' Parents

Educational Level	Father	Mother
High school diploma or GED	2	1
Some college	3	2
Associate degree		2

Participants were asked if they had a sibling who attended OSU. Four of five (80%) indicated they did not have a brother or sister who attended OSU. In addition, most participants (80%) had applied for some form of financial aid.

Participants ranged from desiring an associate degree to a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine as their highest academic degree. All participants noted wanting to complete a degree in higher education (see Table 5).

Table 5

Highest Academic Degree Transfer Zone Participants Intended to Obtain

Degree	<i>f</i>	(%)
Associate	1	20
Bachelors	1	20
Masters	1	20
Ph.D. or Ed. D.	1	20
D.V.M	1	20

Four of five participants (80%) stated that they transferred to OSU because of the universities academic reputation. One participant transferred to the university because he/she had friends at Oklahoma State University (see Table 6).

Table 6

Reasons Transfer Zone Participants' Transferred to OSU

Reason	<i>f</i>	(%)
Friends at OSU	1	20
Family at OSU	0	0
Financial aid packet	0	0
Academic reputation	4	80
Athletic opportunity	0	0

Research question 2: Why did transfer students choose to live in the Transfer Zone?

The participants revealed they chose to live in the Transfer Zone because they expected to live in an area with other transfer students who were in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and had similar backgrounds and interests. It was a general consensus among the participants that the apartments were the biggest selling point to the Transfer Zone. They were new, furnished apartments within walking distance from the center of campus. The Transfer Zone apartments were comparable in price to other apartments close to campus, which made the students' housing decision easier and the stress of looking for a place to live was relieved.

Research question 3: What are the participants' perceptions of the Transfer Zone programming and living arrangements?

When asked about the Transfer Zone programming, three of the five participants had awareness and participated in the programs; therefore, they had sufficient knowledge of the programs and could offer objective feedback. Those three who participated believed the programs had meaning and were an effective use of their time. The remaining two participants were unfamiliar with the programs, although they were informed of when the programs took place. The two participants who indicated they were unfamiliar with the programs were unable to attend due to conflicts with work and school schedules.

All participants believed it would be valuable to have informational programs such as: study abroad, financial aid, team building, class scheduling, and student organizations.

Those who participated in the programs were dissatisfied with the participation and attendance of other Transfer Zone members. Whereas participants who were unable to attend the programs were dissatisfied with the meeting times and methods of contact from the community mentor.

When asked about Transfer Zone living arrangements, participants 1 and 2 were satisfied with where they lived; however, participant 3 showed less satisfaction with his/her arrangements. He/she stated, "I live in family housing and have one neighbor that has three children and the other that has four. My apartment is sometimes noisy." Participant 4 stated, "I don't really like it." Participant 5 explained, "I would pick the

third floor over the first floor because I always hear people upstairs constantly during sporadic times of the night.”

Participants unanimously made it clear that they would have preferred to have lived by other Transfer Zone participants. All participants reported not knowing the other members of the Transfer Zone or where they lived.

Research question 4: Did participation in the Transfer Zone help students attain academic success?

Participants defined academic success within the following ways:

- “A combination of a good GPA but also understanding the subject matter.”
- “The ability to retain what you learned and make use of it.”
- “Your ability to gain knowledge to make a decent grade, a grade that you are happy with.”
- “My perception has changed. When I first got here it was definitely based off of my GPA. After my first couple of exams at a big university I found that academic success is more that you understand the material and what you want to do and understanding what you want to do in life.”
- “Academic success is defined as a combination of me achieving study skills through learning the material and understanding the subject material.”

All participants were in consensus that the Transfer Zone did not help them academically or help to achieve a higher grade point average. One participant reported that the ability to go to a secluded place (room in the Transfer Zone) was nice compared to the junior college dormitory room to which he/she was accustomed.

Four out of five participants agreed that the social interaction of the Transfer Zone might have helped them academically. The participants reported living with other transfer students from the same college as roommates was valuable. Participant 2 explained there was not help academically because “there really wasn’t much social interaction.”

