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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Jason Matthews Martin

The Graduate School
University of Kentucky
2011

WHAT NOW? WHAT NEXT?
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND
COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Communications and Information Studies
at the University of Kentucky

By
Jason Matthews Martin

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Deanna D. Sellnow, Professor of Communication

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

WHAT NOW? WHAT NEXT? A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION

First year college student retention is important to colleges and universities nationwide (Bean, 2005). Most of the research on retention focuses on self-report data collected from students after they withdraw from the institution. The present study focuses, instead, on student stories about school, as well as at and about “home” during their first semester.

The experiences of students who transition from high school to college are sometimes likened to those of individuals who enter a new culture for the first time. Thus, this dissertation is grounded in cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1988, 2001), which posits that successful adaptation occurs via a stress-adaption-growth dynamic and a gradual process of acculturation toward the new environment and simultaneous deculturation from the previous environment.

Stories—in the form of in-class free writing assignments—were collected from 264 first-year college students three times during their first semester. These assignments were designed to capture students’ perceptions about their experiences and interactions at school, as well as their experiences and messages to, from, and about “home” as they evolved over the course of the semester.

A thematic analysis revealed the majority of stories about events at school were negative and an overwhelming majority of the stories about events at home were positive. A longitudinal comparative analysis revealed no decrease in the percentage of negative stories about experiences and interactions at or about school. Moreover, stories focused on positive school related experiences decreased over time while stories about positive experiences at or about home gradually increased over the course of the semester. For students who did not enroll for spring semester, the results were similar but more dramatic. A large percentage of non-returners were female, about half were first generation college students, and a majority reported “home” as less than 100 miles from the university.

More research ought to focus on what goes on during a student’s first year of college to better understand reasons for withdrawing. In doing so, college and university

professionals will be able to work more effectively with high school officials, parents, and students to achieve success once they graduate from high school.

KEYWORDS: Communication, First-Year College Students,
Cross-Cultural Adaptation, College Student Retention,
The Narrative Paradigm

Jason M. Martin

May 9, 2011

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Dedication

To my wife, Camille, and my parents, Karen and Rob

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First and foremost, I sincerely thank Dr. Deanna Sellnow for not only serving as my dissertation chair but for being my advisor and mentor for the past four years. Her deep commitment, constant encouragement, and unwavering support not only guided me through the dissertation process but also increased my overall experience as a doctoral student. She presented me with unique opportunities and assisted my development as a college instructor and academic researcher. Her guidance not only allowed me to discover my potential but also helped me define my career goals.

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Thanks to the University of Kentucky College of Communications and Information Studies for presenting the opportunity to learn and grow. I particularly thank Linda Mudge and Louise Meniffee for helping me with various tasks along the way. Scott Johnson was extremely helpful in presenting me a more efficient way to manage my data, which not only saved considerable time but an unquantifiable amount of heartache. Randi Campbell was instrumental in organizing my data in its early stages, and without her assistance, it would not have come to me in the quantity and efficient way it did. Extra gratitude is extended to Dr. Timothy Sellnow, Dr. Michael Arrington, and Dr. Derek Lane for taking a special interest in my educational and professional pursuits.

This project would not have been possible without the 264 young men and young women who provided stories about their first-semester experience at the University of Kentucky. They did not realize it at the time, but they were part of a unique project and hopefully one that will help improve not only the first-year experience of future UK students but the overall campus environment, as well.

My friends and family also deserve credit for helping me through this process. I was at times distant and testy but their continued support was never beyond reach. Thanks to my brothers, Andrew and Clay, and friends, Jack Brown, Jonah Kauffman, Max McCoy, and Zach Leitch, for listening to my incessant rambling and periodic venting. Most especially, I want to thank my parents, Karen and Rob, and my wife, Camille. My parents provided a nurturing environment in which to grow, supported each of my educational endeavors, and instilled the confidence necessary to succeed. Camille not only offered her assistance but also did so willingly and excitedly. She is not only the most special person in my life but also is a compassionate, caring, kind, and remarkable woman who supported my decision to return to school to pursue my dreams. Without her, this experience would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale	
The Issue of College Student Retention.....	3
College Student Retention by the Numbers.....	6
Why Students Withdraw or Remain Enrolled.....	6
The Present Study.....	9
Organization of the Dissertation.....	12
Chapter Two: Literature Review	
The First-Year College Student Experience.....	14
Transitioning to College.....	15
Stress and Depression.....	17
Predicting Stressful Adjustment.....	18
The Transition Experience for Sub-cultures.....	19
A Helping Hand.....	22
Increasing Student Retention.....	24
Advising.....	25
Mentoring.....	26
First-Year Experience and Orientation Programs.....	27
University of Kentucky Retention-Based Initiatives.....	29
Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory.....	37
Previous Cross-Cultural Adaptation Research.....	41
Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory and First-Semester	
Research Questions.....	49
Summary.....	50
Chapter Three: Methods	
Justification of Methods.....	51
Qualitative Methodology.....	51
Narrative Analysis.....	52
Thematic Analysis.....	58
Stage I, Sampling and Design Issues.....	59
Participants.....	59
Instruments.....	61
Data Collection.....	61
Stage II, Developing Themes and a Code.....	63
Data Analysis.....	63

Stage III, Validating and Using the Codes.....	81
Step 1: Coding the Rest of the Raw Information.....	81
Step 2: Validating the Code.....	81
Research Question One.....	82
Research Question Two.....	82
Research Question Three.....	82
Summary.....	83
Chapter Four: Results	
Research Question 1.....	84
Worst, School Events.....	84
Best, School Events.....	99
Best, Home Events.....	108
Worst, Home Events.....	115
Research Question 1 Summary.....	120
Research Question 2.....	120
Time Period One.....	121
Time Period Two.....	153
Time Period Three.....	187
Research Question 2 Summary.....	215
Research Question 3.....	216
Research Question 3A.....	219
Research Question 3B.....	232
Research Question 3 Summary.....	240
Comparative Summary of Stories.....	241
Summary.....	242
Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications, and Suggestions	
Conclusions.....	243
Research Question 1.....	243
Research Question 2.....	251
Research Question 3.....	258
Implications.....	263
Limitations.....	267
Suggestions for Future Research.....	269
Appendices	
Appendix A.....	273
Appendix B.....	276
Appendix C.....	277
Appendix D.....	281
Appendix E.....	282
Appendix F.....	283
Appendix G.....	284
Appendix H.....	285
Appendix I.....	286

Appendix J.....	287
Bibliography.....	288
Vita.....	314

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1, Summary of total events by association and theme.....	86
Table 4.2, Summary of total worst, school themes and sub-themes.....	88
Table 4.3, Summary of total best, school themes and sub-themes.....	100
Table 4.4, Summary of total best, home themes and sub-themes.....	110
Table 4.5, Summary of total worst, home themes and sub-themes.....	116
Table 4.6, Summary of TP-1, TP-2, and TP-3 events.....	122
Table 4.7, Summary of TP-1 events.....	124
Table 4.8, Summary of TP-1 worst, school themes and sub-themes.....	126
Table 4.9, Summary of TP-1 best, school themes and sub-themes.....	136
Table 4.10, Summary of TP-1 best, home themes and sub-themes.....	146
Table 4.11, Summary of TP-1 worst, home themes and sub-themes.....	151
Table 4.12, Summary of TP-2 events.....	155
Table 4.13, Summary of TP-2 worst, school themes and sub-themes.....	157
Table 4.14, Summary of TP-2 best, school themes and sub-themes.....	171
Table 4.15, Summary of TP-2 best, home themes and sub-themes.....	177
Table 4.16, Summary of TP-2 worst, home themes and sub-themes.....	184
Table 4.17, Summary of TP-3 events.....	188
Table 4.18, Summary of TP-3 worst, school themes and sub-themes.....	190
Table 4.19, Summary of TP-3 best, school themes and sub-themes.....	199
Table, 4.20, Summary of TP-3 best, home themes and sub-themes.....	206
Table 4.21, Summary of TP-3 worst, home themes and sub-themes.....	213
Table 4.22, Summary of non-returning students' total events by association and theme.....	220
Table 4.23, Summary of non-returning students' total worst, school themes and sub- themes.....	222
Table 4.24, Summary of non-returning students' total best, home themes and sub-themes.....	225
Table 4.25, Summary of non-returning students' total best, school themes and sub-themes.....	229
Table 4.26, Summary of non-returning students' total worst, home themes and sub-themes.....	231
Table 4.27, Summary of non-returning students' events over time by theme.....	234

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1, Total events by association.....	85
Figure 4.2, Total worst, school events by theme.....	87
Figure 4.3, Total best, school events by theme.....	99
Figure 4.4, Total best, home events by theme.....	109
Figure 4.5, Total worst, home events by theme.....	115
Figure 4.6, Total events by time period.....	121
Figure 4.7, TP-1 events by association.....	123
Figure 4.8, TP-1 worst, school themes	125
Figure 4.9, TP-1 best, school themes.....	135
Figure 4.10, TP-1 best, home themes.....	145
Figure 4.11, TP-1 worst, home themes	150
Figure 4.12, TP-2 events by association.....	154
Figure 4.13, TP-2 worst, school themes.....	156
Figure 4.14, TP-2 best, school themes.....	170
Figure 4.15, TP-2 best, home themes.....	176
Figure 4.16, TP-2 worst, home themes.....	183
Figure 4.17, TP-3 events by association.....	187
Figure 4.18, TP-3 worst, school themes.....	189
Figure 4.19, TP-3 best, school themes.....	198
Figure 4.20, TP-3 best, home themes.....	205
Figure 4.21, TP-3 worst, home themes.....	212
Figure 4.22, Events by association over time.....	216
Figure 4.23, Non-returning students stories by association.....	219
Figure 4.24, Non-returning students' total worst, school themes.....	221
Figure 4.25, Non-returning students' total best, home themes.....	224
Figure 4.26, Non-returning students' total best, school themes.....	228
Figure 4.27, Non-returning students' total worst, home themes.....	230
Figure 4.28, Non-returning students' stories by association over time.....	233
Figure 5.1, Summary of students' stories.....	244
Figure 5.2, Worst, school events over time.....	252
Figure 5.3, Best, school events over time.....	254
Figure 5.4, Best, home events over time.....	255
Figure 5.5, Non-returning students' stories about home over time.....	263

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Student retention—particularly first year student retention—is important to college and university students, administrators, faculty members, and advisors nationwide (Bean, 2005; Berger & Lyon, 2005). Although definitions for retention vary, it may be defined generally as “staying in school until completion of a degree” (Hagedorn, 2005, p. 91) or as “student attainment of academic and/or personal goal(s)” (Steidman, 2005, p. 296). From an institutional perspective, student retention refers to “the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation” (Berger & Lyon, p. 7). Regardless of how it is defined, student retention is an important issue to students and higher educational personnel, both historically and presently.

Scholars have devoted more than 70 years of investigation to the study of college student retention (Braxton, 2000). The first documented studies on what is presently referred to as retention emerged in the 1930s, but retention did not become a focal point for educators, researchers, and institutions until the early 1970s when decreased student enrollments were predicted (Berger & Lyon, 2005). During the past 30 years, it has easily become one of the most extensively examined topics in higher education (Tinto, 2005a). “The early twenty-first century has dawned with retention fully entrenched as a major policy issue and a well-established professional realm that has brought researchers and practitioners together in widespread efforts to better serve and retain college students” (Berger & Lyon, p. 25). The research is particularly concerned with retention of first-year college students.

Students’ initial year in post-secondary education is important for solidifying the foundation for ensuing educational achievement (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006).

Incoming students require support to face “the academic culture shock” of transitioning from high school to college and “the emotional shock” of relocating from the well-known surroundings of home to the distinctly different environment of a college campus (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005, p. 719). During the past 25 years, much attention has been dedicated to the challenges students confront during the transition from high school to college (Hunter & Murray, 2007). “Student success and retention hang in the balance based on that transition” (p. 25).

While current retention-related research and initiatives are ongoing and future efforts forthcoming, researchers and practitioners may be assured that “the future of retention promises to be as important and dynamic as its past” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 27). University and college faculty, advisors, administrators, and other personnel must work together to increase student retention rates while helping students attain their educational and related goals. Of equal importance is easing the transition from high school to college for first-year, and more specifically first-semester, college students. The present study contributes to existing retention-related efforts by focusing on how students perceive and are influenced by their adaptation experience during the first-semester of college, how communication plays a role in the adaptation process of first-year students, and how adaptation and communication influence students’ decisions to continue to pursue or withdraw from higher education.

This introductory chapter explores the nature of student retention. First, the impact of student retention on the nation’s colleges and universities and its effect beyond academia are examined. Next, statistics related to student retention are presented.

Factors influencing students' decisions to withdraw from or remain in school are then discussed. Finally, an overview of the dissertation is provided.

The Issue of College Student Retention

Student attrition is a real problem on college campuses across the country for a variety of reasons. Retention rates have the potential to negatively affect college and university budgets, effectiveness, and rankings. The magnitude of retention also extends beyond higher education. Despite its importance, many colleges and universities do not devote enough resources to investigating retention and retention-based issues.

Budgets cuts in general will negatively affect institutions of higher learning, and retention rates can result in negative financial implications, as well. According to the University of Kentucky's Chief of Staff, state budget cuts hurt the University in a variety of ways, but almost immediately, cuts affect the provost office's ability to hire faculty, teaching assistants, advisors, and staff members directly involved students' education (D. Boyd, personal correspondence, March 21, 2011). Such cuts result in an unfavorable student-to-faculty ratio, and "budget cuts significantly affect the overall student experience." While research on the impact of retention on institutional costs and budgets is limited, colleges and universities do encounter negative financial repercussions because of reduced retention rates (Schuh, 2005).

Declining enrollments cause more financial problems for colleges and universities than any other factor except reductions in appropriations (Penn, 1999). Colleges and universities incur immediate direct (e.g., student recruitment, financial aid, lost tuition income, lower revenues from student housing expenditures and textbook and supply purchases), indirect (e.g., faculty, advisor, and counselor time), as well as long-term (e.g.,

students who are not retained do not serve as benefactors) institutional costs associated with students who are not retained (Schuh, 2005). High retention rates assure steady revenue flows into institutions in the form of tuition payments. Moreover, federal and state financial support for public institutions is based on the size of an institution's student body. In other words, as an institution's enrollment and retention rates increase, so does the amount of money it is eligible to receive from state and federal funding sources. Student retention also affects institutions in ways other than financially.

Student retention is treated as an important gauge of institutional effectiveness (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Retaining students is important to college and university image, faculty and student morale, faculty and staff member recruitment and retention, and enhanced student learning (Rucker & Davis-Showell, 2007). In addition, retention figures are often used as a criterion for ranking colleges and universities (Berger & Lyon), thus making retention an important factor for maintaining status among benchmark institutions. College student retention is also important beyond the nation's campuses.

The importance of student retention also extends beyond the ivory towers of academia partly because, in addition to impacting the individual and his or her family, retention "produces a ripple effect on the postsecondary institutions, the workforce, and the economy" (Hagerdon, 2005, p. 102). Retention is important to the economic competitiveness of the United States partly because "a strong, vibrant, varied, and expanding national economy depends in part on the educational attainment of its citizens (Seidman, 2005a, p. xi). When a student withdraws from higher education, s/he risks not returning, and a student who does not return to college ends up being a less educated

individual, in the formal sense. As the number of undereducated Americans increases, the ability to be competitive at state-, regional-, national-, and international-levels decreases. “To remain competitive in the ever-changing and challenging world, people will have to take the initiative to seek out educational opportunities,” and “we must continue to encourage our citizens to learn new and different things” (p. xii-xiii).

Retention is important to the private sector and businesses nationwide because it impacts the overall education levels of the nation’s population and labor force. This has resulted in entrepreneurs in the business community and consulting firms becoming interested in the importance of student retention (Tinto, 2006). “It would not be an understatement to say that student retention has become a big business for researchers, educators, and entrepreneurs alike” (p. 2). Despite its importance on and beyond college and university campuses, the issue of college student retention is under-examined.

Many institutes of higher education do not devote adequate resources to combat the problem. Only 51.7% of U.S. universities report having an individual responsible for managing retention strategies, only 47.2% of U.S. universities have established improvement goals for retaining first-year students, and only 33.1% of U.S. campuses have established goals for improving degree completion rates (Hably & McClanahn, 2004). Therefore, many colleges and universities across the country do not devote adequate resources to evaluating and addressing student retention. Regardless of the number and diversity of resources an institution dedicates to studying and combating student retention, it remains an issue in higher education.

College Student Retention by the Numbers

Data compiled by the American College Testing Program indicates that 25.9% of four-year institution freshmen nationwide do not return to school for a second year (Berger & Lyon, 2005). The dropout rate at highly selective institutions is 8%; whereas less selective institutions see dropout rates as high as 35% (Berger & Lyon). Departure rates are as high as 50% at open-enrollment institutions (Devarics & Roach, 2000). The first-to-second year retention rate was 72.3% at four-year institutions in 2008 and only ranged from 73.1% to 74.9% from 1988 to 2008 (American Collegiate Testing Program, 2008) indicating very little change in high to low retention rates over time.

According to its Office of Institutional Research (2010a; 2010b), the University of Kentucky's first-fall to second-fall retention rates ranged from 75.9% to 81% from 1988-2008, and the University retained 94.5% of its 2009 fall cohort to the spring 2010 semester, which marked the highest fall-semester to spring-semester retention rate of the decade (i.e., 2000-2001 to 2009-2010 academic years). Also, preliminary data suggests that the University retained 81.8% of its students in 2010, which is an all-time high surpassing the previous high of 81% in 2007 (Johnson, 2010). Therefore, the University of Kentucky maintains retention rates that are higher than national averages for four-year institutions. Nevertheless, the University's provost declared a "war on attrition" in 2007 to encourage even better retention rates from first to second year.

Why Students Withdraw or Remain Enrolled

Existing research suggests that students leave a particular institution of higher education or for a seemingly endless array of reasons. Generally, research to date suggests students decide to leave a university based on one or more of the following

themes: (1) intentions; (2) institutional fit and institutional commitment (attitudes about institutional attachment and being a student); (3) psychological processes and key attitudes; (4) academics; (5) social factors; (6) bureaucratic factors; (7) external environment; (8) student background; and (9) money/finance (Bean, 2005). Two major factors that influence student retention are interpersonal success and academic success (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989).

Although students withdraw from colleges and institutions for an array of self-reported reasons, the most prominent reasons stem from either academic troubles or financial hardships (e.g., Yorke, 1999; Tinto, 1987; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980). Academic issues may be attributed to poor study habits (Lenning et al., 1980), lack of student commitment (Yorke), low high school performance (Yorke; Lenning et al.), and the selection of the wrong academic program/major (Yorke). Some students decide that higher education is not the right path for them to take or realize that their institution does not fit their educational needs (Tinto). Students who enter college with an undeclared major or who change majors face higher attrition potential (Tinto, 2005b) while others find a particular institution not challenging enough (Yorke; Tinto, 1987). Students may also withdraw for reasons related to poor instructional quality or an unsupportive academic culture (Yorke).

Students are more likely to leave their college or university when they experience isolation (e. g., lack of developed friendships, lack of involvement in campus activities) or a lack of campus activities that parallel their interests (Tinto, 1987). Loneliness may cause students to leave college while quality relationships with roommates may encourage them to stay (Hawken, Duran, & Kelly, 1991). Students living off campus are

more likely to drop out compared to students who live on campus, and those who participate in extracurricular activities, establish close friendships, and maintain student-faculty relationships are less likely to leave postsecondary education (Lenning et al., 1980). Creating an environment where students have access to support networks appears to be an integral factor influencing student retention (Tinto, 1998).

Student retention is affected by an array of reasons, but students can be motivated to stay in school through a variety of institutional factors, including faculty-student relationships (Lau, 2003). Multiple reasons for student attrition in four-year, public universities are related to a lack of personal contact between faculty (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Students' satisfaction with interpersonal communication (as it relates to university teachers) has been correlated with student retention, and students with higher levels of interpersonal communication satisfaction are less likely to leave the university (Rucker & Davis-Showell, 2007). A lack of connection to the university and lack of meaningful relationships at the university are reasons students report for leaving the university (Freeman, Hall, & Bresciani, 2007). An additional factor influencing college student retention is the degree of success students encounter during the first-year experience.

Students accumulate diverse backgrounds of educational and personal experiences prior to entering college but all undergo adjustment periods while adapting to life as a college student (Keup, 2004). College students' adaptation to a university's social, academic, and cultural environments may influence decisions to return for a second year (Kiser & Price, 2007-2008). Additional research is needed regarding the transition experience "because scholars have neglected to study, among other important topics, how

students perceive the factors that influence their transition experience” (Smith & Zhang, 2009, p. 643). Longitudinal, inclusive data examining various components of students’ lives are needed to create effective programs that make the social and academic transition to higher education easier and provide the necessary underpinnings for a successful academic career (Keup, 2004). Such data should “provide academic, social, and personal information about the same cohort of students” (p. 8). Additionally, qualitative research “could offer additional insight into the persistence of college freshman” (Kiser & Price, 2007-2008, p. 434).