When we were asked how satisfied academically they were during their experience at OSU, they responded as follows:

- “I am not really satisfied.”
- “I am satisfied. Good enough I guess.”
- “Overall it has been okay, transferring in, the changes; you are going to suffer a little grade loss.”
- “My grades are better this year than last year, being a second year transfer student.”

Research question 5: Did participation in the Transfer Zone help students attain social integration?

Three of five participants believed the Transfer Zone did not contribute to involvement in activities on campus. One of the remaining two participants expressed starting out in activities but decreasing involvement thereafter. The other participant expressed involvement in activities due to suggestions from friends. All participants agreed that the Transfer Zone did not facilitate involvement in activities off of campus.

Two of the participants indicated involvement in clubs and organizations at OSU. The other three participants were not involved with clubs or organizations. One participant reported non-involvement due to work conflicts. Another participant stated

he/she did not participate in organizations because club participants were only social during the meetings and not afterwards due to over commitment with so many activities.

Four of five participants believed that the Transfer Zone facilitated interaction with faculty members. The participants expressed having positive interaction with the program coordinator and program presenters. One participant indicated “it did not help me meet any faculty members that were not one of my teachers.”

Two participants believed the Transfer Zone helped them develop close personal relationships by meeting their roommates. One participant expressed that there should have been many more chances to get to know other participants. Another asserted that the Transfer Zone alone did nothing to assist in developing personal relationships. However, one participant believed the Transfer Zone provided the opportunity to better know a fellow transfer student from the same junior college.

Research Question 6: Did participation in the Transfer Zone help retain students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and OSU?

When asked if participation in the Transfer Zone influenced their decision to remain at OSU, participants responded with the following statements. “The Transfer Zone made me want to stay because I at least know what other people are going through. I knew it was not only a change for me, but it was a change for everybody.”

“I was ready to drop out of all of my classes and go home because I was stressed . . . I do not think that if I had not gotten into the Transfer Zone and met the person that I did as my roommate would I have stayed.”

“When I first got here I had trouble with financial aid and I thought about transferring back to my junior college where they were offering a four-year degree. But, because of the people I met and the degree at my junior college being a terminal degree, I decided to stay at OSU.”

“I have already dropped out of CASNR. I really liked it there because of the faculty, but the program I was enrolled in was not for me.”

“I wanted to dropout the first semester I was here. But after sticking with it, I eventually got to the stage in my life where I was focused and learned the routine. By the time I participated in the Transfer Zone, I knew OSU was for me, and I am going to hate leaving this May.”

All participants were satisfied with their decision to transfer to OSU. One student stated, “I would have stayed at my junior college because of the small classes, but I am satisfied with my decision to transfer to OSU.” Participant 5 stated, “I wish I would have come here earlier and had gotten into the swing of things.” Participant 3 revealed, “I am glad I made the decision to transfer to OSU. I feel I made the right decisions and I know my education has really improved because of that.”

Two of the five participants expressed they, as transfer students, were treated well by the university (i.e., faculty and other students). Participant 2 stated, “Everybody is nice and everybody’s helpful.” Participant 4 stated, “By the faculty of the ag college, most of them, I had a very warm reception.” Participants 1, 3, & 5 all expressed some form of dissatisfaction. Participant 1 explained, “Sometimes they (the faculty) treat you like you should already know things and it is like this is my first time ever being here. How am I supposed to know something if you do not tell me?” Participant 3 stated, “The

first time I came to OSU and enrolled it was overwhelming and I felt like I was treated like I should know where everything is. But in CASNR, the faculty really made the difference. My advisor has been really good in helping me adjust and plan out my schedule and talks to me about future plans and what I want to do and that made a big impression on me to finish at OSU.” Participant 5 stated, “Some of the people who run university apartments are not really knowledgeable about the Transfer Zone and did not know how to handle us when we had a question or needed help.”

All participants stated it was important for them to graduate from OSU. What is more, participant 2 expressed, “I would like to even get my master’s from here.”

Research question 7: Do Transfer Zone participants have suggestions for program improvements?

Participant 2 stated, “There should be a gathering for everybody who doesn’t have a roommate where they can go and meet the other participants and see who they get along with other participants and pick their roommate that way.”

All participants expressed that living together in the same wing or section would be a significant improvement.

Participant 3 revealed, “More dinners, possibly once a week instead of once a month, would help as well as have study sessions and participate in activities in Stillwater such as community service.”

Participant 4 suggested, “Setting up a computer lab, just for the Transfer Zone participants . . . that way the participants would get to meet each other and hang out and have study groups.”

Three of the four participants agreed just showing incoming transfer students the apartments would be the most influential selling point.

Transfer Zone participants also made the following suggestions to help out in the transfer process to OSU:

- Have a packet for transfer students similar to what freshmen receive when they come to campus.
- Provide an orientation class designed to familiarize new transfer students to the campus, traditions of OSU, and other transfer students.
- Junior colleges and OSU should work more closely together to familiarize transfer students before the transfer process

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize findings derived from the case study and to discuss recommendations and implications for future development and refinement of the Transfer Zone program in CASNR at OSU.

Summary

The intention of this study was to determine how the Transfer Zone in the College of Agricultural Sciences at Oklahoma State University impacted social integration, academic success and retention as defined by Tinto's model (1975). The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What were the characteristics of the Transfer Zone student participants?
2. Why did transfer students choose to live in the Transfer Zone?
3. What were the participants' perceptions of the Transfer Zone programming and living arrangements?
4. Did participation in the Transfer Zone help students attain academic success?
5. Did participation in the Transfer Zone help students attain social integration?

6. Did participation in the Transfer Zone help retain students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and OSU?
7. What were Transfer Zone participants' suggestions for program improvements?

Due to the formative nature of the research, a case study approach was employed.

There were six participants in the Transfer Zone however; one participant chose not to participate in the study. Therefore, the study consisted of five students who were enrolled in the Transfer Zone learning community during Spring semester 2007.

The researcher utilized an instrument that was based on questions from D'Souza (2003) and Lannan (2007). The instrument consisted of six sections: selected student personal characteristics, participants' perceptions of the program, including its programming and activities, their academic success, their social integration, and their retention and institutional commitment.

To collect data about participants' personal characteristics, they were asked to complete a questionnaire prior to the semi-structured interview. Interviews were conducted with each participant at a scheduled time. The researcher followed up the interviews with a visit to the Transfer Zone living facility to observe living arrangements. The questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The researcher was immersed in the data by calculating frequencies and percentages, interviewing, cleaning, transcribing, coding and extracting common themes from the data.

Significance of the Study

The formative nature of this case study should provide officials of Oklahoma State University and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources with data that will assist in the future development and planning of the Transfer Zone program living learning community. The case study provides information regarding participants' perceptions of the current program's living arrangements, programming and activities, including base-line data about Transfer Zone student retention in the college regarding social integration and academic success facilitated by participation in the program. The Transfer Zone program coordinators and administrators should now have a better understanding of transfer students' wants and desires, and could use this information to adapt the program to meet the needs and wants of future Transfer Zone participants.

Major Findings of Study

Selected Personal Characteristics of Participants'

Transfer Zone participants are male and female, predominately white, and living an average of 150 miles from home. Nearly all participants were employed a majority reported working 20 hours or less per week. Two of the Transfer Zone students' parents had an associate degree and the remainder had less education. Participants had academic ambitions that ranged from an associate degree to Ph.D. or a professional degree.

Participants' Perceptions about Programming and Living Arrangements

The participants revealed they chose to live in the Transfer Zone because they expected to live in an area with other transfer students that were in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and who had similar backgrounds and interests. Majority of the participants also indicated that they chose to live in the Transfer Zone because of its proximity to campus and the convenience of not having to look for a place to live.