The Present Study

Millions of young Americans make the transition from high school to college campuses each year. According to the United States Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (2008), approximately 3,485,000 first-year college students enrolled in the nation’s colleges (i.e., all colleges, including four-year and two-year institutions) in 2008. The study of first-year student retention is especially important. Measuring freshman-to-sophomore retention is imperative because students are vulnerable when they enter post-secondary education and because colleges and universities may respond promptly with interventions (Mortenson, 2005). The success, or lack thereof, of student adaptation to college during his/her first year may influence decisions to return. By better understanding the adaptation process of first-semester students, university personnel may isolate their focus when working with retention-based initiatives, expand their influence on first-year students, and produce valuable information for first-year students and their families.

One inherent assumption that drives retention initiatives is that staying at school is always the best decision, which may or may not be true. Most retention-related research and retention-based theories (e.g., Astin, 1977, 1984; Tinto, 1975, 1993) focus on what goes on at school and the activities that occur on campus but fail to incorporate what takes place in students' lives off campus or in their homes and hometowns. Therefore, a question that current research often fails to address includes: What influential factors do students face from friends and family who are not on campus? Astin's (1977, 1984) and Tinto's (1975, 1993) work assumes a student's best interests are served if s/he remains in school and make the assumption that withdrawing (i.e., going home) is bad. While this may be true, sometimes a student's decisions to go home may, in fact, be the better choice.

This vein of thought relates to a pair of Bean's (2008) nine themes of student retention: external environment and student background. The external environment considers forces that are beyond institutions' control and may involve significant others, family responsibilities, and opportunities to work or transfer schools. Bean notes that there is little institutions can do to combat these forces if they come into play. A student's background is based on social and human capital. Social capital is associated with networks (i.e., friends and family) and human capital with personal abilities and characteristics. These forms of capital, particularly social capital, could further influence a student to remain in or withdraw from school. If one's network at home doesn't value attending a certain institution or living in a particular city, will this influence a student's decision? If a student is a first-generation college student or comes from a network

where higher education is not valued, will messages to, from, and about home influence a student's decision?

Despite a widespread interest in improving retention rates, relatively little research exists that focuses on what students do to adapt to a new environment and new roles as college students during their first semester in the academy. That is, how do individuals navigate the transition from high school student to college student during that first semester on their own? Moreover, research on student retention focuses on at-school issues and fails to consider influences outside the campus environment. More specifically, what messages do students send and receive about “home,” and how might that influence their decision to return to college for a second semester? This dissertation analyzes such data by collecting students' stories about their adaptation to college during their first semester at school. Essentially, students who return to college for a second semester may at least do so, in part, because they were able to adapt successfully to the new college culture.

Most of the research related to retaining students focuses on programs and activities offered at the school. Future retention research would benefit from exploring what transpires away from campus in addition to what transpires on it. Through the lens of narrative theory, this dissertation captures students' perceptions related to college adaptation—both on- and off-campus—throughout the first semester. Then, themes from the stories of students who withdraw are examined to discover whether certain messages to, from, and about “home” may play a role in such decisions.

Drs. Deanna Sellnow and Laura Stafford (Communication), Dr. Deborah Chung (Journalism and Telecommunications), and Dr. Lisa O'Connor (Library and Information

Sciences) were recently funded with a grant to study the relationship between messages both from and about home and first-year student retention. This study is part of that larger exploratory study where baseline data was collected and examined during the fall 2010 semester related to how first-year students perceive and make sense of their college adaptation and how adaptation influences retention related decisions.

Unlike most retention related research, their project examines both on- and off-campus factors that may influence college adaptation and retention decisions of first-semester college students. Thus, this study contributes to existing research in several ways. First, it extends our understanding of student retention by collecting student stories (i.e., narratives), both positive and negative, throughout their first semester regarding events at home and at school as they might influence their decision to return. Second, it extends research on retention by tapping potential reasons when returning home might be a better decision than staying at school. Finally, it extends cross-cultural adaptation theory in terms of how it functions to explain the transition students make when entering the college environment as a new culture. Hence, this dissertation is grounded in Kim's (1988, 2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory to examine qualitative data about student narratives using a thematic narrative approach.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to and rationale for the study. Chapter two provides an overview of college student retention and the first-year college student experience as well as establishes the theoretical underpinnings for the study. This includes an overview and explanation of cross-cultural adaptation theory, including details regarding existing research utilizing the

theory and its relevance to this study. Chapter three justifies a qualitative approach to studying student narratives about school and home to better understand student retention related to the first-year college student experience, explains the use of the narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994) and a thematic analysis approach to analyze the data, and outlines other methodological components of this study. Chapter four presents the study's results, and finally, chapter five offers conclusions, implications, recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of literature related to the first-year college experience, increasing student retention, and cross-cultural adaptation theory. First, the experience of first-year college students is examined. Second, efforts by organizations, institutions, and other vested parties to increase college student retention, including initiatives directed toward improving the first-year experience, are discussed. Finally, cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1988, 2011) and related research are reviewed before a connection is made between the theory and the first-year college student experience. Chapter two concludes with the research questions for the present study.

The First-Year College Student Experience

A student's first year of college is not equivalent to the thirteenth grade (Hunter & Murray, 2007; Hunter, 2006a). All students transitioning to college will experience adaptation to new academic and social systems (Terenzini, et al., 1994), and each student's development pace varies (Bliming & Miltenberger, 1984). No blueprint for a successful first-year experience exists, in part, because there is no single first-year experience but, rather, a diverse array of first-year experiences (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006). Regardless, most first-year undergraduate college students are likely to face a barrage of challenges as they transition to college life and navigate their first-year. This transition is not only defined by moving from high school to college but also as a significant move from one life stage to another. It is a process that can lead to stressful and depressive states and whose success may not be predicted. The transition experience differs across various sub-cultures, but resources are available to help students of all types navigate the process successfully.

Transitioning to College

The life of any high school student will undoubtedly undergo significant, and perhaps even drastic, changes after graduation because each high school graduate faces a barrage of changes—both personal and social—in the weeks and months that follow. “The months following high school graduation represent a period of newly found freedom that is in stark contrast to the prior 13 years of formally structured schooling” (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005, p. 527). For many, this “newly found freedom” includes attending college, which is more than simply an educational milestone. Not only are students commencing on an educational journey but a life journey, as well.

Beginning college. The move from high school to college is highlighted by uncertainty and periods of transition and adaptation. A college student’s year of college has the potential to be so daunting that it has been referred to as “the purgatorial zone of the first-year college experience” and “academic hazing” (Kidwell, 2005, p. 253). As students transition to life as college students, they “may feel uncertain, anxious, even depressed and ineffective... They are in unfamiliar surroundings, unsure of their academic potential, their capabilities for making friends, and their adjustment to the campus” (Giddan, 1998, p. 10). First-year college students fear various things about the college experience, including being smart enough, liking roommates, making friends, missing home, handling the party scene, having sex, covering costs, and being safe (Shanley & Johnston, 2008).

Students making the transition from high school to college may find their personal security, need for acceptance, need for comfort (Blimlink & Miltenberg, 1984), and social support network (Beck, Taylor, & Robbins, 2003) tested because university life is

a foreign concept in its early stages. Students frequently question their relationships, direction in life, and sense of self-worth during the transition to college (Chickering, 1969). For many first-year, traditional-age college students, this period of change includes facing the challenges and obstacles of beginning their college careers, which “can be a time of tremendous stress and upheaval in their lives. They are leaving the security and structure of home and starting a new life adventure” (Benjamin et al., 2007, p. 17). In addition to being one of life’s major events, traditional aged first-year college students are not only transitioning into higher education but are initiating their transition from adolescence to adulthood (Dyson & Renk, 2006).

A life transition. In addition to being a noteworthy educational milestone, the transition from high school to college often marks the initial significant relocation away from the family home for many students (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Coelho et al., 1963). The transition to college may be considered one of life’s major events, which are periods of intensified vulnerability to emotional problems (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986). First-year students have reported poorer social and personal-emotional adjustment to college life and higher levels of parental psychological dependency than older students (Lapsley et al., 1989).

Most Americans leave home by their eighteenth or nineteenth birthdays, and approximately one-third of emerging adults head to college following high school and experience independent living while continuing to rely on adults (e.g., residence hall, fraternity/sorority house, off-campus housing) (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994). Therefore, many college students continue to straddle adolescence and adulthood as they transition to and continue with college. Arnett (2000) proposes the term emerging

adulthood as a theory of development for individuals in their late teens through twenties with a focus on ages 18-25. Emerging adulthood includes the typical college years and is a time where individuals have significant opportunity to explore their identities in areas such as love, work, and worldview because emerging adults have moved beyond childhood and adolescent dependency but have not yet reached the typical responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Life as a first-year college student is but a lone example of when individuals must adapt to a new environment. Any individual attempting to adapt to new surroundings must face and cope with daily problems, challenges, and demands (Simons, Kalichman, & Santrock, 1994). The transition to college is brightened by excitement and novelty but shadowed by numerous changes and challenges that students must face, which can lead to increased levels of stress and states of depression.

Stress and Depression

Students' transition to college can be a stressful experience (e.g., Benjamin et al., 2007; Dyson & Renk, 2006; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Jackson & Finney, 2002; Towbes & Cohen, 1996; Lu, 1994; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Lapsley, Rice, & Shadid, 1989; Fisher & Hood, 1987), and university life is often more stressful and more intense than many students anticipate (Compas et al., 1986). While up to 20% of college students encounter depression problems at some point during their undergraduate experience (Daughtry & Kunkel, 1993), first-year students suffer from the highest rate of depressive symptoms (Beeber, 1999). Stress has been reported as the top health impediment to undergraduate students' academic performance (American College Health

Association, 2006). Stress is also a predictor of how successfully students transition to college.

Low stress levels have been shown to predict increases in overall academic, personal-emotional, and social adjustment to college, and increased global, academic, and social self-esteem has predicted increased academic and social adjustment (Friedlander, Ried, Shupak, & Cribble, 2007). Students who are highly concerned with and worried about pre-college friendships demonstrate poorer college adjustment along several dimensions (Paul & Brier, 2001). Individuals who experience high stress levels are at risk of experiencing poor adjustment to college; those who experience small amounts of stress handle adaptation well (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000). Wintre & Yaffe (2000) found that increased stress levels during a college student's first year predicted decreased adaptation in general and lower grade point averages at the year's end. Research has indicated other factors beyond stress that predict the success levels of transitioning college students.

Predicting Successful Adjustment

Although adjusting from high school to college is a highly individualized experience that may take various paths and produce different results, successful student adjustment to college may be predicted by several factors. The amount of social support students receive predicts how successfully students adapt during their transition to college (Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997; Kenny & Rice, 1995; Barnett & Harris, 1984). Specifically, increased social support from friends has been shown to predict improved adjustment from the fall to winter semester (Friedlander et al., 2007). Students who reach out to university counseling services initially adapt at significantly lower levels

than students who do not seek such services, but individuals who receive counseling are affected positively by their counseling experience, particularly regarding personal, social, and academic adjustment (DeStefano, Mellott, & Peterson, 2001). Separation-individuation, family relations, and personality variables have been shown to predict adjustment better than cognitive indicators or home-leaving status (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993).

Authoritative parenting appears to indirectly result in positive effects on students' college adjustment, but current parental relationships, notably mutual reciprocity and conversations with parents, are more directly linked to college adjustment than parenting style (Winte & Yaffee, 2000). While married and unmarried students showed no difference in their levels of academic and personal-emotional adjustment to college, married students' exhibited lower social adjustment and goal commitment/institutional attachment during their transition to college than unmarried students (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Males who were less well-adjusted were found to be more disconnected from significant others, and less well-adjusted females displayed higher separation anxiety and enmeshment seeking levels (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993). For some students, the transition to college produces additional complications and challenges.

The Transition Experience for Sub-cultures

Students from various minority sub-cultures may face additional hurdles at the onset of and throughout their first-year experience. Specifically, students from various race and ethnic backgrounds, international students, and non-traditional students (e.g., first-generation college students, low-income students) may face additional difficulties

during the transition to college. Also, males and females adapt differently as first-year college students.

Race and ethnicity. Perceptions of campus prejudice or discrimination have a negative affect on the first-year college experience for ethnic minority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). These feelings can be amplified at predominantly white colleges and universities. Social climates on predominantly white colleges produce an added stressful burden for ethnic minority students (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Through interviews with and observations of Latino students, Gonzalez (2000-2001) discovered that students were marginalized and alienated by three systems of representation (e.g., the social world, the physical world, the epistemological world). African-American students can experience a sense of underrepresentation, direct racism, and difficulties approaching faculty during their social adjustment to predominantly white colleges (Schwitzer, Griffen, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Additional factors also influence the transitions of racial and ethnic minority students.

Heightened levels of social and academic integration can result in greater levels of first year success, including more successful transitions, for students of color (Anderson, 2004). Attachment, ethnic identity, and separation-individuation influence the college adjustment of non-white college students (Kalsner & Carole, 2003). Institutional personnel, faculty connections, tutorial services, and student-specific advising are key components of a successful first-year experience for African-American students (Lee, 2004). International students also face additional obstacles when transitioning to college life.

International students. International students face additional issues (e.g., culture, language, food, living conditions) when adjusting to college during their first year (Benjamin et al., 2007). These students may also suffer from various manifestations of acculturative stress (e.g., sense of loss and homesickness, loneliness and social isolation, identity and values confusion, discrimination, and prejudice, uncertainty, fear, and anxiety, physiological conditions, cognitive distress, sadness and depression) when acculturating to a new environment such as a university or college in the United States (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). It has been suggested that American higher education can assist international student preparedness by creating a multi-cultural and global communication environment on American campuses (Chen, 2002). Non-traditional students are also met with additional challenges as they transition to college.

Non-traditional students. Attending college is often expected and considered a “normal rite of passage” for many traditional students (e.g., recent high school graduates, students with above average grades, middle- and upper-socioeconomic students, students from families with college experience); conversely, non-traditional students (e.g., low-income students, first generation students, with below average grades or those who have been out of school for some time) often find the transition to college “a major disjuncture in their lives” (Jalomo & Rendón, 2004, p. 39). First-generation students face a greater risk of experiencing a difficult high school to college transition (e.g., London, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ishitani, 2006). Research has also explored gender differences in the transition to college.

Gender. Males and females have been found to adjust to college differently. Enochs and Roland (2006) examined the importance of gender and living environment on college freshmen's social adjustment and found that males maintained significantly higher overall adjustment levels regardless of living condition when compared to females. Males and females adjusting to college are influenced differently by family social support, and young women living at home have been found to experience the highest level of stress when transitioning to college (Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997). Maternal attachment is higher for females than males during the first semester of college (Berman & Sperling, 1991). Regardless of one's demographics, students do not face the transition experience alone. They seek and find assistance from various sources and through an array of programs and opportunities that help them face the transition to college and cope with adaptation.

A Helping Hand

Students receive support and assistance from a variety of sources, including family, friends, university faculty and staff, campus resources, and a variety of published materials. While on-campus assistance is often part of institutional retention-based initiatives, first-year students receive support and assistance through social support and college and transition experience guides.

Social support. The need for social support is considered important throughout the college transition process "because it facilitates the mobilization of interpersonal resources to help students cope with the stress of adjusting to college" (Lidy & Kahn, 2006, p. 124). Mothers, followed by high school teachers, fathers, friends, and high school guidance counselors, have been found to supply the most helping behaviors and to

be the most helpful resource during the transition process (Smith & Zhang, 2009).

Parental support during the transition to college plays a vital role in the psychological adjustment of first-year college students (Mounts, Valentine, Anderson, Boswell, 2006).

Students who sense elevated levels of social support may adjust to college better academically (Lidy & Kahn, 2006).

A seemingly obvious way students may seek help as they transition to college life and continue through their college careers is to simply turn to one another. The range of students' influence on one another, including their academic and personal lives, is considerable (Upcraft, 1989). "Peer groups help freshmen achieve independence from home and family, support or impede educational goals, provide emotional support, develop interpersonal skills, change or reinforce values, and influence career decisions" (p. 144). These peer-to-peer interactions are significant enhancers within the college environment and develop the support base for a successful college experience (Fleming, Howard, Perkins, & Pesta, 2005). While close relationships with high school friends are beneficial during the initial weeks of the first year of college, close relationships with new college friends provide more benefits later in the first semester (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). First-year college students may also find assistance through their residence halls that allow "newcomers to find an early, physical, social, and academic anchor during the transition to college life" (Tinto, 1993, p. 125). Various resources are available for first-year students as well as materials for their families, significant others, and campus personnel who help assist them during their transition.

Transition and college experience guides. A variety of books have been written to address the first-year college experience and help both students and parents understand

the transition to and experience of college. Titles for parents include *Helping your first-year college student succeed: A guide for parents* (Mullendore & Hatch, 2000) and *Letting go: A parents' guide to understanding the college years* (Coburn & Treeger, 2003). Students may seek advice in *Survival secrets of college students* (Shanley & Johnston, 2007); while several books, including *College knowledge: What it really takes for students to succeed and what we can do to get them ready* (Conley, 2005) and *How to recruit and retain higher education students: A handbook of good practice* (Cook, & Rushton, Eds., 2009), have been published for more wider audiences, including students, parents, and educators. While these books can provide valuable insight in advance of and throughout the first-year experience, more tangible assistance comes when students initially step foot on campus. These resources are often associated with postsecondary institutions' efforts to increase student retention.

Increasing Student Retention

The nation's universities have paid attention to college student success and retention since the late 1800s, during which Johns Hopkins University created a faculty advisor system and Harvard University established a board of freshman advisors (Gordon, 1989). A variety of efforts both on and off campuses across the country aimed at increasing college student retention and assisting first-year college students to continue in contemporary American higher education. Several national organizations (e.g., The National Resource Center of the First-Year Experience, The Policy Center on the First Year of College, National Orientation Directors Association) focus on creating resources for students who are transitioning to college life. Various academic journals (e.g., *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice*, *Journal of The*

Freshman Year Experience, Journal of the First Year and Students in Transition) publish the most recent findings on transitioning to college and student retention in higher education. In addition to efforts by national organizations and publications, many institutions of higher learning take various approaches to addressing the issue of and increasing student retention. On a national level, most student retention efforts involve advising, mentoring, first-year experience programs, and orientation programs. The University of Kentucky has taken an aggressive approach to combating retention and increasing the potential for first-year success in recent years.

Advising

Contact with the university's professional staff, including academic advisors, has also been associated with increased college student retention (e.g., Bean, 2005; Anderson, 1997; Hawkins & White, 1991; Kelley & Lynch, 1991; Metzner, 1989; Tinto, 1987; Crockett, 1985; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980; Hornbuckle, Mahoney, & Borgard, 1979; Noel, 1978). Advisors provide students with personal connections to their college or university that are a crucial component of student retention and success (Nutt, 2003). Advisors possess the capability to increase retention rates simply by assisting students in the clarification of their educational goals (Tinto, 1987) and helping students make informed academic decisions (Bean, 2005).

Most students who leave college decide to do so in "social isolation" and do not meet with their advisor until after making up their minds to leave school (Hermanowicz, 2004, p. 90). First-year college students face a barrage of exceedingly personal decisions, often made with limited knowledge, whose ramifications can be immense (Light, 2001). "Advisors can play a crucial role. They can ask a broad array of

questions, and make a few suggestions, that can affect students in profound and contributing ways” (p. 84).

Students who struggle with the transition from high school to college would “benefit from a campus-wide awareness of typical new student needs reflected in concerned, competent advisors” (Noel, 1985, p. 13). Advisors can instill the confidence some students need to join a campus organization or social group that will provide the support they were accustomed to during high school. Many students who struggle with their college transition leave behind support systems and social infrastructures that contributed to success during high school and are slow to incorporate similar groups into their new lives as college students. “These are the students most likely to feel lonely when they get to campus. Such students may not integrate quickly or easily into their new community” (Light, 2001, p. 98), which can result in poor adaptation and/or dropping out. Mentoring also helps increase student retention by easing the transition to college.

Mentoring

First-year students are typically less connected to their university or college than returning students, which is one of the reasons they are more likely than returning students to leave their university (Tinto, 1987). Hawken, Duran, and Kelly (1991) note the importance of social networks and interpersonal relationships to students’ decisions to persist at universities. It is essential, especially for large universities, to ensure that students are able to develop relationships with people at their universities; these relationships are important as a way to root students to the university community (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Such relationships can include those with

mentors through mentoring programs. College students participating in mentoring programs earn higher grade point averages, record more credits earned per semester, and are less likely to drop out of college (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Pidcock, Fischer & Munsch, 2001; Hurte, 2002; Lee & Bush, 2003). Such programs are largely voluntary in nature and provide academic and social support for students. In addition to advising and mentoring, student retention and the first-year experience are heavily impacted by students' ability to engage in first-year experience and orientation programs.

First-Year Experience and Orientation Programs

Perhaps the most important retention-related initiatives should begin before the first day of class. "Pre-college advising and orientation programs targeted at helping students develop realistic expectations for the pending transition can facilitate a constructive college-adjustment process" (Paul, Manetas, Grady, & Vivona, 2001, p. 76). Some scholars believe that such orientation programs are so crucial that they should be mandatory (e.g., Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004), and it seems that the sooner first-year students have access to assistance programs the better.