Programs and Activities

Three of the five participants were aware of and participated in the programs offered by the Transfer Zone. The three students that participated believed the programs had meaning and were an effective use of their time by providing structured time with other participants and an opportunity to learn about an aspect of the university or college. However those who participated in the programs were dissatisfied with the participation of other Transfer Zone members. To the contrary, those who were unable to attend the programs due to work or scheduling conflicts were discouraged by the programs not being offered at more convenient times. Participants unanimously made it clear they would like to have lived by other Transfer Zone participants. Participants also reported not knowing all of the other members of the Transfer Zone or where they lived.

Academic Success

All participants indicated that the Transfer Zone did not help them academically or help to achieve a higher grade point average. Participants believed that they did not know the other participants with whom to form study sessions, and they did not gain any

information outside of the classroom that would contribute to improving their academic success.

Social Integration

Three of five participants expressed that the Transfer Zone did not contribute to their involvement in activities on campus. All participants agreed the Transfer Zone did not facilitate their involvement in activities off campus. Four of five participants believed the Transfer Zone facilitated interaction with faculty members. Participants classified faculty members as those who came and spoke at the Transfer Zone's programs and those individuals who were involved with the administration of the Transfer Zone in CASNR i.e., not teaching faculty. Tinto (1975) asserted that positive interaction with faculty would contribute to institutional commitment. Accordingly, Transfer Zone, participants expressed they made a positive connection with various individuals, although it may not have been persons who held teaching positions.

Retention

Almost all participants considered leaving the university at some time during their first semester, but contributed their staying to some aspect of the Transfer Zone. Most of the participants believed their roommate provided an outlet to discuss emotions and feelings that contributed to continuing at the university. All participants were satisfied with their decision to transfer to OSU and alleged it was important to graduate from OSU.

Participants' Suggested Improvements of the Transfer Zone

All participants expressed living together in the same building or wing would be the most significant improvement. Tinto (1997) found that the learning community

allowed students to develop a network of peers who assisted them toward persistence. However, that condition is contrary to current conditions where participants reside in separate wings and, in some cases, opposite sides of the building and do not participate in sponsored programs. Participants suggested that more study sessions and dinner gatherings would be helpful to the program to develop relationships and make cooperative learning opportunities more meaningful.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study were derived from the data that were collected. The Transfer Zone appeared to have a positive impact on retention of the transfer student participants. Roommates had a significant impact on the participants' decisions to remain at OSU. This was found to be in agreement with Mohr, Eiche and Sedlacek, (1998) and Newcomb (1962), who found transfer students who had a higher level of social relations and a positive peer influence reported being more satisfied with their college experience as well as their decision to persist.

Living accommodations, although the most significant "selling point" of why participants decided to participate in the program, was also the principal concern of all participants. Students were not placed in apartments within the same area which resulted in participants perceiving they did not know one another. One explanation for this may be the administration of CASNR was expecting 50 participants to sign up for the program, yet much fewer than 50 applied for the program and only eight decided to enter the Transfer Zone. Because of this, residential life was left with allocated dorm rooms

but no occupants. Residential life personnel placed non-Transfer Zone participants with those who signed up for the Transfer Zone program in the excess rooms. Transfer Zone program participants reported they thought they would be living in an environment with individuals of similar interests and majors, which turned out to not be the case. McKegg (2005) stated “all learners need an environment in which they feel culturally safe, surrounded by like minds, in order to make sense and meaning from their learning” (p. 296). Based on participants’ perceptions, the Transfer Zone was deficient in providing such an environment.

Programming and activities did not meet the needs of all the students. The students that participated did reveal the programs were a valuable use of their time; however, programming and activities were not offered during times that all participants could partake.

It was perceived by students that the Transfer Zone did not contribute to their academic success. All participants expressed the belief that academic success is defined as the take away concepts you understand and retain as well as the ability to gain study skills. The perceived lack of academic success may be linked to students not knowing the other participants and, thus not creating study groups or referring to other students for understanding and clarification regarding academic challenges. All participants reported experiencing a decline in their GPA’s, but being somewhat satisfied with their grades. This is consistent with literature that describes transfer students who commonly experience what is known as “transfer shock”. It is a phenomenon that is characterized by a decrease in grade point average and decline in academic success (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 2004; Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000).