Orientation programs first appeared in the United States' higher education system in 1888 at either Harvard University (Strumpf, Sharer, & Wawrzynski, 2003) or Boston University (Drake, 1966), and became a regular fixture on college and university campuses nationwide in the 1980s (Johnson, 1998). During the past two decades, first year interventions have increased considerably, and approximately 95% of four-year colleges and universities have some type of first year experience program (Jamelske, 2009). First year experience programs not only go by a variety of names (e.g., orientation programs transition programs, retention programs) but are also organized in

various ways and take various approaches to assisting students in the initial stages and/or their entire first year.

Regardless of their organization and objectives, the primary goals of all of these programs are increasing student performance, persistence, and graduation by incorporating students academically and socially into the university community (Goodman & Pascarella, 2006; Tobolowsky, Mamrick, & Cox, 2005; Terenzini, 2005). Orientation programs generate discussions about academic adjustment and requirements but may also offer vital social interaction opportunities for students (Braxton & Mundy, 2001-2002). First-year experience programs provide students with an introduction to various aspects of academic life, campus life (e.g., culture, traditions, history, people), and surrounding communities (Mack, 2010). “The goal is to provide individuals with a holistic view of the new college experience” while simultaneously establishing “expectations for students’ responsibilities in their academic career” (p. 5).

Orientation programs are beneficial for a number of reasons. First-year student orientation programs are recommended as a preventative measure of student attrition (Yorke, 1999; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980), and students who participate in first-year student seminar courses are more likely to return to college for a second year than students who do not participate (Yockey & George, 1998; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Maisto & Tammi, 1991). Jamelske (2009) found first year experience students earned higher grade point averages than non-first year students. Long-term effects of the first-year seminar, or orientation program, included significantly higher retention rates when compared to students who did not participate in the program (Schnell and Doetkott, 2002-2003). Professional responses predict the future of such programs and focus on three

themes: inclusiveness, technology, and accountability (Ward-Roof & Guthrie, 2010).

Orientation and related first-year experience programs are only one way that the University of Kentucky is attempting to ease the transition from high school to college while working to increase retention.

University of Kentucky Retention-Based Initiatives

The University of Kentucky has taken a variety of steps in recent years related to improving retention of first-year students. First, UK declared the “War on Attrition” in 2007 as part of its Top 20 Business Plan. The fight to increase student retention and bolster graduation rates is beginning to produce results. A referral system was put into place to alert advisors of various student issues that may be indicators of students’ struggles in and out of the classroom. Parking and Transportation Services recently designed a new bus service to help transport students during key points throughout the academic year. The University’s College of Communications and Information Studies and Department of Communication have taken additional steps to help increase student retention. Finally, a variety of University-wide programs and services are available for first-year UK students. The University’s recent drive to increase retention began with a bold vision.

Top 20 plan. In December 2005, University of Kentucky President Lee Todd, Jr. revealed his “Top 20 Business Plan,” which defined his time as president and exceeded his expectations (Blanton, 2011). The idea was straightforward, but:

it had never been done before in public higher education -- anywhere: telling the people of the state and policy-makers in explicit terms what it would cost over the course of 15 years for UK to reach its state mandated goal of becoming a Top 20 public research institution by 2020. (Blanton)

The plan received national attention, was featured in *The New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and generated excitement across the state (Blanton).

Todd cited benefits of the plan for people across the state, including jobs and millions of dollars for Kentucky and “an institution defined by academic excellence, world-class research, and vigorous engagement in communities across Kentucky” (Todd, 2009).

The plan called for increasing (a) enrollment to 34,000; (b) UK’s graduation rate to 72%; (c) the number of faculty to more than 2,500; (d) research expenditures to \$768 million; and (e) engagement in the state’s schools, farms, businesses, and communities (Todd). Additionally, a byproduct of the plan was to increase the University’s student retention rate. In 2007, the University of Kentucky’s provost declared the “War on Attrition,” and as part of this “war” the University announced a \$2 billion budget that included \$35 million specifically for improving retention and graduation rates.

Results. The University of Kentucky’s Top 20 Business Plan has demonstrated its effectiveness over the years. The University was the 40th ranked public research institution in 1997 and was ranked 37th in 2010 despite nine budget cuts over the past 10 years (Blanton, 2011). In his November 2009 State of the University Address, UK President Todd announced that first- to second-year student retention numbers increased by 1.5% since the provost announced his war on attrition and, in turn, helped increase the University’s revenue (Staff Senate, 2009).

During his 2010 Address, Todd highlighted the 2010-2011 freshmen class who cumulatively possess a record 25.2 ACT composite average and a mean high school grade point average of 3.60, also a record (Bennett & Holaday, 2010). Furthermore, the percentage of first-year students that successfully return for their sophomore years has

improved from 76.4% to 82%, which is a record high (Blanton, 2011). During the 2008-2009 academic year, the University hired 65 new faculty members, nine new academic advisors, and a Coordinator for the Common Reading Experience (University of Kentucky, 2010a). The Provost's Retention Workgroup developed and launched a University Retention Timeline describing key times in the academic years across the University units for strategic intervention efforts.

Todd considers the Top 20 plan an attitude changer for the University, sees it as “a magnet for helping (the University) recruit some of (the country's) very best people,” and believes it has “helped change UK's psyche and outlook” and “changed the culture of the institution” (Blanton). A University-sponsored meeting of campus directors of undergraduate studies was held in March 2010; one of the topics discussed was student retention, demonstrating cross-departmental collaboration to address the topic. A variety of campus-wide initiatives are currently in place to assist the University's “War on Attrition.”

Advising and retention at UK. Advisors at the University of Kentucky are also doing their part to increase student retention. UK recently implemented an Academic Alert Referral System meant to notify academic advisors across campus about students' problems (e.g., attendance issues, habitual tardiness, missing homework, poor grades, behavioral issues). The system was designed to identify at-risk students before they enroll and students who struggle during their first-year on campus, which allows for early intervention with at-risk students. The initiative also increases communication among instructors, advisors, and students and allows an academic alert team to collect data for the University's Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness. Also, a

series of webinars on “Reaching and Retaining Students” was started in the fall of 2009, and additional webinars are continuously available.

Accessibility to home. The University of Kentucky began offering an alternative travel option in the fall 2010 for students and employees under the Parking and Transportation Services (PTS) Ride Home Express program, which offers “reliable, comfortable and affordable transportation on deluxe motor coach busses to and from hometowns or break destinations” (UK Parking & Transportation Services, 2010). The service operates at the beginning and ends of the Thanksgiving, winter semester, and spring breaks and serves 29 cities along eight routes. Tickets range from \$49-\$129. The PTS Ride Home Express helps students return home during key points of the semester and potentially reduces student and parent stress about transportation related issues, both of which may reduce attrition through increasing student exposure to their hometowns and support systems. The University of Kentucky’s College of Communications and Information Studies and Department of Communication are also taking steps to help improve student retention at the University of Kentucky.

College Level. The College of Communications and Information Studies is in full cooperation with the University’s initiatives (e.g., Academic Alert Referral System) and has taken several measures to increase communication between the College and its undergraduate students (C. Hunt, personal communication, October 12, 2010). First, all students are included on various College listservs, which are developed in the College, that allow them to “be ‘in the loop’ and well informed of club meetings, student activities, (and) academic deadlines” (Hunt). Students are encouraged to participate in student organizations or become involved with the student newspaper, both of which

allow “a way for students to become connected and invested in UK” (Hunt). Finally, unlike some University of Kentucky colleges (e.g., Business and Economics), the College of Communications and Information Studies provides students with individual academic advising (Hunt).

The Department of Communication introduced Faculty Resource Day presentations in the basic public speaking course (COM 181) sections during the fall 2008 semester. Graduate teaching assistants and part-time instructors predominantly teach COM 181, which enrolls a large number of first- and second-year students, both from in and outside the Department of Communication and College of Communications and Information Studies. Thus, students majoring in communication may not be taught by a regular faculty member during their first-year unless it is part of a mass lecture, introductory class. These presentations are intended to increase students’ knowledge about the communication discipline and UK’s Department of Communication while increasing students’ sense of connection to the Department and its faculty. Also, the Department of Communication welcomed two new instructional communicational research faculty members to its staff in the fall 2010 semester, which will increase the level of research focusing on educational outcomes and may include increasing retention efforts. Unfortunately, no empirical research has been conducted to know whether or not there is a direct link to any of these services and the University’s increased student retention rates. However, there appears to be a positive correlation. Other retention-based initiatives at the University of Kentucky are specifically geared toward students navigating their first year on the UK campus.

The UK first-year experience. The University of Kentucky has implemented several programs intended to improve students' first year experience. These include a welcoming event for students, a resource guide publication, and new student seminars.

K Week. The University of Kentucky's equivalent of first-year student orientation is K Week, which in 2010 consisted of nine days of welcoming students to campus with 257 different events. The program's goals are to (a) "facilitate successful academic and social transitions to the University;" (b) "introduce students to important University values;" (c) "foster a sense of belonging to the University community;" (d) "engage the entire campus community in reaching out to new students;" (e) "provide an alcohol-free social alternatives for students;" and (f) "address the needs of parents and families and involve them in their students' transition" (University of Kentucky, 2009).

Each new UK student is expected to attend K Week because this is considered the most ideal way for new students to meet new people and become more familiar with the UK campus and its resources before fall semester classes begin (University of Kentucky, 2010b). Students are not penalized for missing key events but doing so is considered a detriment:

K Week activities are designed to meet the needs of new students. Students who do not take full advantage of the activities and resources available to them will be at a disadvantage compared to other new students. While students may be upset about skipping a vacation or family event to attend K Week, they should remember that they only begin college once and should devote their time and attention to getting a good start. (University of Kentucky)

K Week also doubles as an opportunity for the University to increase student retention.

The University of Kentucky's Office of New Student & Parent Programs reviewed student retention and success literature and accumulated a list of "factors, frameworks, and best practices which (they) consistently refer to when developing and

evaluating (their) goals, learning outcomes, and programs” (University of Kentucky, 2009).

In response to this list, K Week is intended to increase UK student retention by (a) “introducing students to the University’s expectations for student learning and student behavior;” (b) “assisting in their social transition to the University;” (c) “assisting in their academic transition to the University;” (d) “providing a comprehensive orientation experience;” (e) “providing opportunities for students to develop meaningful relationships with other students, faculty, and staff;” (f) “encouraging faculty-student contact outside of the classroom;” (g) cultivating students’ respect for diversity;” (h) facilitating academic and social peer interaction;” (i) “informing parents of variables which will impact their students’ success;” (j) “providing common intellectual experiences (Common Reading Experience);” (k) “introducing students to undergraduate research opportunities;” (l) “encouraging membership in campus organizations;” (m) strengthening participation in campus activities” (University of Kentucky). An extension of K Week for incoming University of Kentucky first-year students is the K Book, “UK’s comprehensive student handbook” (University of Kentucky, 2010b).

K Book. After a 50-year absence, the University resumed production of K Book, a 96-page resource guide written by students for students in 2007 (University of Kentucky, 2007). Tracing its roots to 1901, K Book has been called the “freshman bible” and “is a guide to life at UK and is the ‘go-to’ resource for incoming students” (University of Kentucky). It contains information about “everything (transitioning students would) want to know about UK, and a little more, and highlights the wealth of opportunities

available to every UK student.” The University of Kentucky also offers a pair of classes designed with incoming students in mind.

New student seminars. The University of Kentucky also offers a pair of classes—UK 101 and UK 201—that are intended to promote academic success, foster connections with other students, engage students with the University, implement effective study habits, create friendship bonds, and provide new ideas. UK 101 is a 10½-week, letter graded course designed for first-year students, and UK 201 is a 10-week, pass/fail course designed for transfer students. The classes explain the characteristics of studying at a research institution, allow students to reflect on personal and social issues, create relationships, and provide valuable insight about UK, its traditions, and learning outcomes.

Regardless of the measures taken by students, parents, and various campus personnel to increase student retention and ease the stress of transitioning to college, the first-year college student experience contains obstacles and includes a transition period for those involved. “The college years represent a time of transition for many college students as they leave their families and familiar peers and enter a new social environment characterized by greater freedom, academic challenges, and changing responsibilities” (Lanithier & Windham, 2004, p. 591). This transition period may be conceptualized as entering a new culture because first-year college students are transitioning from one cultural environment to another (Hunter & Murray, 2007), and previous research has proposed the student transition from high school to college be understood as if students were immigrants entering a new country (Chaskes, 1996).

Therefore, the transition from high school to college may be considered a period of cross-cultural adaptation.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory

Cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1988, 2001) is rooted in the assumption that a period of assimilation and adjustment exists when members of one culture move to another culture, or host environment, and the belief that successful adaptation stems from an individual's ability to communicate through the normal and desired practices of local culture. The theory extends itself to any individual born and raised in one culture (or subculture) who then moves to a different, unfamiliar culture (or subculture) for an identifiable length of time (Kim 1988, 2001). Individuals must be completely socialized in their original culture before moving to a new one in order to experience cross-cultural adaptation.

Kim (2001) uses the term "strangers" to "represent a wide range of individuals crossing cultures and resettling in alien cultural environments" (p. 32). These "strangers" must be "at least minimally dependent on the host environment for meeting their personal and social needs" and "at least minimally engaged in firsthand communication experiences with that environment" (p. 34) to be included in the theoretical domain. The process of cross-cultural adaptation can be long and arduous for individuals, and "through continuous interaction with the various aspects of the cultural environment, the individual's internal system undergoes a progression of quantitative and qualitative changes by integrating culturally acceptable concepts, attitudes, and actions" (p. 46). During this process of internalized learning, the individual becomes more adept at interacting with others in the cultural community as their images of reality and self begin

to overlap. Nonetheless, the process of cross-cultural adaptation can be stressful, and successful adaptation depends on the ability to communicate according to normal, desired practices of the local culture (Kim, 1988, 2001).

The cross-cultural adaptation process is a stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, a process that is filled with conflicting ideas and internal conflict between an allegiance to one's native cultural identity and the need to embrace a new identity as defined by the host environment (Kim, 1988, 2001). Stress, adaptation, and growth are interrelated and never occur in isolation; each occurs because of the others. "The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic plays out not in a smooth, linear progression, but in a cyclic and continual 'draw-back-to-leap' representation of the present articulation of the interrelationships among stress, adaptation, and growth" (2001, p. 56-57). Stressful experiences push individuals to adapt by organizing and reorganizing themselves, which results in psychological growth and the restructuring of internal conditions.

Individuals moving from one culture to another experience peak levels of stress during the initial phases of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 1988, 2001). The cross-cultural adaptation process becomes less stressful for individuals when they engage in interpersonal communication with and absorb social communication from persons within their host environment (Kim, 1988, 2001). The cross-cultural adaptation process consists of four stages: (1) interaction with the host society and consumption of media; (2) gaining competence in the host language; (3) becoming more motivated and eager to participate in the host culture; and (4) accessibility of mass media. It is a complex and dynamic process that occurs through various communication channels, including interpersonal, small group, and mass communication (Kim 1988, 2001).

Kim (2001) reports that the cross-cultural adaptation process is set in motion when strangers enter a new culture and continues for the duration of their communication with the host environment. Adaptation is an excursion that alters one's life through a process of personal reconstruction, expansion, and revolution while extending one's life outside the parameters of their known reality. It "occurs naturally and is inevitable even when strangers do not plan or actively seek for it to happen, have no intention of participating fully in host social communication activities, and confine themselves to mostly superficial relationships with the natives" (p. 183). During the process of cross-cultural adaptation, individuals are engaged in a journey of personal development that takes them from their comfort zones to a heightened, more comprehensive understanding of human conditions, including their own; people have a natural desire to adapt and grow (Kim 1988, 2001). Kim describes cross-cultural adaptation as a process of dynamic unfolding of the natural human tendency to struggle for an internal equilibrium in the face of often adversarial environmental conditions.

A cross-cultural move requires physical relocation after which strangers must learn to adapt to their new surroundings while distancing themselves from the practices of their native culture (Kim 1988, 2001). Long-term "settlers" and short-term "sojourners" are said to experience a common cross-cultural adaptation process. Individuals moving from one culture to another must adapt to their new cultural surroundings, which includes altering their communicative styles to accommodate their new culture. Persons transitioning from their old to their new culture will dissociate themselves with certain practices from their home culture while acquiring characteristics and practices of their host culture (i.e., old cultural habits are replaced by new ones).

These processes are known as deculturation and acculturation, respectively. From the moment a stranger sets foot in a new culture, “the cross-cultural adaptation process is set in full motion. The stranger’s habitual patterns of cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses undergo adaptive transformations” (Kim, 2001, p. 58). Individuals must adapt to their new environment while distancing themselves from their previous culture and seeking “fitness” and “compatibility.”

When the processes of acculturation and deculturation come together in harmony while moving toward assimilation, individual strangers succumb to internal changes and intercultural transformation (Kim, 1988, 2001). The processes of internal change and intercultural transformation are dependent on increased functional fitness, improved psychological health, and movement toward intercultural identity. Functional fitness is directly linked to the development of one’s ability to communicate according to local cultural norms and how they navigate daily transactions. Psychological health, which should increase over time, is related to how one deals with her/his new environment based on their ability to communicate and their functional fitness in their host environment. Without positive psychological health, individuals run the risk of becoming frustrated and suffering from poor mental mindsets. Finally, intercultural transformation is dependent upon gradual development of an intercultural identity that operates along a developmental continuum and links individuals to more than one cultural group. Behavioral and cognitive changes follow the completion of intercultural transformation. Research has utilized cross-cultural adaptation theory in a variety of ways.

Previous Cross-Cultural Adaptation Research

The cross-cultural phenomenon has been investigated extensively in the United States since the beginning of the 20th century, but academic interest in the topic has been exhibited in other countries, including Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Israel, and Sweden (Kim, 2001). The field of cross-cultural adaptation has been “extensive and complex” since the parameters for inquiry into acculturation within the field of cultural anthropology were defined by the Social Science Research Council’s Subcommittee on Acculturation in the 1930s (p. 12). Cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 1988, 2001) is presently examined by scholars across a variety of disciplines (e.g., anthropology, communication, psychology, and sociology) and across many different topic areas (e.g., psychological adaptation of immigrants, diversity, interethnic perceptions, shared ethnicity). The social science disciplines have put forth widespread academic efforts to understand and clarify the cross-cultural phenomenon (Kim, 2002), including communication research, which is reviewed for this study. Cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1988, 2001) has previously been applied to the adaptation of international students attending college in the United States (e.g., Lewthwaite, 1996; Chen, 2000; Zhang, 2004; Ye, 2006).

Lewthwaite (1996) explored how incoming Chinese graduate students adapted to their new academic, social, cultural, and linguistic environments and in New Zealand. These students felt natives were friendly at all levels but found it difficult to maintain relationships with such people. The students “realized the social and linguistic benefits of interacting with local families but felt trapped by the academic workload and by their perceived lack of fluent social English” (p. 175). Respondents indicated it was difficult

to cross into local culture and society partly because of apparent disparity between their native and host cultures. These feelings were enhanced by what was viewed as a lack of opportunity to interact in a relaxed way with their host culture and because locals did not invite immigrants to participate in their groups. Students found general satisfaction in the quality of their coursework and academic supervisors to be an integral part of adaptation. The fear of failure and becoming sick away from the support of home were major sources of anxiety, and some concern accompanied the belief that students were losing touch with their native culture.

Chen (2000) reported that international students had some knowledge about the American higher education prior to their arrival and were most concerned about being accepted by American students. Colleges and universities can assist international student preparedness by creating a multi-cultural and global communication environment on American campuses. “These students’ confidence needs to be nourished in the American schools so they do better in their adaptation to American society” (p. 43). Chen suggests that U.S. colleges and universities should educate international students about the country’s culture and higher education as well as pay closer attention to the adaptation process they encounter.

The amount of social difficulties encountered by Chinese students studying in the United States decreased with increases in social support from their host country interpersonal networks and online ethnic social groups (Ye, 2006). “These two types of social networks can provide crucial information and knowledge about life in the host culture, thus facilitating the management of everyday social situations” (p. 872). Computer mediated communication can play an important role in easing international

student's transition to a host culture. Communication with support systems and through supportive online social groups holds the potential to dramatically enhance the adaptation process. Cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1988, 2001) has been used in a variety of other contexts beyond how international students adapt to life as American college students.

Cui, van den Berg, and Jiang (1998) found that the communication and cultural empathy of Chinese students studying in the United States were significantly correlated with one another and that both assisted social interaction with the host culture. Language and interpersonal skills are important to the adaptation process, and "cross-cultural adaptation takes place in and through communication and interactions with host people" (p. 81). Social interaction was found to be a significant predictor of cross-cultural adaptation and future research was encouraged to explore the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and ethnic communication.

Kim, Lujan, and Dixon (1998) analyzed identity experience by investigating how American Indians in Oklahoma balance life with fellow Indians and those outside their ethnicity. Oklahoma Indians were found to mainly share the integration identity orientation, which is defined by an attempt to retain their Indian cultural traditions while maintaining contact with the larger white society. Respondents' self-professed identity experiences were also found to "reflect varying degrees of integration (or separation) identity orientation and form a natural hierarchy of the degree of intensity in commitment to ethnic and interethnic identities," which supports Kim's conception of cultural-intercultural identity continuum (p. 268). It was also discovered that intercultural identity

integration is connected to other features of Kim's theory, including in out-group communication, functional fitness, and psychological health.