A study conducted by Flaga (2006) “indicated that living on campus increased opportunities to integrate into the academic, social, and physical environments, and helped students find their niche faster” (p. 15). However, findings here indicated that the Transfer Zone did not facilitate social integration into the OSU system. Participants’ perceived that the program did not facilitate involvement with clubs and organizations on or off the OSU campus. Participants that did become involved in clubs and organizations indicated they did so as a result of non-Transfer Zone influences such as friends or by suggestions from professors. Previous studies have shown that learning communities were found to place students in close proximity to social activities (Zaho & Kuh, 2004), which in turn results in social integration. However, this study did not find that to be the result for students who participated in the CASNR Transfer Zone during 2006-2007.

The Transfer Zone did facilitate interaction with faculty members but not teaching faculty. Majority of the participants expressed they had made acquaintances with faculty members outside of their teaching faculty by interacting with the program’s presenters. Tinto (1998) stated “learning communities are important when they provide both academic and social support” (p. 3), which is particularly needed by transfer students as they enter into a new environmental setting.

Recommendations for the Transfer Zone

The recommendations for this study were derived from the data that were collected.

1. CASNR administration should attempt to increase the ethnic diversity of students participating in the Transfer Zone. The findings show that the current Transfer Zone participant population is racially homogenous, although there are participants of both genders. By increasing the ethnic diversity of the Transfer Zone, the program would better represent the diversity of the university while also making the program appeal to a larger pool of students.

2. Pair CASNR students with other CASNR students with like majors or interests in the Transfer Zone. Keep all CASNR transfer students on the same floor or wing.

3. Program activities and scheduling should reflect participants' needs, wants, and availability. (1) Participants expressed that they wanted informational programs about study abroad, financial aide, team building, class scheduling, and student organizations. (2) To increase the impact of the Transfer Zone on academic success, provide programming that introduces students to academic resources, such as the Writing Center, Math Center and library usage. (3) Participants expressed that their non-attendance of programs was a result of their job scheduling. Therefore programs should be scheduled at multiple times to accommodate varied student schedules.

4. Allow structured time and space for group study sessions, having second-year transfer students' act as academic mentors or locating other academically successful students to do so.

5. Promote off-campus activities in Stillwater, such as organized community-service projects, that would better socially integrate students with the Stillwater community.

6. During Transfer Day enrollment, make a unit of the Transfer Zone available for viewing in order to entice students to participate in the program. Ensure that CASNR's incoming transfer students tour the Transfer Zone.

Discussion and Implications

Due to the formative nature of this case study several items deemed necessary for discussion to progress the Transfer Zone learning community.

1. CASNR should make contact with junior college advisors so they can inform their transferring students about the Transfer Zone. CASNR should continue to promote the Transfer Zone during two-year/four-year conferences through tours and brochures.

2. Allow second-year transfer students to live in the Transfer Zone and provide mentorship to first-year transfer students, helping them to socially integrate and advising them on class preparation and realistic academic goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following items should be considered concerning future research of the Transfer Zone.

1. Additional research should be conducted in a longitudinal nature to evolve the programming to meet the needs of future transfer students.

2. A questionnaire should be developed and administered at the two-year institutions to determine the true wants and needs of transfer students, in order to make the program more marketable and effective.
3. In-depth follow up with participants that withdraw from the program early or do not return for the second year should be conducted to determine if the Transfer Zone could have helped to facilitate their retention.
4. Continue with longitudinal qualitative inquiry to gain a deeper appreciation for the elements of the program seen and unseen.
5. Construct explicit goals for the Transfer Zone and measure them annually.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) FORM

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Friday, March 02, 2007
IRB Application No AG075
Proposal Title: Evaluation of Transfer Zone Living Learning Community

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/1/2008

Principal Investigator(s)

Amy Simmons
437 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Kathleen Kelsey
466 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Chris Morgan
466 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

CONTACT LETTER

(Will be sent via e-mail to participants)

Date

Dear:



We are conducting an evaluation of the Transfer Zone learning community at Oklahoma State University. It is our pleasure to invite you to participate in this important study.