Lee and Chen (2000) studied the cross-cultural adaptation of first- and second-generation Chinese adolescents in Canada, investigating the relationship between their host and native cultural communication patterns, their psychological adjustment, and the role parents play in these adolescents' adaptation process. Adolescents who stayed in Canada longer reported high host communication competence but low native communication competence, and those who immigrated at older ages maintained more native communication competence compared to those who immigrated at younger ages. No significant relationship between host communication competence and psychological adjustment was found, but adolescents who reported host communication competence generally possessed better psychological adjustment. "It is conceivable that peers may play a particularly important role in cross-cultural adaptation at the adolescence stage" (p. 788).

Smith (2001) believes that cross-cultural adaptation is also relevant for persons who experience re-entry after returning to their home country after a period of living in a host country overseas. "In reentry, it seems clear that this transformed identity and its accompanying perceptual and behavioral frameworks creates a whole new set of adaptation issues" (p. 9). Communication scholars have addressed cross-cultural adaptation but have not extensively examined entry and reentry.

Ma (2005) examined communication between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese. The two groups were found to possess distinct social identities and argued that their experiences across the border differ from previous studies because no clear distinction

between a dominant and submissive group is established. As the world becomes more globalized we will no longer have one dominant group in intercultural encounters, and the one-way population flow and adaptation assumed in existing theories will be joined by a give-and-take flow and two-way adaptation. Both sides need to lower their expectations toward each other's behavior while reducing resentment against outsiders and the pressure for outsiders to conform to cultural norms. The world is becoming smaller as communities diversify and cultures merge, and communication will play a central role in successful adaptation and the level of comfort felt by society at large and within individuals. "The tendency of having one dominant group in intercultural encounters will no longer be held true, it is hoped that people on both sides will lower their expectation toward the behavior of each other" (p. 210). Interpersonal and mass communication will play an integral role as our world becomes more globalized.

Kim (2008) looked at how American expatriates in South Korea experience communication and used cross-cultural adaptation theory as the basis for providing an explanation of the connection between communication competence and psychological health of American expatriates concerning sociocultural environment in South Korea. Communication, as predicted by cross-cultural adaptation theory, is the primary influence in how expatriates adapt because it can promote psychological health in an unfamiliar cultural setting. Americans working in South Korea faced intercultural challenges because of cultural differences in work styles (e.g., relationship-oriented, not individualistic) and verbal/nonverbal behaviors (e.g., indirect/vague communication style, degree of language formality and proxemics). "The expatriates' knowledge and understanding of their host culture and active involvement in interpersonal

communication with host nations will help them to meet intercultural challenges arising from the process of adjustment” (p. 525). An increased need exists for training programs that will lead to more successful international business and an easier adaptation process. Cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1988, 2001) may also be extended to examine the transition from high school to college.

Although cross-cultural adaptation theory was conceived as an intercultural communication theory, it is appropriate for understanding the college student adaptation process as well because students are socialized as members of their high school and community cultures before moving to college campuses and university environments. New college students must engage in communicative activities with individuals associated with their institution (e.g., fellow new students, older students, faculty, staff). Doing so helps them transition and slowly move away from high school tendencies (e.g., academic, social, and institutional behaviors) and replace them with norms found on college campuses.

Kim (personal communication, December 4, 2007) endorsed the use of her cross-cultural adaptation theory to examine the transition experience of first-year college students. She was “delighted to learn about (the) application of (her cross-cultural) adaptation theory to investigating new college students’ functional fitness, or lack of it,” and believes “their situation can certainly be investigated as a cross-cultural adaptation phenomenon.” While previous studies have used the theory to explore the adaptation experience of international students attending colleges and universities in the United States (e.g., Lewthwaite, 1996; Chen, 2000; Zhang, 2004; Ye, 2006), it has not previously be used to examine the transition from high school to college. Despite not

using the theory, previous researchers have examined the adaptation of first-year college students and their transition experience as a cultural move.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory and First-Semester College Students

During their first-year transition, college students face a resocialization process to a foreign cultural environment (i.e., life as a college student and life on a college campus) similar to the acculturation process experienced by immigrants in a new homeland (Chaskes, 1996). As students begin their first semester in college, “it becomes increasingly apparent to first-year students that they are ‘strangers in a strange land.’ They find themselves immersed in a rather complex cultural milieu that they must master in a relatively brief span of time” (p. 89). By acknowledging the cultural differences between high school and college, both in and out of the classroom, the American post-secondary educational system may better assist students in transition. “Higher educators have only more recently seen the need to help beginning college students become acclimated to the culture of their institutions and to collegiate learning in general, because these cultures differ significantly from that of high school” (Hunter & Murray, 2007, p. 25).

First-year college students must learn to disassociate themselves with certain aspects of their lives that they grew accustomed to prior to and during high school while grasping new ideas, customs, and norms. These are the processes that Kim (1988, 2001) defines as acculturation and deculturation. Ultimately, the new cultural patterns replace many of the old patterns and the overall transformation of strangers becomes noticeable, particularly to others. As young college students “face the demands of the host

environment [their college campus] and cope with the accompanying stress, parts of their internal organization undergo small changes” (Kim, 1988, p. 55).

When combined, the educational, social, and personal adaptation of a first-year college student may place her/him severely outside of their comfort zone and into a realm of the unknown. First-year college students must navigate socialization to a new cultural environment similar to immigrants who arrive in a new homeland; this socialization includes culture shock, acquiring new language skills, internalizing academic, bureaucratic and social norms, and embracing new values and expectations (Chaskes, 1996). In this sense, first-year college students transitioning from life as a high-school student to that of a new college student can be thought of as experiencing a period of cross-cultural adaptation. In addition to viewing the transition to college as a period of cross-cultural adaptation, this transition may be conceptualized as a period of organizational assimilation and socialization.

Organizational assimilation is the process “by which individuals join, become integrated into, and exit organizations” (Jablin & Krone, 1987, p. 712). Organizations socialize new members through attempts to create suitable attitudes, values, and beliefs while newcomers simultaneously attempt to individualize their organizational roles as they discover organizational norms and values (Jablin, 2001). Successful transition programs (e.g., campus initiatives, orientation activities, transition classes) should recognize that students in transition are frequently relocating across cultural environments as a key ingredient in the adaptation to college process (Hunter, 2006b). Colleges and universities are similar to complex organizations in several ways, including the fact that new members of a campus culture and environment (i.e., organization)

should be expected to experience and need assistance while navigating a period of organizational socialization. Therefore, “deliberate and intentional efforts to assimilate new students into the institutional culture and environment are essential if institutions are to expect transitional students to thrive” (p. 10).

By examining and better understanding the adaptation period of students transitioning from high school to college, researchers and practitioners may come to better understand how this adaptation process influences retention. The present study examines first-semester college student adaptation (i.e., a form of cross-cultural adaptation) and how this adaptation influences students’ decisions to return for their second semester. Specifically, it examines the first-year college student experience and transition from high school to college through students’ own experiences and their own words. Rooted in cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim, 1988, 2001), the present study answers three research questions.

Research Questions

This dissertation uses students’ stories about college adaptation as its data and seeks answers to understand (a) the overall first-semester experience of a cohort of first-year University of Kentucky students; (b) how these students’ adaptation to college changes over time; and (c) the experience of students who did not return to UK for a second semester. More specifically, this dissertation project proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are students’ stories about the University of Kentucky and about home during their first semester?

RQ2: How do students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home evolve over the course of their first semester?

RQ3: What are students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home who do not return to UK for a second semester?

RQ3A: What are the overall themes?

RQ3B: How do the stories evolve over time?

Summary

Chapter two provided a review of literature related to the first-year college experience, increasing student retention, and cross-cultural adaptation theory. Chapter three justifies a qualitative approach to studying student retention and the first-year college student experience, explains the use of the narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994) and a thematic analysis approach to analyze data, and outlines other methodological components of this study. Chapter four presents the study's results, and chapter five offers conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This chapter examines the present study's use of qualitative methodology grounded in the narrative paradigm and employing a thematic analysis design. Also, the study's participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis are discussed. Chapter three concludes with a discussion of how each research question was answered.

Justification of Methods

A variety of methodological approaches may be utilized when conducting social science research in general or communication research specifically. Each type of data and each type of data reduction is valuable for answering particular types of questions (Bernard, 2000). The specific methodological approach a researcher or team of researchers selects must be driven by the topic selected and the research questions and/or hypotheses proposed (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). The research questions for the present study explore how first-year college students make sense of their college adaptation experience and seek to understand the experiences of students who withdrew after their first semester. Therefore, the research questions are more concerned with interpretation than with quantification, which justifies a qualitative approach for collecting and evaluating data. Specifically, this study takes a thematic analysis approach grounded in narrative paradigm to examine student stories collected as in-class free-writing assignments throughout their first semester at the University of Kentucky.

Qualitative Methodology

This study utilizes qualitative methodology partly because qualitative research "is known for being primarily inductive, emergent, and... very little is linear about it" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 66). The fact that qualitative research allows for flexibility in

data analysis makes it ideal for a study that seeks insight into a problem without pre-established themes.

Qualitative research allows researchers to refrain from predicting how a study will turn out (Lindlof & Taylor), which was the approach taken with this study because themes emerged from the data thematically and without being predetermined. This study uses first-semester college students' stories collected in the form of in-class free-writes as its data.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is loosely formulated, practically intuitive, and employs terms identified by the analyst (Riessman, 1993), and its goal “is to discover regularities in how people tell stories or give speeches” (Bernard, 2000, p. 441). Contemporary narrative inquiry is considered “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (Chase, 2005, p. 651). Data for the present study was generated from in-class writing prompts (i.e., narratives) by first-semester students at the University of Kentucky.

Narrative is the major way human experience is made meaningful, and “the individual stories and histories that emerge in the creation of human narratives are available for direct observation” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). The purpose of studying narrative meaning is to clearly understand “the operations that produce its particular kind of meaning, and to draw out the implications this meaning has for understanding human existence” (p. 6). Studies utilizing a narrative theory of human existence should concentrate their attention on existence as human beings live, experience, and interpret

narratives. Thus, narrative analysis is ideal for examining how students experience adaptation as first semester college students.

Narrative research may be classified as descriptive or explanatory depending on whether the research's purpose is "to describe the narratives already held by individuals and groups" (i.e., descriptive research) or "to explain through narrative why something happened," (i.e., explanatory research) (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 161). The aim of descriptive research is:

to render the narrative accounts already in place which are used by individuals or groups as their means for ordering and making temporal events meaningful. The criterion for evaluating this kind of narrative research is the accuracy of the researcher's description in relationship to the operating narrative scheme. (p. 161)

This study utilizes a descriptive approach to answer its research questions by describing the themes of students' stories and how these stories may change throughout their first semester. Also, descriptions are provided for stories from students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester. The aim of explanatory narrative research is:

to construct a narrative account explaining "why" a situation or event involving human actions has happened. The narrative account that is constructed ties together and orders events so as to make apparent the way they "caused" the happening under investigation. (p. 161)

Thus, an examination of student narratives should aid in understanding why students did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester.

The narrative paradigm. No binding theory of narrative exists in part because one defining feature of narrative theory is its great conceptual diversity (Riessman, 1993). However, communication scholars ground their understanding of the narrative paradigm based on the work of Walter Fisher (1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994) who contends that

humans are essentially storytelling animals (Fisher, 1987). Fisher (1984) defines narration as:

a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination. (p. 2)

Humans have participated in the act of storytelling since the beginning of time in a variety of ways (e.g., oral, written, drawings) to accomplish a variety of tasks (e.g., recording family or other history, entertainment, educational). Fisher's notion that people are storytelling animals is one of the five assumptions that serve as the foundation of the narrative paradigm. His work with the narrative paradigm spans more than 30 years.

Fisher first published his notions about the narrative paradigm in the late 1970s, but his most quoted foundational piece was published in 1984 in *Communication Monographs*. In the article, Fisher (1984) defines paradigm as “a representation designed to formalize the structure of a component of experience and to direct understanding and inquiry into the nature and functions of that experience—in this instance, the experience of human communication” (p. 2). Also, Fisher outlines his five assumptions for the rational-world and narrative paradigms, which are discussed subsequently.

A year later, Fisher (1985) positioned his still new and developing narrative paradigm as it related to major social science and humanistic theories. *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action* is the culmination of Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm during which he asserts his conviction that human beings are narrative creatures who “experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends” (p. 24). Later, Fisher (1989) discussed what the narrative paradigm is not, including the

ideas that it is not a rhetoric, is not about criticism, does not deny the utility of traditional genres, is not a rejection of the traditional argumentation, and “does not deny that power, distortion, or totalitarian forces are or can be significant features of communicative practices” (p. 57). Fisher concludes his essay by saying:

the narrative paradigm is a philosophical statement that is meant to offer an approach to interpretation and assessment of human experience—assuming that all forms of communication can be seen fundamentally as stories, as interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time shaped by history, culture and character. (p. 57)

Five assumptions prevail in the rational world paradigm: (a) people are essentially rational; (b) we make decisions on the basis of arguments; (c) the type of speaking situation (legal, scientific, legislative) determines the course of our argument; (d) rationality is determined by how much we know and how well we argue; and (e) the world is a set of logical puzzles that we can solve through rational analysis (Fisher, 1987). In short, the rational-world paradigm asserts that people base decisions on logical arguments, evidence, and reasoning. Conversely, Fisher’s narrative paradigm considers narration to be the focal point of human communication and is based on values, aesthetic criteria, and commonsense interpretation. The five assumptions of the narrative paradigm are: (a) people are storytelling animals; (b) we make decisions on the basis of good reasons, which vary depending on the communication situation, medium, and genre (philosophical, technical, rhetorical, or artistic); (c) history, rationality, biography, culture, and character determine what we consider good reasons; (d) narrative rationality is determined by the coherence and fidelity of our stories; and (e) the world is a set of stories from which we choose and thus constantly re-create our lives (Fisher, 1987).

Individuals evaluate narratives to which they are exposed based on the ideas of narrative rationality, which allows people to evaluate the value of stories as being true and is what Fisher (1987) considers to be the logic of his narrative paradigm. Narrative rationality is based on two principles: narrative coherence (probability) and narrative fidelity (truthfulness and reliability).

Narrative coherence gauges how well a story hangs together and how believable the story sounds and appears to be. It addresses questions about the consistency of characters' actions and is evaluated in three ways: (a) argumentative or structural coherence; (b) material coherence; and (c) characterological coherence (Fisher, 1987). Coherence often includes a comparison to other stories that individuals have encountered and address similar themes. Characters should act reliably, and those who act uncharacteristically should be considered suspicious. Stories told by people whose thoughts, motives, and actions are stable can be trusted.

Narrative fidelity is based on how well a story aligns with one's experiences (i.e., it measures how well a story rings true) (Fisher, 1987). Stories have fidelity when they provide good reasons that can be utilized to guide our future actions. These values are what distinguish the narrative paradigm's logic of good reasons from the rational world paradigm's logic of reasons. Five value-related issues are the focus of Fisher's logic of good reasons: (a) the values embedded in the message; (b) the relevance of those values to decisions made; (c) the consequence of adhering to those values; (d) the overlap with the worldview of the audience; and (e) conformity with what the audience members believe is an ideal basis for conduct. Fisher contends that this form of logic combines the process of analyzing and evaluating arguments "with critical questions that can locate and

weigh values. These are questions about fact, relevance, consequence, consistency, and transcendental issues” (p. 48). Fisher’s (1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994) narrative paradigm has been used by researchers across multiple disciplines and is appropriate for examining students’ stories about their high school to college transition and adaptation.

The narrative paradigm and first-semester college students. The narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994) has been utilized in a variety of academic disciplines (e.g., rhetorical criticism, education, business, public relations, psychology, political science, communication) and through an array of academic studies. It is also appropriate to examine students’ stories about their transition to college and throughout their lives as first-semester college students. This study extends Fisher’s narrative paradigm by applying it to the collegiate first-year experience and will allow for examination of student stories, the results of which will allow for the creation of communication messages aimed at increasing student retention.

Fisher’s narrative paradigm (1984, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1994) emphasizes history, culture, and characters, as well as conflicts, beginnings, middles, and ends. Student narratives may specifically be examined regarding their first-semester adaptation in terms of beginnings (weeks leading up to the start of class and the initial week of college), middles (the middle of the semester, including midterms and Thanksgiving/fall breaks), and ends (last few weeks, including finals, and the time in between semesters). If a student described her/his history, influential characters, and conflicts in her/his life that impacted adaptation and influences retention decisions, an analysis of narratives would be greatly benefited.

Culture in the form of academic culture, hometown culture, family culture, and social culture could become central components of student narratives and may provide insight into how each influence adaptation and ultimately retention decisions. Also, the various characters that are present in a college student's life (both on-campus and at home) may influence these factors. Student narratives will provide intimate details about such ideas and how they influence adaptation and retention decisions. Interest in narratives as a method of inquiry and as a general element of educational research has become increasingly popular across a number of disciplines in recent decades (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The object of investigation when one conducts a narrative analysis is the story itself (Riessman, 1993). This study employs a thematic analysis approach to examine students' stories about their first semester as college students.

Thematic Analysis

This study's data was analyzed through a thematic analysis approach, which is a procedure for encoding qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1988). Explicit "codes," which may include a list of themes, are required for encoding; minimally, themes describe and organize potential observations or maximally interpret characteristics of the phenomenon (Boyatzis). Research using a thematic analysis approach includes three distinct stages: "Stage I, deciding on sampling and design issues; Stage II, developing themes and a code; and Stage III, validating and using the code" (p. 29). Each stage is discussed subsequently. First, Stage I of the present study involved the study's participants, instruments, and data collection. Then, Stages II and III involved analyzing the data.

Stage I, Sampling and Design Issues

Participants

Participants for the present study consisted of students enrolled in 15 sections of CIS 110: Composition and Communication I at the University of Kentucky during the fall 2010 semester. CIS 110 is a part of the University's general education program and enrolls students from a diverse array of majors. Only students 18 years old and older who signed a pair of consent forms, Consent to Participate in a Research Study and Consent Form for Composition and Communication I Students (see Appendices A and B), were eligible to participate. As part of a larger research project supported by the University of Kentucky's College of Communications and Information Studies and Department of Communication, students enrolled in CIS 110 completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). Respondents received no compensation for their participation, but their answers to a series of free-writes and participation in survey research were part of CIS 110 course requirements.

The total sample for this study is 264 students ($N = 264$). Demographic data was not available for 22 participants (8.3%) because these students did not complete a demographic questionnaire. Of the 264 participants, 109 were male (41.3%) and 133 were female (50.4%). Most participants (84.1%) were 18 years old. Participants classified themselves as white (78%, $n = 206$), black or African American, (6.8%, $n = 18$), as Asian (1.9%, $n = 5$), Hispanic or Latino (1.5%, $n = 4$), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander (.8%, $n = 2$), and American Indian or Alaska native (.4%, $n = 1$). Six (2.3%) individuals reported their race as other, four of whom provided written responses

(e.g., Asian/White, black/white, Half Asian Half White, White and Black/African American).

At the beginning of their first-semester as college student, 50.8% (n = 134) of the sample reported they had identified a major, 24.6% (n = 65) of the students reported having an intended major, and 15.9% (n = 42) identified themselves as undecided (i.e., undeclared). The majority of participants (78.4%, n = 207) reported living in a University dormitory, and the remainder of the sample reported different living situations, including living in an apartment or rental house (7.2%, n = 19), living with one or more of their parents (3.5%, n = 10), with another family member or family members (less than 1%, n = 1), in a Greek house (less than 1%, n = 1) or in another type of living arrangement (1.5%, n = 4). Most (n = 181, 68.6%) students self-reported their hometowns as being in Kentucky and 60 (22.7%) students reported they were from outside the state. Twenty-three students (8.7%) did not provide information about their hometown.

Over half of the study's participants reported that the highest degree earned by their primary caregiver was a bachelor's degree (31.8%, n = 84) or a graduate or professional degree (20.8%, n = 55). Forty-four students (16.7%) reported this caregiver's highest education level was graduated high school, one (less than 1%) student that it was some college, and one (less than 1%) that it was completed some high school. The majority (75.8%, n = 200) of students reported having close friends from "home" attending the University of Kentucky compared to 15.9% (n = 42) of students saying they have no close friends from home attending UK. Of those who reported having close

friends from home at UK, 50 students (18.9%) reported having four to six on campus, 50 (18.9%) 10+, 47 (17.8%) two to three, 28 (10.6%) one, and 24 (9.1%) seven to 10.

Instruments

Data for this study consists of open-ended, qualitative responses (i.e., narratives) provided by first-semester students based on in-class free-write responses. CIS 110: Composition and Communication I students completed in-class free-write assignments based on a narrative prompt (see Appendix D) during the first 10-15 minutes of class at three points during the semester (i.e., Time Period (TP) 1, Time Period (TP) 2, Time Period (TP) 3). In these free-writes, students were asked to describe at least one best and worst event that happened during the previous week or so. An *event* was defined as an *activity* (i.e., something the student did alone or with others), (e.g., going to a movie, studying) or a *state* (i.e., a condition), (e.g., elated, tired). Students were specifically asked to focus their free-writes on (a) what occurred or happened; (b) where it took place; (c) the characters involved; (d) what these particular characters said or did; and (e) how predictable these characters' interactions were. Students wrote their free-writes in freehand during class time.