You are one of a small number that is participating in the Transfer Zone. Your voice counts! By filling out a survey and participating in an interview you will help CASNR to better serve the transfer student population. Your responses will help improve the Transfer Zone program and how the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources can better meet the needs of transfer students.

The information gathered will be used to plan future changes and improvements to the Transfer Zone program. Please be assured that your responses are completely confidential, that your participation is strictly voluntary, and that there will be no harmful effects caused by participating in this study.

The short survey and interview should take about 45 minutes. If you have any questions about this study please feel free to call or e-mail me. You will be contacted within the next week to schedule an interview time. Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Sincerely,

Amy Simmons
Research Associate
(405)744-8135
Amy.simmons@okstate.edu

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form – Transfer Zone Evaluation

I am consenting to participate in the research study titled Transfer Zone: An Evaluation by Amy Simmons, Dr. Kathleen Kelsey and Dr. Chris Morgan. This study is designed to evaluate the program for effectiveness and improvements, and to record my experiences with the program.

- I will be asked to fill out one questionnaire in Spring 2007.
- I will be asked to participate in an interview with researchers working on the project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time with no penalty.
- I understand that my participation in this study is a one-time occurrence and that it will only take approximately 45 minutes of my time.
- I understand that there are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.
- I understand the records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. All audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of transcription. Research records will be stored securely for three years and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

Thank you for your participation!

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date



APPENDIX D

TRANSFER ZONE QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Transfer Zone Participant Questionnaire

Section A

The purpose of this section is to obtain demographic and background information

Some graduate school
 Master's degree
 Doctoral degree

1. Your age _____
2. Gender Male Female
3. How far is your parent's home/ your home from OSU, Stillwater _____ miles?
4. I consider myself: (choose one)
 - White: Caucasian
 - Black: African American
 - Hispanic
 - Native American (American Indian)
 - Other
please list _____
5. Are you employed? yes no
6. (if yes) Do you work?
 - on campus off campus
7. (if yes) How many hours do you work every week? _____ (numeric terms)
8. Please check the box that corresponds to your parent's educational level. (mark one in each column)

Father	Mother
<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary school	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Some high school(9-12)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma Or GED	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Some college	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Baccalaureate degree	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Do you have an older brother or sister that attends or attended OSU?
 yes no
10. Did you apply for financial aid to attend OSU? yes no
11. What is the highest academic degree that you intend to obtain at any institution (not just OSU)? (Choose one)
 - None
 - Associate degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree
 - Ph.D or Ed.D
 - D.V.M
 - Other (please specify)
_____.
12. Why did you transfer to this university?
 - Friends here
 - Family here
 - Financial aid packet
 - Academic reputation
 - Athletic Opportunity

Qualitative Interview Questions

Section B

The purpose of this section is to obtain information regarding participant perception of the Transfer Zone program.

1. Why did you decide to participate in the Transfer Zone program?
2. What is your impression about the Transfer Zone program so far?
3. How has the Transfer Zone benefited you in the transfer process to OSU?
4. Has the Transfer Zone harmed you in any way?
5. What is your perception of the living arrangements?
 - a. What changes could be made?
6. What changes could be made to attract future transfer students to the program?

Section C

The purpose of this section is to obtain information regarding activities/ programs conducted by the Transfer Zone

1. Are you familiar with the programs offered by the Transfer Zone?
2. How many programs did you attend?
3. Were the programs offered by the Transfer Zone effective (did they have meaning)?
4. Do you feel they were adequate (did they provide enough)?
5. Did they help you?
6. Should their nature or location be changed?
7. Do you think attending them was a valuable use of your time?