Data Collection

On the first day of class during the fall 2010 semester, representatives from the University of Kentucky's Department of Communication (e.g., faculty members, graduate teaching assistants, lecturers) visited each of the 15 CIS 110: Composition and Communication I sections selected for participation in an exploratory research study, which included the present study. The purpose of these visits was to explain the various components of the research project and to secure student consent enabling various

researchers access to student responses to a variety of questions, including the free-writes used for this study.

After informed consent was obtained, participants wrote stories on three occasions during the fall 2010 semester, which was their first semester as University of Kentucky first-year students. Narrative data was collected during three key time periods, (i.e., the initial weeks of school, midterm, Thanksgiving). Specifically, narrative data was collected during the weeks of: (a) August 30-September 8; (b) October 4-8; and (c) November 8-12. TP-1 (i.e. the week of August 30-September 8) represented the beginning of students' first semester at the University of Kentucky and their initial adaptation to life as a college student. TP-2 (i.e., the week of October 4-8) represented the students' midterm period and the approximate half-way point of their first-semester adaptation to college. Finally, TP-3 (i.e., the week of November 8-12) represented the students' fall break.

Free-write responses were collected in the controlled environment of a classroom setting in an attempt to minimize external distractions and to encourage respondents to spend adequate time with each free-write. Also, collecting narratives in a structured format ensured that feedback was produced consistently across regular intervals. Responses were collected at three points during the semester in hopes that capturing changes in the free-write answers' valence (i.e., positive and/or negative emotion) would be captured along with similarities among those students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester.

CIS 110 instructors collected free-write responses during TP-1, TP-2, and TP-3 throughout the semester and delivered them to a research assistant with the University of

Kentucky's Department of Communication. Free-writes were alphabetized and kept in folders for each respective course section and separated into three groups, one for each of the three collection periods. Free-writes for participants who were not yet 18 years old or from those did not sign the required consent forms were removed. Students who self-identified as not being first year students were also removed.

Students were arbitrarily assigned three-digit identification codes, which maintained their anonymity because names were removed from free-writes after being assigned a code. These codes became the only way to identify an individual students' free-writes and allowed individual responses to be attributed to demographic characteristics, examined across the three time periods, and linked to students who did not return for the spring semester. Free-writes were not collected from students who were absent on collection days, and several batches of free-writes were not received by the deadline for data submission. Therefore, the number of available free-writes per time period varies. After being collected, sorted, and assigned student identification codes, free-writes were given to the researcher who then conducted Stages II and III of the thematic analysis.

Stage II, Developing Themes and a Code

Data Analysis

During the second stage, thematic codes may be developed in three different ways: "(a) theory driven, (b) prior data or research driven, and (c) inductive (i.e., from the raw data) or data driven" (Boyatzis, 1988, p. 29). A unique aspect of this study is that theory, preexisting data, and previous research were not used to predetermine thematic codes. Therefore, the thematic codes were developed inductively and emerged from the

data (i.e., events from student narratives) itself. Boyatzis discusses several benefits to this data-driven approach, which is how this study analyzed its data:

Working directly from the raw information enhances appreciation of the information, in addition to eliminating intermediaries as potentially contaminating factors. With a complete view of the information available, the researcher can appreciate gross (i.e., easily evident) and intricate (i.e., difficult-to-discern) aspects of the information. Previously silenced voices or perspectives inherent in the information can be brought forward and recognized. (p. 30)

Allowing themes to emerge from the data itself is accomplished through five steps: “(a) reducing the raw information; (b) identifying themes within subsamples; (c) comparing themes across subsamples; (d) creating a code; and (e) determining the reliability of the code” (Boyatzis, 1988, p. 45).

It is first necessary to define the study’s unit of analysis and unit of coding. “The unit of analysis is the entity on which the interpretation of the study will focus” (Boyatzis, 1988, p. 62). In the present study, the unit of analysis is student narratives generated from in-class writing prompts (i.e., free-writes). “The unit of coding is the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be addressed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (p. 63). In the present study, the unit of coding is the event that emerged from students’ narratives. The first step in Stage II is reducing the raw information.

Step 1: Reducing the raw information. The first step in inductively developing a code is to read the raw material for each unit of analysis and generate an outline of summarized items, which provides “close contact and familiarity with the raw information” (Boyatzis, 1988, p. 45-46).

Upon reception, the primary investigator read through each free-write to become familiar with the data. Each narrative was then outlined. Writing prompts asked students to write about at least one best and worst event. As each free-write was re-read, the best and worst events were placed into a spreadsheet and later a database used to organize, outline, and later analyze the units of coding. Information from the narratives was originally placed into five columns: (a) Code; (b) Event; (c) Character(s); (d) Association(s); and (e) Comments.

The “Code” column consisted of the student’s free-write identification code. The “Event” column summarized the activity or state that prompted the narrative. The “Association” column established whether the event’s primary association: (a) best, home; (b) best, school; (c) worst, home; (d) worst, school. The “Character(s) column listed the person(s) involved with the event. Finally, the “Comments” columns presented notes and observations written by the researcher or excerpts from the narratives. This process was repeated for TP-1, TP-2, and TP-3. Stage II, Step 1 resulted in two tables for each time period, one for best events (see Appendices E, F, and G) and one for worst events (see Appendices H, I, and J). Abbreviations (e.g., fam for family, bf or b.f. for boyfriend, gf or g.f. for girlfriend, doc for doctor, h.s. for high school) were gradually implemented in and used throughout Stage II, Step 1. Several issues were considered when recording events, assigning associations, and logging comments.

Recording events. Each narrative varied in length and amount of detail. Some clearly discussed one event, but others discussed more than one. It was necessary to make a decision regarding which events to record in instances where multiple events were discussed. The first distinction was between primary and secondary events.

Numerous narratives contained primary events (e.g., attending a campus event) that were associated with secondary (e.g., met a new friend at an event) or implied events (e.g., hanging out with friends). For example, a student wrote, “The best thing that has happened to me was just all of K Week. It allowed me to meet a variety of people...” (Student 246). Meeting people was a secondary event that happened because the student attended K Week activities. Attending K Week activities was the primary event. Only primary narratives were recoded. In this example, attending K Week activities was coded as the student’s best event (i.e., primary event) for the particular time period.

Many narratives written about worst events evolved away from the primary event and into secondary events. This was particularly the case when students discussed worst, school events. Students would often miss or turn to home after something bad happened at school (e.g., calling or missing home after receiving a bad grade or becoming ill). For example, when writing about a worst, school event a student wrote, “I woke up feeling sick... Sometimes when I get sick, I also get homesick as a result” (Student 215). Becoming homesick was a secondary event that resulted from being sick (i.e., the primary event), not a separate primary event, and therefore, only being sick was coded for this particular event and ones similar to it.

Narratives describing something positive (i.e., best event) or negative (i.e., worst event) sometimes digressed to discuss negative or positive events, respectively. For example, a student wrote, “The best thing that happened... was when I was asked to join the Chi Omega sorority. Rush week was very long and stressful, especially since I did not know anyone from UK” (Student 280). Joining the sorority was the best event despite being associated with negative events. In situations where students wrote about

negative events while describing a best event or wrote about positive events while describing worst event, these secondary events were not coded because they were not identified as worst (or best) events and were part of the best (or worst) event. Secondary events were not coded but were noted. They were later used when examining results (i.e., chapter four) and discussing of the study's results (i.e., chapter five).

Several students wrote about multiple best or worst events. If a student specifically, discussed more than one activity or state as separate best events (i.e., multiple primary events), all events were recorded. For example, a student wrote, "During this week I attended fight night and a UK Wildcats exhibition basketball game." Attending fight night and attending a basketball game were both primary events. Therefore, in this example, attending fight night and attending a basketball game were both coded. The primary and secondary distinction was used one additional way during open coding, but first characters were recoded. After events and characters were recorded, events were assigned an association (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS).

Assigning associations. Primary events were used to make the distinction of whether an event would be associated with school or home. After identifying a particular event as being associated with school, students often wrote about home while continuing their narratives. This often was the result of a student turning to home for support or comfort after falling ill or receiving bad academic news. In these situations, the primary event was used to distinguish whether the event should be associated with home or school. For example, a student wrote, "The worst thing that happened to me since coming to UK is I got a sinus infection... I called my mom and she called the doctor" (Student 237). This student turned to home (i.e., secondary event) after becoming sick

(i.e., primary event), which was associated with school. Therefore, this event was coded as school. However, it was noted that the narrative evolved to home. Narratives that evolved to home were not coded as separate events but were noted, used during the later stages of data analysis, and included in the discussion of the study's results (i.e., chapter five). The "Comment" column established during Stage II, Step 1 allowed the researcher to insert various information related to particular narratives.

Logging comments. The comment column was used to document observations about and quotes from individual narratives. The inclusion of observations allowed the researcher to note particulars from individual narratives without having to re-write them entirely, mark instances where narratives evolved, and make connections to important concepts. Quotations were captured as written by students allowing their voices and writing to be captured in unaltered states. Therefore, the students' narratives appear accurately from how they were written and quotations include wording, spelling, and interior punctuation errors from their original source (i.e., handwritten student free-writes). Spelling errors are noted by the insertion of [*sic*], and words that were bolded, underlined or otherwise accentuated in student narratives are reproduced. After the raw information was reduced, themes were identified within samples and compared across subsamples.

Step 2: Identifying themes within samples. The second step in inductively developing a code is to compare summaries to uncover similarities between the pieces of information in every subsample (Boyatzis, 1998). "Specifically, (a) compare all of the summaries from one subsample, looking for similarities, or patterns within the subsample... and (b) repeat the process for the other subsample" (p. 46). Step 2 is

followed by themes being compared across subsamples. The present study combined Steps 2 and 3.

Step 3: Comparing themes across subsamples. The third step in inductively developing a code is comparing “the themes, or items, as ‘similar within each group,’ ... Compare the two groups through the patterns identified (e.g., compare the similarities seen within Subsample A with the similarities seen within Subsample B)” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 47). The material in this study (i.e., summarized events from students narratives) is relatively short, which enabled Steps 2 and 3 to be combined because the separation of the two steps is not as obvious as with most material (Boyatzis).

Identifying and comparing themes. Information recorded in Stage II, Step 1 was used to create groups of the events drawn from students’ narratives. During Steps 2 and 3, subsamples included each time period (e.g., TP-1, TP-2, TP-3) and each association (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS). Events were assigned to one group (e.g., bad grade, doing homework, missing class) based on the primary nature of the event. After an individual event was assigned to a group, the identification code associated with the respective narrative was placed in brackets for future reference. Stage II, Steps 2 and 3 resulted in six documents that were used to create codes (i.e., themes and sub-themes).

Step 4: Creating codes. The fourth step in inductively developing a code is to “write, rewrite, or construct a set of statements that *differentiate* the two groups, or subsamples... This set of preliminary themes is a code” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 48). Preliminary themes are edited, rewritten, and reconstructed into revised themes. “The revised theme should be stated in such a manner that (a) maximizes the differentiation of the subsamples...; (b) facilitates coding of the raw material (i.e., it is easy to apply); and

(c) minimizes exclusions” (p. 48). Codes for the present study were in the form of themes and sub-themes.

Information from Stage II, Steps 2 and 3 was used to create the study’s emergent themes and sub-themes (i.e., codes) in Step 4. Complete narratives were referred to throughout Step 4 to ensure accuracy and to double-check the results of Steps 2 and 3. The categories that resulted from Steps 2 and 3 were collapsed into larger themes and sub-themes during Step 4 for each time period’s best and worst events as they related to school or home. This resulted in revised themes and sub-themes for: (a) best, home events; (b) best, school events; (c) worst, home events; and (d) worst, school events.

Best, home events. The following themes emerged for best, home events:

- Connection
- Contact
- Visited
- Visiting

Connection. Best, home events coded as “Connection” related to students connecting with other UK students from home while on campus. “Connection” produced two sub-themes:

- Doing things
- Running into

“Connection” events coded as “Doing things” involved students engaging in an activity (e.g., eating together, exercising together, partying together) with someone from home (e.g., high school friend, sibling who attended UK, older friends from home).

“Running into” involved students running into someone from home (older friend, grade school friend, old friend) coincidentally while on campus.

Contact. Best, home events coded as “Contact” related to students’ having contact with people from home without returning home or by engaging in an activity that was not the result of someone from home coming to UK specifically to visit a student. The best, home theme “Contact” produced three sub-themes:

- Receiving something
- Seeing, doing
- Talking to, hearing from

“Contact” events coded as “Receiving something” involved students being given things (e.g., money, clothes, things in the mail) from someone at home during the first-semester. “Seeing, doing” involved students participating in an activity (e.g., hunting, professional sporting events, concert, road trips) with someone from home (e.g., family, friends, girl/boyfriend) without going home or being specifically visited on campus. The “Seeing, doing” sub-theme also included instances where the narrative did not specifically indicate that the student went home or discussed being with family at undisclosed locations but clearly described seeing and doing something with someone from home. “Talking to, hearing from” involved students speaking with someone from home over the telephone or Skype or hearing from them through social media (e.g., Facebook).

Visited. Best, home events coded as “Visited” related to students receiving visits from a person or people from home.

The best, home theme “Visited” produced three sub-themes:

- Visited by family
- Visited by friend(s)
- Visited by girl/boyfriend

“Visited” events coded as “Visited by family” involved students having a family member or family members from home visit the student on campus. Events coded under this sub-theme required the visit to be the primary event (i.e., a student’s parents did not come for another primary event such as a UK sporting event). “Visited by friend(s)” involved students having a friend or friends from home visit the student on campus.

“Visited by girl/boyfriend” involved students having a girlfriend or boyfriend from home visit the student on campus.

Visiting. Best, home events coded as “Visiting” related to students leaving the UK campus to visit someone from home. The best, home theme “Visiting” produced three sub-themes:

- Visiting home
- Visiting friend(s)
- Visiting girl/boyfriend

“Visiting” events coded as “Visiting home” involved students traveling home to visit family and/or friends. “Visiting friend(s)” involved students traveling to destinations other than home (e.g., another college) to visit a friend or friends from home. “Visiting girl/boyfriend” involved students traveling to destinations other than home (e.g., another city) to visit a girl/boyfriend from home.

Best, school events. The following themes emerged for best, school events:

- Academic
- Campus
- Living
- Starting
- Other

Academic. Best, school events coded as “Academic” related to students finding relation in some aspect of their coursework during the first-semester. The best, school theme “Academic” produced four sub-themes:

- Classroom success
- Finding help
- Schedule
- Workload

“Academic” events coded as “Classroom success” involved students receiving a good grade or otherwise enjoying success in the classroom (e.g., positive feedback from a teacher, performing well). “Finding help” involved students locating help (e.g., from a friend, from The Study, from a tutor) with some aspect of their coursework. “Schedule” involved students liking some aspect of their academic schedule (e.g., a class, classes, canceled class). “Workload” involved students getting pleasure from their coursework (e.g., class project, finishing work) or good news related to their coursework (e.g., deadline extension, easy assignment, no homework on a weekend).

Campus. Best, school events coded as “Campus” related to students connecting to and involving themselves with the University through various campus activities, events, and organizations. The best, school theme “Campus” produced three sub-themes:

- Activities, events, non-Greek organizations
- Greek life
- UK athletics

“Campus” events coded as “Activities, events, non-Greek organizations” involved students participating in campus activities (e.g., intramural sports), events (e.g., water balloon fight, on-campus movie), and non-Greek organizations (e.g., Christian Student Fellowship). “Greek life” involved students participating in the University’s Greek system (e.g., rush week, pledging, bid day, sorority/fraternity event). “UK athletics” involved students attending (e.g., going to game, tailgating, getting tickets), being passionate about (e.g., happy the team won), or participating (e.g., student athletes) in official University of Kentucky varsity sports.

Living. Best, school events coded as “Living” related to students maneuvering through various aspects of life as college students beyond campus involvement and academic life.

The best, school theme “Living” produced five sub-themes:

- Doing something alone
- Financial
- Meeting people, making friends
- Social life, network
- Other

“Living” events coded as “Doing something alone” involved students being or engaging in activities alone (e.g., helping someone, exercising), participating in events where the character(s) cited were not a central part of the narrative’s event (e.g., job interview, purchasing something), or making personal statements (e.g., happy about seasonal change). “Financial” involved students receiving positive financial news (e.g., winning a bet, receiving money, making money). “Meeting people, making friends” involved students encountering new individuals and creating new friendships. “Social life, network” involved students doing something with friends and/or roommates (e.g., watching a movie, celebrating a birthday, going on a date, attending a concert, exercising with others) or expressing happiness over something that happened to, with, or because of a member of their social network, which included roommates, friends, and dormmates.

Starting. Best, school events coded as “Starting” related to students’ beginning their college careers. These events were activities (e.g., moving into University housing) or states (e.g., excited about starting college) associated with anticipating and/or beginning life as a college student. The best, school theme “Starting” did not produce any sub-themes and was only associated with TP-1.

Other. Best, school events coded as “Other” could not be coded under another best, school theme.

Worst, home events. The following themes emerged for worst, home events:

- Leaving
- Missing
- Trouble
- Other

Leaving. Worst, home events coded as “Leaving” related to students leaving family members or others from home. The worst, home theme “Leaving” produced three sub-themes:

- Family leaving after visit
- Leaving home, starting college
- Returning to school

“Leaving” events coded as “Family leaving after visit” involved students experiencing negative emotions when a member(s) of their family left campus after visiting. “Leaving home, starting college” involved students feeling a degree of distress over beginning college and/or leaving home. “Returning to school” involved students being troubled upon heading back to college after visiting home.

Missing. Worst, home events coded as “Missing” related to students being unable to return or speak with someone from home, failing to see someone from home while home, and wishing they could be with someone from home. “Missing” ultimately produced no sub-themes because many instances where students’ couldn’t see or contact individuals from home also incorporated being homesick (i.e., the sub-themes could not be clearly differentiated).

Trouble. Worst, home events coded as “Trouble” related to students being concerned about home or someone from home, experiencing problems at home or with someone from home, or receiving bad news about someone from home.

The worst, home theme “Trouble” produced five sub-themes:

- Argument
- Bad news
- Illness, injury, death
- Inconveniences
- Other

“Trouble” events coded as “Argument” involved students quarreling with someone from home. “Bad news” involved students receiving bad news from home, about someone from home, or something related to home. They also related to students having to share bad news with someone from home or finding out personal bad news that related to home. “Illness, injury, death” involved students injuring themselves at home or someone at home (e.g., family member, friend, girl/boyfriend, pet) being ill, getting injured, or dying, which also included funerals. “Inconveniences” involved students experiencing hassles (e.g., getting locked out) or encountering other difficulties (e.g., car accident) while home. “Other” involved events that could not be coded as another “Trouble” sub-theme.

Other. Worst, home events coded as “Other” could not be coded under another worst, home theme.

Worst, school events. The following themes emerged for worst, school events:

- Academic
- Living
- Navigation

Academic. Worst, school events coded as “Academic” related to students being bothered by or frustrated with some aspect of their coursework. The worst, school theme “Academic” produced four sub-themes:

- Bad grade(s)
- Schedule
- Stressed, overwhelmed
- Workload

“Academic” events coded as “Bad grade(s)” involved students receiving less than desired grades on exams, quizzes or other school assignments (e.g., homework, project, speech) or having poor grades in one or more classes. “Schedule” involved students disliking or being concerned about some aspect of their school schedule (e.g., early class, long day of class, not enjoying a class). “Stressed, overwhelmed” involved students feeling stressed out or swamped because of schoolwork. “Workload” involved students studying (e.g., for long periods of time, during weekends), struggling with exams, quizzes, or assignments, and other aspects of their schoolwork (e.g., being unproductive, getting behind, not submitting work).

Living. Worst, school events coded as “Living” related to students struggling in some aspect of their lives as college students outside the classroom.

The worst, school theme “Living” produced 10 sub-themes:

- Doing something alone
- Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)
- Financial
- Greek life
- Inconveniences
- Physical
- Social life, network
- UK athletics
- Work
- Other

“Living” events coded as “Doing something alone” involved students being or doing something alone, having something bad happen to them (e.g., embarrassing moment, getting mugged, legal trouble), or seeing something bad happen to someone (e.g., witnessing an accident). “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)” involved students experiencing difficulties with their living situation and/or roommate. “Financial” involved students struggling financially or receiving bad financial news. “Greek life” involved students going through something difficult with their sorority or fraternity lives. “Inconveniences” involved students having problems at school (e.g., car issues, bike trouble, computer problem). “Physical” involved getting sick, struggling with sleep, having difficulty with a medical condition, or other things related to their health. “Social life, network” involved students experiencing trouble with or because of friends or students seeing a member of their social circle struggle. “UK athletics” involved students

being bothered by a poor varsity athletic team's performance, frustrated over a ticket issue (e.g., didn't get tickets, had to stand in line), or associated with an unpleasant experience as a student athlete (e.g., difficult practice, busy schedule). "Work" involved students feeling frustrated with a component of their job (e.g., work hours, working on a weekend, getting laid off).

Navigation. Worst, school events coded as "Navigation" related to students navigating their way around campus, dealing with University of Kentucky bureaucracy, and managing their class schedules. The worst, school theme "Navigation" produced six sub-themes:

- Late to, waking up late for class
- Lost way
- Missed class
- Parking, driving, walking
- Scheduling spring semester
- University

"Navigation" events coded as "Late, to, waking up late for class" involved students being tardy to or getting up late for class. "Lost way" involved students becoming lost on campus or in Lexington. "Missed class" involved students being unable to attend class. "Parking, driving, walking" involved students facing issues related to having a vehicle on or walking across campus. "Scheduling spring semester" related to students facing challenges with determining their second semester schedules. "University" involved students having an unpleasant experience with a University service

(e.g., financial aid). Following the establishment of themes and sub-themes, codes were validated in Stage III.

Stage III, Validating and Using the Codes

During the third, and final, stage codes (i.e., themes and sub-themes) are validated and used. Stage III involves two steps, the first of which is coding the remaining information.

Step 1: Coding the Rest of the Raw Information

The first step during Stage III of a thematic analysis is to apply reliable codes to the entire sample (Boyatzis, 1998). Columns for “Theme” and “Sub-theme” were added to the original Excel workbook before being converted to a FileMaker Pro database. Each event was then coded according to a theme and sub-theme. Following the coding of the entire sample, the codes (i.e., themes and sub-themes) were validated qualitatively.

Step 2: Validating the Code

The second, and final, step of Stage III is validating the code (Boyatzis, 1998), which for the present study was done qualitatively. Themes displaying differentiation constitute validated codes (i.e., validated themes and sub-themes) (Boyatzis). This was accomplished in the present study by an additional reading of narratives to ensure that the appropriate codes (i.e., themes and sub-themes) were applied across the entire data set. Following this additional reading and validating, the data analysis process allowed the study’s research questions to be answered.

Research Question One

To answer RQ1 (What are students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home during their first semester?), totals and percentages were calculated for themes and sub-theme across TP-1, TP-2, and TP-3 as they evolved from the four associations (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS). Data was analyzed to capture the dominant characteristics of students' stories during their first semester as college students and how they described the transition from high school to college.

Research Question Two

To answer RQ2 (How do students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home evolve over the course of their first semester?), emergent themes and sub-themes were used to explain both the best and worst events that happen to students as they related to home and school. This included looking at how these themes and sub-themes evolved, as well as compared and contrasted them over time (e.g., TP-1, TP-2, TP-3). Data was analyzed to capture students' initial state as first-semester college students (i.e., TP-1), how they progressed during the first half of their first semester (i.e., TP-2), and how they felt toward the end of their first semester (i.e., TP-3).

Research Question Three

To answer RQ3 (What are students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home who do not return to UK for a second semester?), it was first necessary to determine which of the study's participants (N = 264) did not return for a second semester. Demographic figures for these students were calculated and their free-writes pulled from the entire data set. Free-writes from non-returning students were reread by the researcher, which established familiarity with the stories of students who did not

return for a second semester at UK. To answer RQ3A (What are the overall themes?), coded events (i.e., their themes and sub-themes) from these narratives were then examined. To answer RQ3B (How do the stories evolve over time?), narratives and events about each association (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS) were examined over time.

Summary

In sum, a qualitative approach is appropriate for the present study because the research questions are more concerned with interpretation than quantification. Student narratives collected in the form of in-class free-writes were examined for emergent themes based on setting, characters, and events. This was done in hopes of revealing the “whole story . . . holistically in all its complexity and richness” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 10). Finally, inductive, data driven thematic codes were developed as part of a thematic analysis because this study sought to allow student narratives to produce emergent themes, which were not created or influenced by theory or previous research or data. Chapter four provides the results of the data analysis. Chapter five offers conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter summarizes the results that answer the study's research questions. First, RQ1 is answered based on the total number of narratives students wrote during their first semester as students at the University of Kentucky as they related to the event's primary association (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS) and the themes and sub-themes that emerged for each. Second, RQ2 is answered based on the number and content of student narratives and how their stories about home and about UK evolved longitudinally over their first semester. Third, RQ3 is answered based on the overall themes and how the stories of students who did not return for a second semester evolved over time

Research Question 1

To answer RQ1 (What are students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home during their first semester?) all events from student narratives were coded. In total, there were 1,340 events. Of these, 42.3% (n = 567) were worst, school events, 31.9% (n = 427) best, school events, 18.9% (n = 253) best, home events, and 6.9% (n = 93) worst, home events (see Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1). By examining the number of events coded under each association, (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS) and the number and content of each association's themes and sub-themes, one may begin to understand students' stories about UK and about home during their first semester as college students.

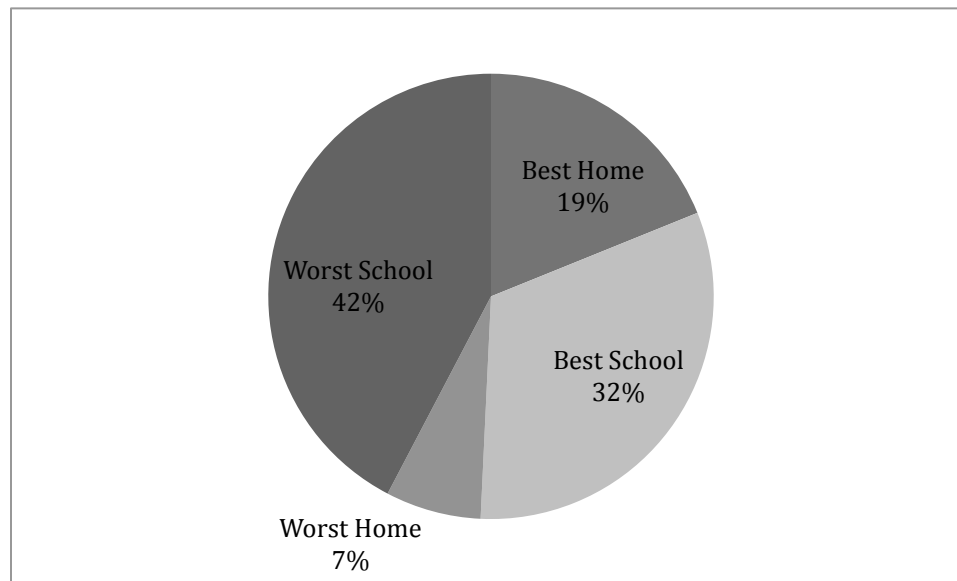
Worst, School Events

A total of 567 worst, school events were coded (see Figure 4.2 and Table 4.2). Of these events, 327 (57.7%) were coded as "Living," 174 (39.7%) as "Academic," and 66 (11.6%) as "Leaving," and one (1.1%) as "Other." 15 (3.5%) as "Starting," and one (0.2%) as "Navigation." By examining the total number and content of events coded

under each of the emergent themes and sub-themes, one may better understand what students associated with worst, school events.

Figure 4.1

Total events by association



Living. A total of 327 (57.7%) worst, school events were coded as “Living.” Events coded as “Living” related to students struggling in some aspect of their lives as college students outside the classroom. “Living” produced 10 sub-themes: “Physical” (n = 83, 25.3%), “Social life, network” (n = 62, 19%), “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)” (n = 53, 16.2%), “Inconveniences” (n = 40, 12.2%), “Doing something alone” (n = 24, 7.3%), “UK athletics” (n = 21, 6.4%), “Greek life” (n = 18, 5.5%), “Work” (n = 11, 3.4%), “Financial” (n = 10, 3.1%), and “Other” (n = 5, 1.5%).

Table 4.1

Summary of total events by association and theme

Total Events	N = 1,340	%
Total Worst School	567	42.3%
Living	327	57.7%
Academic	174	30.7%
Navigation	66	11.6%
Total Best School	427	31.9%
Living	198	46.4%
Campus	151	35.4%
Academic	62	14.5%
Starting	15	3.5%
Other	1	0.2%
Total Best Home	253	18.9%
Visiting	90	35.6%
Contact	73	28.9%
Visited	69	27.3%
Connection	21	8.3%
Total Worst Home	93	6.9%
Trouble	55	59.1%
Missing	22	23.7%
Leaving	15	16.1%
Other	1	1.1%

Physical. Eighty-three (25.4%) “Living” events were coded as “Physical.” The sub-theme “Physical” related to students getting sick, struggling with sleep, having difficulty with a medical condition, or other things related to their health. Many of these narratives that produced “Physical” events evolved writing about home. This was specifically the case when students wrote about being sick while at school, which resulted in students being homesick and/or turning to home for comfort. One student wrote:

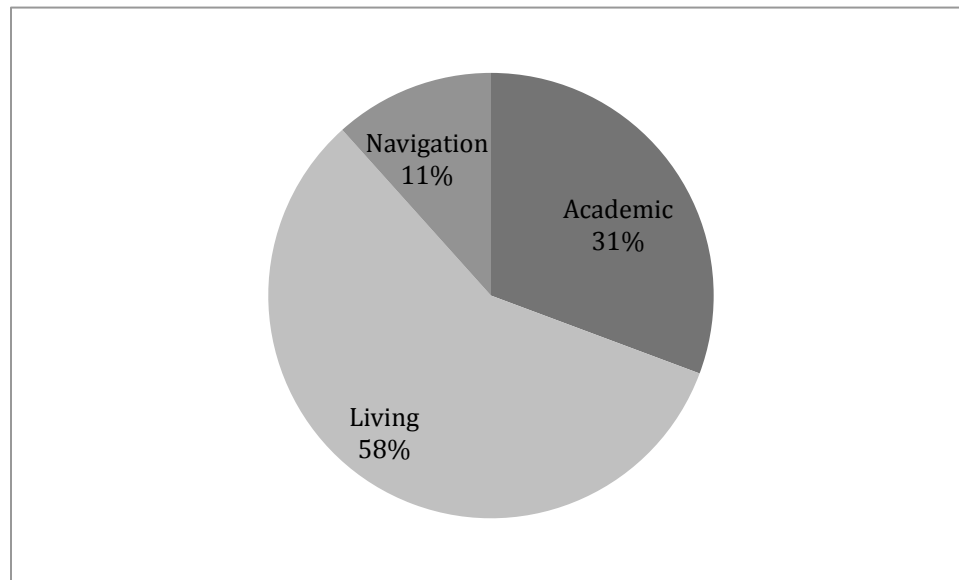
A few mornings ago I woke up feeling sick. I had a sore throat and was nervous I had strep... Sometimes when I get sick, I also get homesick as a result. I talked to

my mom and my roommate. While I knew what they would say before they said it, it still was nice hearing it and it helped me calm down... In regards to the homesickness, my mom told me to stay busy. (Student 215)

Worst, school events coded as “Living” were also associated with students’ social lives and their social networks.

Figure 4.2

Total worst, school events by theme



Social life, network. Sixty-two (19%) “Living” events were coded as “Social life, network.” The sub-theme “Social life, network” related to students experiencing trouble with or because of friends or seeing a member of their social circle struggle. Events included students: (a) worrying about someone (e.g., Students 114, 129); (b) staying up too late on school nights to socialize (e.g., Students 240, 268); (c) arguing with a friend or girl/boyfriend (e.g., Students 159, 162, 206); (d) dealing with sick friends (e.g., 134, 274, 355); (e) having a bad drinking experience, such as being hungover or blackout drunk and dealing with a drunk person (e.g., Students 289, 408, 424, 428); (f) being bored or having nothing to do with friends (e.g., Students 145, 212); (g) experiencing situations

involving the police (e.g., Students 169, 226); and allowing one’s social life to interfere with academics (e.g., Students 218, 362). Worst, school events coded as “Living” were also associated with students’ living situations.

Table 4.2

Summary of total worst, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 567	%
Living	327	57.7%
Physical	83	25.4%
Social life, network	62	19%
Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)	53	16.2%
Inconveniences	40	12.2%
Doing something alone	24	7.3%
UK athletics	21	6.4%
Greek life	18	5.5%
Work	11	3.4%
Financial	10	3.1%
Other	5	1.5%
Academic	174	30.7%
Workload	92	52.9%
Bad grade(s)	39	22.4%
Stressed, overwhelmed	27	15.5%
Schedule	15	8.6%
Other	1	0.6%
Navigation	66	11.6%
Lost way	20	30.3%
Missed class	16	24.2%
Parking, driving, walking	14	21.2%
Late to, waking up late for class	9	13.6%
Scheduling spring semester	4	6.1%
University	3	4.5%

Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s). Fifty-three (16.2%) “Living” events were coded as “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s).” The sub-theme “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)” related to students experiencing difficulties with their living situation and/or

roommate. Events related to dormmates, neighbors, or roommates being: (a) noisy (e.g., Students 108, 270, 279, 347); (b) inconsiderate (e.g., Students 115, 340, 347); (c) sick (e.g., Students 267, 357); and (d) sad or experiencing trouble (e.g., Students 322, 368). Other events involved students living in University of Kentucky residences halls and included issues with: (a) temperature (e.g., Student 411); (b) showers (e.g., Students 268, 354); (c) moving in (e.g., Student 323); (d) electricity (e.g., Student 176); (e) elevators (e.g., Student 350); and (f) locking oneself out or getting locked out by roommates (e.g., Students 248, 420). While being locked out can be considered an inconvenience, the primary association of being locked out of one's room was with the sub-theme "Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)." Other inconveniences established an additional "Living" sub-theme for worst, school events.

Inconveniences. Forty (12.2%) "Living" events were coded as "Inconveniences." The sub-theme "Inconveniences" related to students experiencing problems at school, which were inopportune in nature. Events included: (a) having problems with cars, bikes, computers, or phones (e.g., Students 248, 382, 396, 423); (b) locking one's keys in the car (e.g., Students 217, 227); (c) being in a car or bike accident (e.g., Students 138, 144); (d) losing items such as keys, wallets, debit/credit cards, and IDs (e.g., 137, 241, 275, 399, 412); and (e) having belongings stolen (e.g., Student 274). Several students contacted home when encountering inconveniences (e.g., 138, 172, 217, 382). One student explained this as seeking help after a check engine light appeared in her car, "I started to really worry and had to call my dad to ask him what was going on. I called in a panic so he told me to calm down and talk normally" (Student 382). Another quickly realized that help from her parents was not an option after she locked her keys in the car,

“I started dialing numbers as if my parents could help me two hours away” (Student 217).

Other “Living” events occurred to students when they were alone or to them as individuals when in the company of others.

Doing something alone. Twenty-four (7.4%) “Living” events were coded as “Doing something alone.” The sub-theme “Doing something alone” related to students being or doing something alone, having something bad happen to them, or seeing something bad happen to someone. Events included: (a) embarrassing moments (e.g., Students 312, 350, 392); (b) getting mugged (Student 424); (c) experiencing legal trouble (e.g., Student 348); (d) seeing a counselor (Student 226); (e) witnessing an accident (e.g., Student 121); and (f) having nothing to do or being alone (e.g., Students 195, 391, 406). Other “Living” events related to the University of Kentucky athletics teams.

UK athletics. Twenty-one (6.4%) “Living” events were coded as “UK athletics.” The sub-theme “UK athletics” related to students being bothered by a poor varsity athletic team’s performance, frustrated over a ticket issue, or associated with an unpleasant experience as a student athlete. Events included: (a) reacting to a loss by the football team (e.g., Students 273, 274); (b) being unable to receive tickets (e.g., Student 255); (c) standing in line or camping out in the cold for tickets (e.g., Students 214, 342); and (d) attending a lopsided football game (Student 210). Student athletes wrote about: (a) difficult and early practices (e.g., Students 410, 425); (b) busy nature of the team schedule (e.g., Student 414); (c) soccer season ending (Student 400); and (d) being unable to go home until Christmas because of athletic team membership (Student 314). Other “Living” events related to students’ participation in sororities and fraternities.

Greek life. Eighteen (5.5%) “Living” events were coded as “Greek life.” The sub-theme “Greek life” related to students going through something difficult with their sorority or fraternity lives. Events included: (a) the stress of rush week, recruitment, and bid day (e.g., Students 245, 331, 430); (b) not getting or turning down a bid to an organization (e.g., Students 125, 213, 312); (c) friends not getting bids (e.g., Student 116); and (d) not beating a rival fraternity in a tug-o-war competition (Student 210). Other “Living” events were related to students who maintained jobs.

Work. Eleven (3.4%) “Living” events were coded as “Work.” The sub-theme “Work” related to students feeling frustrated with a component of their job. Events included: (a) having work hours cut (e.g., Student 427); (b) working weekends or unpleasant hours (e.g., Students 131, 186, 202); (c) getting laid off (Student 415); (d) working sick (Student 223); (e) making a mess at work (Student 396); and (f) dealing with unpleasant situations at work (e.g., Students 189, 194, 252). Other “Living” events were related to students’ finances.

Financial. Ten (3.1%) “Living” events were coded as “Financial.” The sub-theme “Financial” related to students struggling financially or receiving bad financial news. Events included: (a) being unable to make money (Student 235); (b) receiving the wrong change (Student 260); (c) paying for gas (Student 275); (d) getting scammed out of belongings (Student 289); (e) having limited or insufficient funds in the bank (Students 352, 428); (f) losing money (Students 125, 398); and (g) worrying about how to pay for college (Students 129, 422). Several events could not be coded under another “Living” sub-theme.

Other. Five (1.5%) “Living” events were coded as “Other” because they did not fit under another sub-theme. One student wrote about being concerned over a series of campus robberies (Student 246). Another wrote about not liking life as a University of Kentucky student, “The worst event that has happened was when I realized I am not a big fan of UK... I just realized I am not myself” (Student 376). Additional worst, school themes were coded related to aspects of students’ coursework.

Academic. A total of 174 (30.7%) worst, school events were coded as “Academic.” Events coded as “Academic” related to students being bothered by or frustrated with some aspect of their coursework. “Academic” produced five sub-themes: “Workload” (n = 92, 52.9%), “Bad grade(s)” (n = 39, 22.4%), “Stressed, overwhelmed” (n = 27, 15.5%), “Schedule,” (n = 15, 8.6%), and “Other” (n = 1, 0.6%).

Workload. Ninety-two (52.9%) “Academic” events were coded as “Workload.” The sub-theme “Workload” related to students studying, struggling with exams, quizzes, or assignments, and other aspects of their schoolwork. Events included: (a) studying for long periods of time and on weekends (e.g., Students 162, 211, 347); (b) being unproductive or behind (e.g., Students 401, 406); (c) preparing and delivering speeches (e.g., Students 194, 232, 374, 186); (d) experiencing difficulties while studying and with exams or assignments (e.g., Students 104, 121, 160, 201); (e) failing to submit or finish work and/or missing deadlines (e.g., Students 201, 277); and (f) managing one’s coursework (e.g., Students 272, 408). Several students’ narratives of the college workload evolved to include details about how one’s college workload resulted in stress (e.g., Students 152, 282, 331, 374). One student wrote:

I studied and studied for (my exam) and then when I went to take it, I felt like I always have to do well on things so I was stressed to begin with but after seeing

the questions I got even more stressed, mad, upset, etc. I was mad at myself because I thought I could have studied more or differently. When talking to other students in the class I realized everyone thought it was hard but still that didn't make me feel much better. I haven't gotten my grade back yet but I have a feeling I will be disappointed in myself when I do get it back. I should have known the class lectures were too easy to be true. Maybe I'll learn for next time so I won't be so stressed anymore. (Student 282)

Another wrote:

I have taken three exams during the past week and I have another exam Friday. I have spent several hours a day at the library studying with friends and colleagues. This has caused a lot of stress in my life, and I am definitely looking forward to the weekend. (Student 152)

Some events were primarily related to students being stressed out over and overwhelmed with school, which constituted an additional "Academic" sub-theme. Other "Academic" events were related to students earning poor grades.

Bad grade(s). Thirty-nine (22.4%) "Academic" events were coded as "Bad grade(s)." The sub-theme "Bad grade(s)" related to students receiving less than desired grades on exams, quizzes or other school assignments or having poor grades in one or more classes. Students were "disappointed" (e.g., Students 242, 271, 402), "heart broken [*sic*]" (Student 106), "quite upset" (Student 202), and "very angry" (Student 354) upon learning about bad grades; one student "went through all the profanities (he) could possibly [think of]" (Student 111). Several broke down in tears (e.g., Students 280, 403) in the aftermath of learning about a bad grade, and others placed at least some of the blame on instructors (e.g., Students 179, 192). Students were especially bothered when they felt like they prepared better for (e.g., Students 137, 209) or expected to do better on exams (e.g., Students 137, 354). One student wrote:

It was a huge letdown, it lowered my overall grade in the class, and now I have to do extra work to get back to where I was at [*sic*]. Overall it was a letdown because I felt that I knew the material well. It is never good to fail a test because it lowers

not only your grade but also your overall self-esteem and your confidence in all the work that you do. Nobody wants to do extra work because it makes the tower of work teeter back and forth. (Student 209)

Several students' narratives evolved to home, which resulted in parents being contacted (e.g., Students 106, 280, 348, 403) and in some instances disappointed (e.g., Student 135). Other "Academic" events were related to students feeling weighed down with or frazzled by their schoolwork.