Section D

The purpose of this section is to obtain information regarding academic success.

1. How would you define academic success? (GPA, understanding of the subject matter, motivation to study more, having effects on your study habits, etc.)
2. Did the Transfer Zone help you academically?
 - a. How?
 - b. Did it help you get better grades?
 - c. Motivated you to study more?
 - d. How else were you helped academically?
 - e. Did the social interaction help you academically?
3. How satisfied are you with your academic experience this year?

Section E

The purpose of this section is to obtain information regarding social integration.

1. Did the Transfer Zone program help you get involved in activities on campus?
2. Did the Transfer Zone program help you get involved in activities off campus?
3. What is your involvement with other student organizations and clubs?
4. How did the Transfer Zone facilitate your interaction with OSU faculty members?
5. How did the Transfer Zone assist you to develop close personal relationships with other students?

Section F

The purpose of this section is to obtain information regarding retention.

1. Have you ever thought about dropping out of OSU or CASNR? Why?
2. Did the Transfer Zone program encourage or discourage you from leaving or staying in college?
3. How satisfied are you with your decision to transfer to OSU?
4. How do you feel you were treated as a transfer student at OSU by the university (faculty & other students)?
5. How important is it for you to graduate from OSU?

VITA

Amy Simmons

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE "TRANSFER ZONE" AT

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY

Major Field: Agricultural Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Alamogordo, New Mexico, May 17, 1977, the daughter of Robert and Sharon Kirkpatrick.

Education: Graduated from Alamogordo High School, Alamogordo, New Mexico in 1995; Graduated with honors with a Bachelors of Science in Agriculture from New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico in May 2000, Major: Agriculture and Extension Education. Completed the Requirements for the Master of Science degree in Agriculture at Oklahoma State University July, 2007.

Experience: Outreach Coordinator for the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership Oklahoma State University, 3/06 – 7/07; Sales and Design Associate at The Tile Shop in Virginia Beach, Virginia, 10/04 – 7/05; Farrowing Department Manager, Technical Training Coordinator, College Recruiter for Murphy Farms LLC, Laverne, Oklahoma 6/00 – 7/04; Cooperative Extension Service Staff Development at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico 5/98 – 5/00.

Professional Memberships: Alpha Tau Alpha

Name: Amy Simmons

Date of Degree: July, 2007

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE "TRANSFER ZONE" AT
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY

Pages in Study: 81

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Agricultural Education

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this case study was to describe the transfer students' perceptions of the Transfer Zone in the College of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University using Tinto's (1975) model for integrating transfer students into a four-year institution. This case study focused on transfer students who populated the Transfer Zone in the spring of 2007. The research design employed in this study was a case-study approach used to determine students' perceptions of social integration, academic success, and commitment which Tinto (1975) explains will ultimately lead to persistence in college.

Findings and Conclusions: The Transfer Zone appeared to have a positive impact on retention of the transfer student participants. Living accommodations, although the most significant "selling point" of why participants decided to participate in the program, was also the principal concern of all participants. Transfer Zone program participants reported they thought they would be living in an environment with individuals of similar interests and majors, which turned out to not be the case. Programming and activities did not meet the needs of all the students. The students that participated did reveal the programs were a valuable use of their time; however, programming and activities were not offered during times that all participants could partake. It was perceived by students that the Transfer Zone did not contribute to their academic success. All participants expressed the belief that academic success is defined as the take away concepts you understand and retain as well as the ability to gain study skills. All participants reported experiencing a decline in their GPA, but being somewhat satisfied with their grades. Findings indicated that the Transfer Zone did not facilitate social integration into the OSU system. Participants' perceived that the program did not facilitate involvement with clubs and organizations on or off the OSU campus. The Transfer Zone did facilitate interaction with faculty members but not teaching faculty. Majority of the participants perceived they had made acquaintances with faculty members outside of their teaching faculty by interacting with the program's presenters.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: A. Christian Morgan