Stressed, overwhelmed. Twenty-seven (15.5%) "Academic" events were coded as "Stressed, overwhelmed." The sub-theme "Stressed, overwhelmed" related to students feeling stressed out or swamped because of schoolwork. These feelings resulted in several students crying (e.g., Students 223, 259) or having breakdowns (e.g., Students 337, 353). One student wrote:

I was in my dorm room by myself filling out my calendar realizing everything that I have to do. I became overwhelmed because I don't think there is enough time in the day to get it all taken care of. This was predictable for me to become overwhelmed and break down because I've been feeling like that for a while. It just happened because I could psychically see all of the things I need to do." (Student 337)

As another student explained, the workload that accompanied these stressful times complicated other areas of students' lives during their transition to college:

School is getting really stressful and finding time for a social life is getting harder...I had a test for three consecutive days. I was so stressed out the whole week before, weekend before, and the week of. I was overwhelmed with information and say no way I would retain it all. I had no time to hangout with friends or relax and watch a movie. I barely had time to go workout. Between class, homework, sorority events, and the need for sleep/food, I felt as if there was no time to study. My friends knew how stressed I was and felt bad they couldn't help me out. They tried to stay away from me so they wouldn't interfere but having them there to make me laugh or distract me really helped at certain points. The library became my best friend and from now until Christmas break I am going to have a lot more weeks like that one. (Student 282)

Several students turned to home when they became stressed and/or overwhelmed with school (e.g., Students 198, 211, 245, 259, 353, 402). One student wrote:

I was just so stressed out that I started to cry. I was at my apartment and on the phone with my mom. She always makes everything so much better. She always knows what to say and how to make me laugh...every time this happens, it's always her that makes everything better. (Student 259)

These feelings of being stressed also led students to realize college was going to require a lot of work:

The worst thing that happened to me in the past week is that I had to worry about so much school work [*sic*] which I still have to do because I have tests all next week. So I have been worrying about that... This week I'm going to have to study a lot. I want to get at least a B on all my tests coming up... My attitude hasn't been very positive lately. I need to be happy and have a positive outlook on things. You know college isn't what its [*sic*] to be. Everyone talks about how its [*sic*] so fun. I mean its [*sic*] just OK. Its [*sic*] still school you just have free time that's about it. And on top of that I don't have a car here so I have to walk very far every day. (Student 272)

Other “Academic” events were related to students perceiving negatives regarding their schedules.

Schedule. Fifteen (8.6%) “Academic” events were coded as “Schedule.” The sub-theme “Schedule” related to students disliking or being concerned about some aspect of their class schedules. Events included: (a) attending early morning classes (Students 142, 231, 232, 258, 266); (b) realizing the difficulty of or not liking a class (Students 190, 216, 222, 225, 322); (c) having a complex about dropping a class (Student 225); (d) being upset over a class ending (Student 108); (e) finding an initial lab boring (Student 265); and (f) experiencing a difficult day of classes (Students 140, 270). One event could not be coded under a “Living” sub-theme.

Other. One (0.6%) “Academic” event was coded as “Other.” In this particular event, the student lost a course notebook (Student 409). Additional worst, school events

were related to navigating their way on campus, around the University, and through their daily schedules.

Navigation. A total of 66 (11.6%) worst, school events were coded as “Navigation.” Events coded as “Navigation” related to students finding their way around campus, dealing with University bureaucracy, and managing their daily schedules. “Navigation” produced six sub-themes: “Lost way” (n = 20, 30.3%), “Missed class” (n = 15, 24.2%), “Parking, driving, walking” (n = 14, 21.2%), “Late to, waking up late for class,” (n = 9, 13.6%), “Scheduling spring semester” (n = 4, 6.1%), and “University” (n = 3, 4.5%).

Lost way. Twenty (30.3%) “Navigation” events were coded as “Lost way.” The sub-theme “Lost way” related to students becoming lost on campus or in Lexington. Events included: (a) being unable to locate a classroom (e.g., Students 153, 330, 343, 414, 424); (b) attending the wrong class (e.g., Student 250, 375, 416); (c) getting lost while driving (e.g., Students 208, 213); (d) losing oneself in the library (Student 175), and (e) going places only to find out they were closed (e.g., Students 212, 352). These events often caused students stress and resulted in the location of assistance, which one student described as:

I had no clue where the location [of my study group session] was, so I was running around like a chicken with my head cut off, asking people if they knew where c.a.r.e.s. [Center for Academic Resources and Enhancement] was. Nobody knew, so I started to stress... When I finally found it, the lady that was in charge calmed me down and let me know everything was okay. She looked sincere, and her sweet smile made me actually believe it was okay. I didn't know what to expect, I thought I was going to get yelled at or even get my scholarship taken away. The day got much better after that, but man o man I was stressed. (Student 271)

Students also became stressed over missing classes, which was another “Navigation” sub-theme.

Missed class. Sixteen (24.2%) “Navigation” events were coded as “Missed class.” The sub-theme “Missed class” related to students being unable to attend class. Reasons for missing class included: (a) oversleeping (e.g., Students 163, 209); (b) sleeping through (e.g., Students 277, 414); and (c) forgetting class time (e.g., Student 207). Doing so resulted in students feeling awful (e.g., Student 287), “disappointed” (e.g., Student 147), “irresponsible” (e.g., Student 148), “horrible” (e.g., Student 163), “very upset” (e.g., Student 209), “awful” (e.g., Student 287), and “like the worst person on earth [*sic*]” (Student 287). One student wrote:

I was very disappointed at myself, as I’ve been trying not to do that. I don’t miss classes very often because I think it’s very important to go... I want to make an effort to not let it happen again. This first semester is one of the most important, and I want to get myself into good study habits and a good routine. If I do that, I’m confident I’ll be ready for the harder classes in the coming years. On a related note, I’m also going to try to get more sleep if I can, so I won’t be as tired in the mornings. (Student 147)

Other “Navigation” issues students encountered were related to getting around on campus via cars and on foot.

Parking, driving, walking. Fourteen (21.2%) “Navigation” events were coded as “Parking, driving, walking.” The sub-theme “Parking, driving, walking” related to students facing issues related to having a vehicle on or walking across campus. Events included: (a) almost getting hit by a car or in an accident (Students 170, 179); (b) receiving parking tickets (Students 231, 339, 394); (c) having cars towed (Students 126, 196, 357, 424); (d) being stuck in traffic (Student 259); (e) experiencing difficulty locating one’s car in the parking lot (Student 261); (f) dealing with finding a parking spot

(Students 377, 399); and (g) facing the amount of walking associated with living on a college campus (Student 246). Other “Navigation” issues students encountered were related to arriving to class on time.

Late to, waking up late for class. Nine (13.6%) “Navigation” events were coded as “Late to, waking up late for class.” The sub-theme “Late to, waking up late for class” related to students being tardy to or getting up late for class. Arriving late to class on an exam day made one student “very stressed” (Student 206), and waking up late for class made one student feel “so confused and rattled” (Student 137). Another “Navigation” issue that plagued students’ first semester was creating a class schedule for their second semester.

Scheduling spring semester. Four (6.1%) “Navigation” events were coded as “Scheduling spring semester.” The sub-theme “Scheduling spring semester” related to students facing challenges with determining their second semester schedules. Students found the experience stressful (e.g., Students 319, 321) and were disappointed when they were unable to enroll in particular classes (e.g., Student 367) but found assistance from their advisors (e.g., Students 321, 356). Finally, another “Navigation” issue students encountered was dealing with University services or requirements.

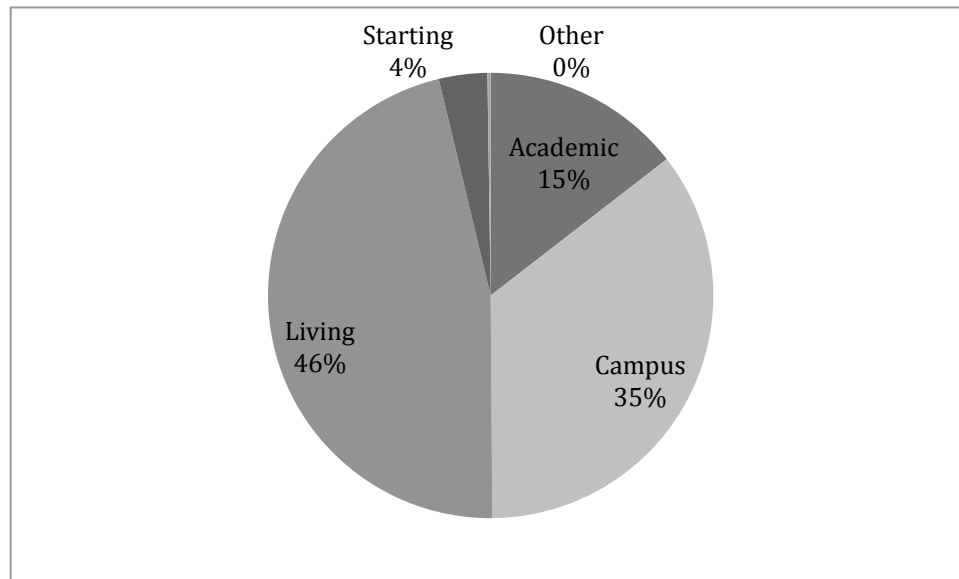
University. Three (4.5%) “Navigation” events were coded as “University.” The sub-theme “University” related to students having an unpleasant experience with a University service or requirement. Events included: (a) having to pay money to move out of a dormitory (Student 398); (b) wasting meals on a meal plan (Student 265); and (c) finding out about a financial aid mix-up.

Best, School Events

A total of 427 best, home events were coded (see Figure 4.3 and Table 4.3). Of these events, 198 (46.4%) were coded as “Living,” 151 (35.4%) as “Campus,” 62 (14.5%) as “Academic,” 15 (3.5%) as “Starting,” and one (0.2%) as “Other.” By examining the total number and content of events coded under each of the emergent themes and sub-themes, one may better understand what students associated with best, school events.

Figure 4.3

Total best, school events by theme



Living. A total of 198 (46.4%) best, school events were coded as “Living.” Events coded as “Living” related to students maneuvering through various aspects of life as college students beyond campus involvement and academic life. “Living” produced five sub-themes: “Social life, network” (n = 128, 65.6%), “Doing something alone” (n = 33, 16.7%), “Meeting people, making friends” (n = 24, 12.1%), “Financial,” (n = 7, 3.5%), and “Other” (n = 6, 3%).

Table 4.3

Summary of total best, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 427	%
Living	198	46.4%
Social life, network	128	65.6%
Doing something alone	33	16.7%
Meeting people, making friends	24	12.1%
Financial	7	3.5%
Other	6	3%
Campus	151	35.4%
Activities, events, non-Greek organizations	53	35.1%
UK athletics	53	35.1%
Greek life	45	29.8%
Academic	62	14.5%
Classroom success	35	56.5%
Workload	19	30.6%
Finding help	4	6.5%
Schedule	4	6.5%
Starting	15	3.5%
Other	1	0.2%

Social life, network. One hundred twenty-eight (65.6%) “Living” events were coded as “Social life, network.” The sub-theme “Social life, network” related to students doing something with friends and/or roommates or expressing happiness over something that happened to, with, or because of a member of their social network, which included roommates, friends, and dormmates. Events coded under this sub-themes included: (a) watching movies (e.g., Students 114, 218, 396, 407); (b) celebrating birthdays (e.g., Students 136, 391); (c) going on dates or hanging out with someone of romantic involvement or interest (e.g., Students 133, 218, 362, 426); (d) attending concerts (e.g., Students 140, 240); (e) exercising with others (e.g., Students 132, 272, 346); (d) drinking and/or partying (e.g., Students 194, 226, 234, 420); and (e) getting off campus to eat,

shop, or otherwise explore Lexington (e.g., Student 283, 401). “Social life, network” events allowed students to focus on other aspects of college life beyond educational components. One student’s narrative described this notion:

(Experiencing a college Friday night) was awesome fun... College isn’t just about classes and doing well, I mean it’s a huge part but you have to have your parties, and friends, and sports. There is just so much more to college and everybody needs to experience it. My parents went to college the hard way, full-time job and part-time school. They wanted the best for me, so that is why I’m here. (Student 287)

Other best, school events coded as “Living” related to students doing things without others.

Doing something alone. Thirty-three (16.7%) “Living” events were coded as “Doing something alone.” The sub-theme “Doing something alone” related to students being or engaging in activities alone, participating in events where the character(s) cited were not a central part of the narrative’s event, or making personal statements. Events coded under this theme included: (a) exercising (e.g., Students 182, 285); (b) making purchases and/or shopping (e.g., Students 158, 277, 285, 289); (c) sleeping or resting (e.g., Students 139, 418); and (d) attending events (e.g., Students 157, 348, 373). Some events included other characters but were primarily about students doing things alone. These events included: (a) helping someone (Student 148); (b) attending a job interview (Student 186); and (c) making purchases (e.g., Students 173, 408). Finally, other events involved students being happy about something, which included: (a) seasonal change (Student 392); (b) the start of college football season (Student 103); and (c) finishing driving class (Student 348). At times, doing something alone allowed students to meet other people on campus or in the Lexington community, which one student described as:

The best event that happened to me this week was attending Middle School ministry leadership training at Southland [Christian Church]... I got to meet some amazing people who will be leading along side of me. Two girls in particular stand out in my mind that I met that I can tell I will be friends with. (Student 157)

Meeting others and establishing relationships resulted in another “Living” sub-theme.

Meeting people, making friends. Twenty-four (12.1%) “Living” events were coded as “Meeting people, making friends.” The sub-theme “Meeting people, making friends” related to students encountering new individuals and creating new friendships. These events allowed student to establish bonds with those with whom they shared common interests, values, and beliefs as well as make connections at college that made them feel more comfortable and confident. One student explained:

Since moving to college is such a huge transition, the repercussions [*sic*] from it come in both positive and negative forms. One of the positives that came in the first week is the creation of new friends... Within the first week of arrival [*sic*] of campus, I met new people, found common interest, and enjoyed their company. Making friends can make big changes and life in general easier. (Student 134)

Other best, school events coded as “Living” related to positives related students’ finances.

Financial. Seven (3.5%) “Living” events were coded as “Financial.” The sub-theme “Financial” related to students receiving positive financial news. These events included students: (a) winning a bet (Student 125); (b) making good money at work (Student 202); and (c) finding out certain financial information related to the University of Kentucky. Information related to UK included: (a) receiving money from UK (Student 398); (b) realizing wrongly charged out-of-state tuition (Student 367); (c) finding another option for Dining Services Flex Dollars (Student 410); and (d) obtaining financial aid (Students 198, 379). Having student loans accepted had a significant impact on “a

student who is scared beyond belief about the future” (Student 198). An additional event could not be coded as one of the four “Living” sub-themes.

Other. Six (3%) “Living” events were coded as “Other” because they did not fit under another “Living” sub-theme. Of these, two were about students signing contracts with the United States Air Force (Students 209, 218) and two about students finding happiness in multiple aspects of living as University of Kentucky college students (Students 358, 365). Additional best, school events related to students’ involvement on campus.

Campus. A total of 151 (35.4%) best, school events were coded as “Campus.” Events coded as “Campus” related to students connecting to and involving themselves with the University through various campus activities, events, and organizations. “Campus” produced three sub-themes: “Activities, events, non-Greek organizations” (n = 53, 35.1%), “UK athletics” (n = 53, 35.1%), and “Greek life” (n = 45, 29.8%).

Activities, events, non-Greek organizations. Fifty-three (35.1%) “Campus” events were coded as “Activities, events, non-Greek organizations.” The sub-theme “Activities, events, non-Greek organizations” related to students participating in campus activities, events, and non-Greek organizations. Campus activities included intramural (e.g., Students 144, 201, 206, 261) and club sports (e.g., Students 207, 255, 312). Campus events included: (a) a water balloon fight (e.g., Students 162, 184, 200, 343, 425); (b) a rooftop rave (e.g., Students 123, 222, 414); (c) movies (e.g., Students 414, 418); (d) international night (e.g., Student 222); (e) Dance Blue, a student run charity event (Student 246); and (f) the performing arts (e.g., Students 208, 426). Many of these

events were part of the University's K Week, an orientation for new students and welcoming event to the fall semester. One student described K Week as:

I found all the different activities and booths so helpful. They were all around campus so that helped me learn my way around. I experienced most of these alone because I was new and still getting to know people. I feel this was my best experience because I received so much new and useful information and made friends out of it. Also, what helped was the fact that everyone else was a freshman so they knew how I was feeling. (Student 323)

Non-Greek organizations included: (a) Christian Student Fellowship (e.g., Students 158, 166, 227); (b) Baptist Christian and Ministries (Student 276); and (c) a MSV group, an organization for tabletop role players (Student 283). Students also became involved on campus through the University of Kentucky's athletic teams and sporting events.

UK athletics. Fifty-three (35.1%) "Campus" events were coded as "UK athletics." The sub-theme "UK athletics" related to students attending, being passionate about, or participating in official University of Kentucky varsity sports. Students wrote about: (a) attending games (e.g., Student 132, 234, 347); (b) receiving or purchasing tickets (e.g., Students 273, 334, 416); (c) tailgating (e.g., Students 232, 339); (d) celebrating team success (e.g., Students 187, 239, 244); and (e) participating in athletics as student athletes (e.g., Students 143, 400).

Students not only wrote about attending games of the University's major sports (e.g., basketball, football) but minor sports as well (e.g., volleyball). Students were "very excited" (Student 138) to attend basketball games and "kind of sad" (Student 319) to attend the season's final football home game. One student described the environment at a volleyball game as "amazing" and said he "couldn't have asked for a better experience" (Student 312). Students also wrote about going out to watch UK games, which allowed them to "(get) rowdy and have a lot of fun" (Student 377), and traveling for road games,

which one student described as, “I spent the weekend getting closer to the friends I traveled with, all the while making new friends with other UK students who, like me, decided to make the journey to Mississippi” (Student 215). Acquiring athletic tickets was not only the result of standing in line but at times doing so overnight.

Several students wrote about their experiences as student athletes. Events included: (a) traveling for a tryout (Student 143); (b) beating a rival team on their field (Student 400); (c) outperforming teammates in practice (Student 363); (d) being recognized on the field during halftime of a football game (Student 314); and having Saturday off from football (Student 275). Students also involved themselves on campus through the University’s Greek system.

Greek life. Forty-five (29.8%) “Campus” events were coded as “Greek life.” The sub-theme “Greek life” related to students participating in the University’s Greek system. The Fraternity and Sorority Office advises 44 student-run fraternities and sororities at the University of Kentucky; these Greek organizations consist of more than 3,700 students, present more than 400 leadership positions, include 31 small group living facilities, and expend more than \$3.2 million dollars annually (University of Kentucky Student Affairs, 2006). Students primarily wrote about: (a) rushing and pledging (e.g., Students 223, 312, 366); (b) sorority bid day and receiving fraternity bids (e.g., Students 166, 233, 322, 366); (c) initiation (e.g., Students 116, 359); receiving a big sister or brother (e.g., Students 149, 280, 248); and (e) Greek events and competitions (e.g., Students 160, 216, 223, 354). Involvement in sororities and fraternities was considered “such a great way to meet people and make new friendships” (Student 188). Additional best, school events related to students’ academics.

Academic. A total of 62 (14.5%) best, school events were coded as “Academic.” Events coded as “Academic” related to students finding elation in some aspect of their coursework during the first-semester. “Academic” produced four sub-themes: “Classroom success” (n = 35, 56.5%), “Workload” (n = 19, 30.6%), “Finding help” (n = 4, 6.5%), and “Schedule” (n = 4, 6.5%).

Classroom success. Thirty-five (56.5%) “Academic” events were coded as “Classroom success.” The sub-theme “Classroom success” related to students receiving a good grade or otherwise enjoying success in the classroom. The overwhelming majority of events coded under this theme (32/35, 91.4%) were related to students receiving good grades, which resulted in them feeling “happy” (Student 366), “elated” (Student 148), “accomplished” (Student 217), and “proud” (Student 326). Some students gained confidence through these grades and/or shared this success with someone back home. One student wrote:

The best thing that has panned this week was receiving an A on my first exam. It showed all my studying and focusing paid off. I almost jumped out of my chair when I saw the grade in red pen at the top. Going into college I was very nervous and was not quiet [*sic*] ready to find out what college was all about. I was so happy I called my mom right away, of course she was very excited and wouldn't stop saying how proud she was of me. (Student 217)

Success, aside from grades, came in the form of positive feedback from a teacher or performing well on an in-class activity. Students also found joy in various aspects of their coursework.

Workload. Nineteen (30.6%) “Academic” events were coded as “Workload.” The sub-theme “Workload” related to students getting pleasure from their coursework or good news related to their coursework. Events included: (a) enjoying a class project or assignment (e.g., Students 107, 330); (b) finishing homework or exams and meeting

deadlines (e.g., Students 327, 403, 420, 423); (c) receiving a deadline extension (e.g., Student 183); (d) dealing with an easy assignment or exam (e.g., Student 358); (e) having to do no homework weekends (e.g., Student 270). Several students wrote about how such events provided a sense of achievement, which one student explained as, “I felt accomplished about this and happy that I buckled down and did it” (Student 254). Students also wrote about receiving help in areas related to their coursework.

Finding help. Four (6.5%) “Academic” events were coded as “Finding help.” The sub-theme “Finding help” related to students locating help with some aspect of their coursework. This help came from a friend (Student 423), tutors (Student 106), and University services (e.g., The Study) (e.g., Students 193, 213). Discovering help not only assisted these students with completing work but provided reduced stress. One student wrote:

As boring as this sounds the best thing that happened to me this week was my tutoring session with my assistant teacher after anatomy class. This may seem little to someone else, but it was so reassuring to understand the complicated processes of cells and tissues. It completely calmed my fears and stress of not understanding. (Student 106)

Students also wrote about aspects of their schedules as they related to their academic lives.

Schedule. Four (6.5%) “Academic” events were coded as “Schedule.” The sub-theme “Schedule” related to students liking some aspect of their academic schedule. Events included students enjoying one class (Student 226) or their overall schedule (Students 179, 229) or a class being canceled (Student 368). Additional best, school events related to students’ starting college.

Starting. A total of 15 (3.5%) best, school events were coded as “Starting.” Events coded as “Starting” related to students anticipating college, arriving at college, and beginning college. Some students noted the excitement and emotions associated with leaving home as part of the event. One student’s narrative captured the overall feelings of the event:

Many great things have happened since I moved to college but the actual move-in date definitely took the cake. When my mother said goodbye and the tears of ‘my baby is actually going to college’ came streaming down her face [it] set something off in me. The feeling of freedom came coursing [*sic*] down my veins, it was a natural high. (Student 422)

One event from a student’s narrative could not be coded as any of the best, school themes.

Other. A total of one (0.2%) best, school event was coded as “Other.” In addition to writing about best events throughout their first semester, students also wrote about worst events that were associated with home and school.

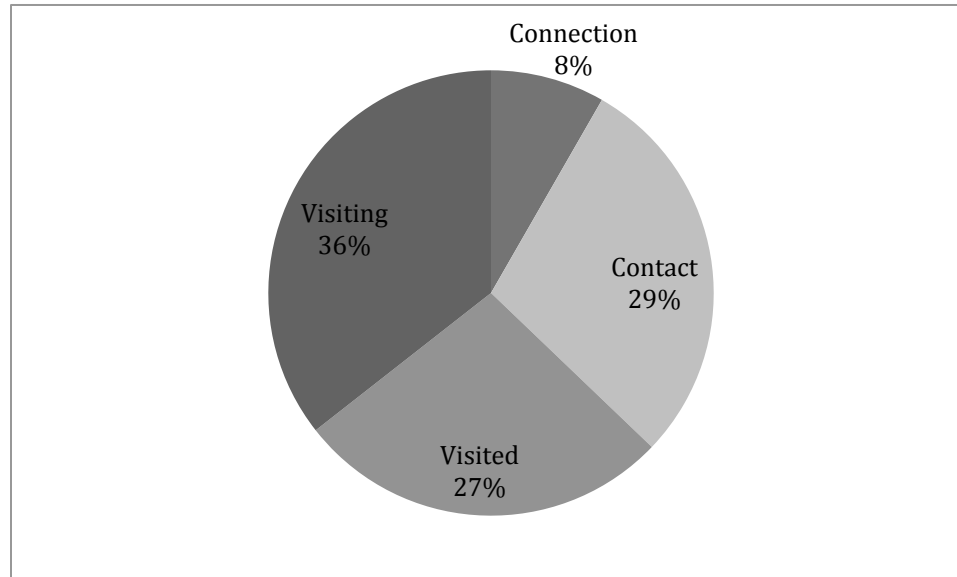
Best, Home Events

A total of 253 best, home events were coded (see Figure 4.4 and Table 4.4). Of these events, 90 (35.6%) were coded as “Visiting,” 73 (28.9%) as “Contact,” 69 (27.3%) as “Visited,” and 21 (8.3%) as “Connection.” By examining the total number and content of events coded under each of the emergent themes and sub-themes, one may better understand what students associated with best, home events.

Visiting. A total of 90 (35.6%) best, home events were coded as “Visiting.” Events coded as “Visiting” related to students leaving the UK campus to visit home or someone from home. “Visiting” produced three sub-themes: “Visiting home” (n = 80, 88.9%), “Visiting friend(s)” (n = 8, 8.9%), and “Visiting girl/boyfriend” (n = 2, 2.2%).

Figure 4.4

Total best, home events by theme



Visiting home. Eighty (88.9%) “Visiting” events were coded as “Visiting home.”

The sub-theme “Visiting home” related to students returning to their hometowns to visit family, friend(s), and/or girl-boyfriends. Aside from allowing students an opportunity to spend time with family members, friends, and significant others from home, visiting home, among other things, allowed them to: (a) escape campus life; (b) forget school related stress; (c) rest and catch up on sleep; (d); receive support; (e) eat homemade meals; and (f) sleep in their own beds. One student described visiting home this way:

The best event that happened to me during the past week was getting to go home, sleep in my own bed, see my dog, my family, and relax without thinking about everything going on with college... I haven’t had much time since being at college to talk to or see my parents and it is always refreshing when I do get the chance. (Student 154)

Events coded under the theme “Visiting” also related to visiting people from home at other locations than their hometowns.

Table 4.4

Summary of total best, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 253	%
Visiting	90	35.6%
Visiting home	80	88.9%
Visiting friends(s)	8	8.9%
Visiting girl/boyfriend	2	2.2%
Contact	73	28.9%
Seeing, doing	43	58.9%
Receiving something	20	27.4%
Talking to, hearing from	10	13.7%
Visited	69	27.3%
Visited by family	42	60.9%
Visited by friend(s)	15	21.7%
Visited by girl/boyfriend	12	17.4%
Connection	21	8.3%
Doing things	16	76.2%
Running into	5	23.8%

Visiting friend(s) or girl/boyfriend. Eight (8.9%) of “Visiting” events were coded as “Visiting friend(s)” and two (2.2%) as “Visiting girl/boyfriend.” The sub-themes “Visiting friend(s)” and “Visiting girl/boyfriend” related to students going to another college or location to spend with friends or girl/boyfriends from home. In addition to making students happy and providing students a link to home, these events were at times associated with surprising someone else. Students also wrote about links to home that did not require visiting home or someone from home.

Contact. A total of 73 (28.9%) best, home events were coded as “Contact.” Events coded as “Contact” related to students having contact with home without returning home or being visited at UK by someone from home. “Contact” produced three sub-

themes: “Seeing, doing” (n = 43, 58.9%), “Receiving something” (n = 20, 27.4%), and “Talking to, hearing from” (n = 10, 13.7%).

Seeing, doing. Forty-three (58.9%) “Contact” events were coded as “Seeing, doing.” The sub-theme “Seeing, doing” related to students participating in activities with someone from home without going home or being specifically visited on campus. Seeing and doing things with people from home allowed students additional contact with home without the students having to travel home. These events included eating meals, taking trips, attending concerts or sporting events, and participating in hobbies (e.g., hunting, golfing). They provided students contact with someone from home at times when the student did not go home. Oftentimes, these events were simple yet had a larger impact on students. As one student explained, “Its [*sic*] been a long time since I’ve been with them and just gotten to talk and relax. Yes, having lunch was very simple but definitely a good way to start off my week” (Student 133). Students also received contact with home by receiving things.

Receiving something. Twenty (27.4%) “Contact” events were coded as “Receiving something.” The sub-theme “Receiving something” related to students being given things from someone from home, including money, clothes, computers, food, and pictures. Two items—letters and packages—seemed to make students particularly happy as one student explained:

This past week I walked into my dorm and saw that I had a package from my mom and dad. It is a small surprise but meant a lot to me because they did this without telling me... They each sent an item down that reminded them of me. After getting cookies from my sweet mom, a burned CD from my sister, and a flashlight to stay safe at night from my protective father, they all signed a card. They were all sweet sentimental words with 1 meaning—we miss you... My mom sent cookies to give me a feel of home. (Student 118)

Students also had contact with home by speaking with or hearing from someone at or from home.

Talking to, hearing from. Ten (13.7%) “Contact” events were coded as “Talking to, hearing from.” The sub-theme “Talking to, hearing from” related to students speaking with someone from home over the telephone or Skype or through social media (e.g., Facebook). These events provided students contact with important people from home and allowed them to catch up in general or talk about specific incidents (e.g., birthday, ill family member). Students also wrote about people from coming to visit the student at school.

Visited. A total of 69 (27.3%) best, home events were coded as “Visited.” Events coded as “Visited” related to students receiving visits from a person or people from home. “Visited” produced three sub-themes: “Visited by family” (n = 42, 60.9%), “Visited by friend(s)” (n = 15, 21.7%), and “Visited by girl/boyfriend” (n = 12, 17.4%).

Visited by family. Forty-two (60.9%) “Visited” events were coded as “Visited by family.” The sub-theme “Visited by family” related to students having a family member or family members from home visit the student on campus. Simply being able to see family members and catch up highlighted visits, which was often emotional for students and their families. One student wrote, “My mom and dad were both very excited to see me and I was happy to be with them as well... We laughed and hugged a lot” (Student 337).

Visits from family members allowed students to show their family members around campus and introduce them to campus friends. Students cited other benefits related to these visits, including getting off campus, going out to eat, going shopping,

which one student described as, “My parents were extremely happy to see me and quick to do whatever I wanted” (Student 240). Students also wrote about friends from home coming to visit.

Visited by friend(s). Fifteen (21.7%) “Visited” events were coded as “Visited by friend(s).” The sub-theme “Visited by friend(s)” related to students having a friend or friends from home visit the student on campus. Students liked the opportunity to show their friends around campus and help them experience life as a UK student. One student wrote:

Because I live over 4 hours from Lexington, I rarely get a chance to see many of my high school friends... I got to show her all about UK and the campus/campus life here. It was interesting to see her reaction to the differences between here and where she attends college. Getting to catch up and exchange stories was the best event that happened to me in the last week. (Student 290)

These events were packed with emotion and excitement, which was also true of when students were visited by girl/boyfriends.

Visited by girl/boyfriend. Twelve (17.4%) “Visited” events were coded as “Visited by girl/boyfriend.” The sub-theme “Visited by girl/boyfriend” related to students having a girlfriend or boyfriend from home visit the student on campus. Similarly to visits from family, visits from girl/boyfriends allowed students to escape their normal routines and delivered great periods of time that were full of happiness. Visits from girl/boyfriends also allowed students to rekindle passion and romance while not skipping a beat. One student described the experience as, “It was just like old times after we greeted each other with affection and enthusiasm. We talked as though we haven’t been separated by thousands of miles for a month” (Student 400). Additional

best, home events related to students being able to connect with other UK students from their hometowns.

Connection. A total of 21 (8.3%) best, home events were coded as “Connection.” Events coded as “Connection” related to students connecting with other UK students from home while on campus. “Connection” produced two sub-themes: “Doing things” (n = 16, 76.2%) and “Running into” (n = 5, 23.8%).

Doing things. Twenty-one (76.2%) “Visited” events were coded as “Doing things.” The sub-theme “Doing things” related to students engaging in an activity with someone from home. Students discussed eating, exercising, and partying with other UK students who were from the same hometown. Spending time with a fellow UK student from home provided students a sense of security and allowed them to expand relationships. One student wrote:

Over the past week, my friends and I have grown closer by being so close in terms of location. We are all neighbors in the K3 dorm. We all hung out in one of the rooms either just have fun or do homework. This has been extremely convenient when doing homework because there is always someone who can help out with a problem. These people are three of my best friends... It was always a question as to whether us all living together would cause a strain, but as far as I can tell we have only strengthened our friendship. (Student 240)

Students were also able to establish a connection to home while on campus by running into people from home who also attend UK.

Running into. Five (23.8%) “Visited” events were coded as “Running into.” The sub-theme “Running into” related to students crossing paths with someone from home (e.g., older friend, grade school friend, old friend) coincidentally while on campus. These events most often were when students ran into a friend from their past who they did not previously know attended the University of Kentucky. One student wrote:

The best event that happened to me this week was that I found out one of my good friends from grade school goes to UK. We saw each other at Ovid's in the library and we were both stunned to see each other. We both did double-takes and were hesitant to say the first words. We both ended up greeting each other and got our food and sat down. We caught up on all the good times we had which was nice. We both mentioned how glad we were that we caught up and it made for a good week. We were both surprised at how changed we were physically with facial hair deeper voices and so on. But personality neither of us have changed. We were just as outgoing free spirited as ever. We were still our grade school selves at heart. (Student 151)

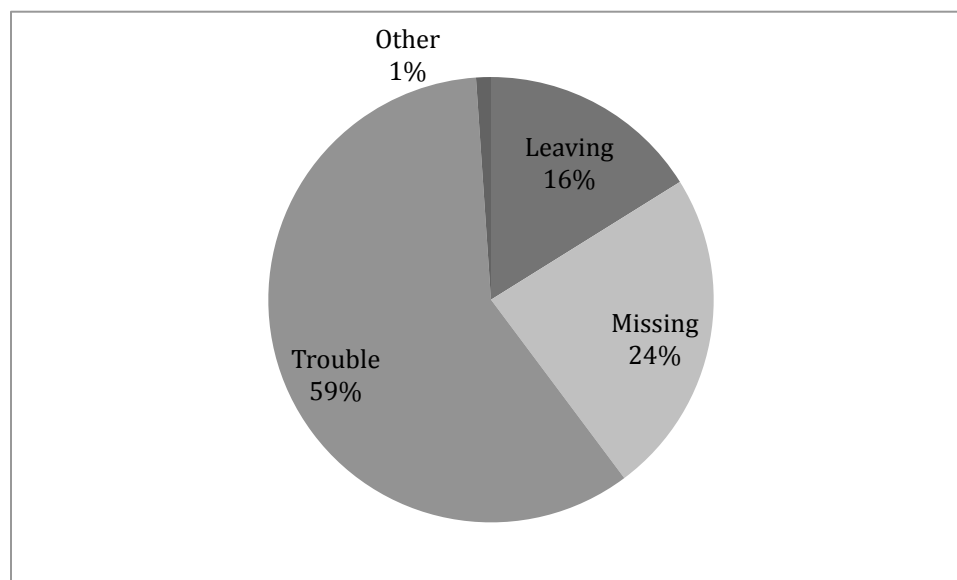
In addition to writing about recent best events associated with home during their first semester, students wrote about best events associated with school.

Worst, Home Events

A total of 93 worst, home events were coded (see Figure 4.5. and Table 4.5). Of these events, 55 (59.1%) were coded as "Trouble," 22 (23.7%) as "Missing," 15 (16.1) as "Leaving," and one (1.1%) as "Other." By examining the total number and content of events coded under each of the emergent themes and sub-themes, one may better understand what students associated with worst, home events.

Figure 4.5

Total worst, home events by theme



Trouble. A total of 55 (59.1%) worst, home events were coded as “Trouble.” Events coded as “Trouble” related to students being concerned about home or someone from home, experiencing problems at home or with someone from home, or receiving bad news about someone from home. “Trouble” produced five sub-themes: “Illness, injury, death” (n = 26, 47.3%), “Bad news” (n = 15, 27.3%), “Inconveniences” (n = 7, 12.7%), “Argument” (n = 5, 9.1%), and “Other” (n = 2, 3.6%).

Table 4.5

Summary of total worst, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 93	%
Trouble	55	59.1%
Illness, injury, death	26	47.3%
Bad news	15	27.3%
Inconveniences	7	12.7%
Argument	5	9.1%
Other	2	3.6%
Missing	22	23.7%
Leaving	15	16.1%
Leaving home, starting college	8	53.3%
Returning to school	6	40%
Family leaving after visit	1	6.7%
Other	1	1.1%

Illness, injury, death. Twenty-six (47.3%) “Trouble” events were coded as “Illness, injury, death.” The sub-theme “Illness, injury, death” related to students injuring themselves (e.g., Students 138, 232) at home or someone at home (e.g., family members, friends, family friends, pets) being ill (e.g., Students 150, 194, 351), getting injured (e.g., Students 242, 276), or dying (e.g., Students 322, 365), which also included funerals (e.g., Student 356, 413). These events bothered students but also raised their concern for others, which was captured in one student’s narrative, “(Attending the

funeral) was really hard and sad because I had to see some of my closest friends and family extremely upset. I don't like seeing people upset" (Student 356). Trouble at home was also associated with students receiving bad news from and/or about someone from home.

Bad news. Fifteen (27.3%) "Trouble" events were coded as "Bad news." The sub-theme "Bad news" involved students receiving bad news from home, about someone from home, or something related to home. They also related to students having to share bad news with someone from home or finding out personal bad news that related to home. Events included students learning about: (a) a friend terminating a pregnancy (Student 131); (b) a brother's girlfriend becoming pregnant (Student 152); (c) an ex-boyfriend getting married (Student 395); a sister was facing problems (Student 176); (d) a role model isn't as great a person as previous believed (Student 143); and (e) being pregnant (Student 139). Trouble at home was also associated with students encountering inconveniences.

Inconveniences. Seven (12.7%) "Trouble" events were coded as "Inconveniences." The sub-theme "Inconveniences" related to students experiencing hassles or encountering other difficulties while home. Events included: (a) getting locked out (Student 211); (b) being in a car accident or hit by a car (Students 217, 418); (c) getting a hand caught on a toilet handle (Student 397); and (d) having car or bike trouble (Students 234, 349). Trouble at home was also associated with students getting into arguments with someone from home.

Argument. Five (9.1%) "Trouble" events were coded as "Argument." The sub-theme "Argument" related to students quarreling with someone from home. Events

included arguing with one's: (a) boyfriend (Student 345); (b) mother (Students 124, 226); and (c) siblings (Students 124, 125).

Other. Two (3.6%) "Trouble" events were coded as "Other" because they did not fit under another "Trouble" sub-theme. Additional worst, home events were associated with being homesick or unable to see or contact someone from home.

Missing. A total of 22 worst, home events were coded as "Missing." The theme "Missing" related to students being unable to return or speak with someone from home, failing to see someone from home while home, and wishing they could be with someone from home; the theme did not produce any sub-themes. Events included being unable to: (a) go home (Students 236, 251, 332, 390); (b) talk to a boyfriend (Student 109); (c) see family (Students 123, 161, 407); (d) see best friend when home (Student 138); (e) ride a high school band bus with friends (Student 256); and (f) have parent(s) attend family weekend (Students 215, 270). Several of these events and others involved students being or getting homesick (e.g., Students 136, 344, 384). One narrative captured the theme's overall essence:

My family did not come down for the weekend and I haven't seen my parents since I moved down here. I am very homesick and this weekend just made me more upset seeing everyone's [*sic*] families. And none of my friends were around because all their families were here or they went home or the weekend. (Student 341)

Additional worst, home events were associated with students departing home or someone from home leaving after a visit.

Leaving. A total of 15 worst, home events were coded as "Leaving." Events coded as "Leaving" related to students leaving family members or others from home.

“Leaving” produced three sub-themes: “Leaving home, starting college” (n = 8, 53.3%), “Returning to school” (n = 6, 40%), and “Family leaving after visit” (n = 1, 6.7%).

Leaving home, starting college. Eight (53.3%) “Leaving” events were coded as “Leaving home, starting college.” The sub-theme “Leaving home, starting college” related to students feeling a degree of distress over beginning college and/or leaving home. One student wrote:

The worst event of the past week is really not very bad in the grand scheme of things. It was not too awful of an event, but saying bye to my parents was bittersweet to say the least. I had lived under their roof and seen them virtually every day for the first 18 and a half years of my life, and in the fraternity parking lot I said goodbye to my mom and dad for a while. No tears were shed [*sic*] but I knew they would miss me, and I them. (Student 412)

Leaving one’s family was also associated with coming back to school after visiting home or someone from home.

Returning to school. Six (40%) “Leaving” events were coded as “Returning to school.” The sub-theme “Returning to school” related to students being troubled upon heading back to college after visiting home or someone from home. One student wrote:

I was sad to leave (my mom) to come back to school... she is very emotional. She talked about how much she misses me during the week and she started to tear up, which made it very difficult for me. Her starting to cry was very predictable. My mom and I are best friends and she gets sad every time I leave her. I knew she would cry, but every time it still makes us feel sad. (Student 385)

Leaving one’s family was also associated with one’s family leaving after visiting the University of Kentucky.

Family leaving after visit. One (6.7%) “Leaving” event was coded as “Family leaving after visit.” This student noted experiencing negative emotions after her parents left Lexington after visiting. She said, “It was sad to say goodbye” (Student 331).

Other. A total of one (1.1%) worst, home event was coded as “Other” because it did not fit under any worst, home themes. In this event, the student wrote that he experienced no worst event during the free-write’s time period. He explained:

With such a great weekend I cannot think of 1 worst event that happened to me over the past week or so. It could be possible that I cannot think of anything because seeing my loved ones completely trumps anything bad that could have happened. I was so excited to see them that I looked over anything that may or may not have happened. (Student 151)

In addition to writing about recent worst events associated with home during their first semester, students wrote about worst events associated with school.

Research Question 1 Summary

Students’ stories were most frequently coded as worst, school events, most of which were about living on a college campus followed by students’ academic lives and their inability to navigate a college campus. The second most frequent type of events that emerged from students’ stories were of the best, school association, most of which were about living on a college campus, followed by campus involvement, academic enjoyment, and starting college. The third most frequent type of events were of the best, home association, most of which were about visiting home, having contact with someone from home, being visited on campus, and connecting with students from one’s hometown on campus. Students wrote about worst, home events the least often; most of these events were related to trouble at home, followed by missing home and leaving home. An additional research question explored how students’ stories evolved over time.

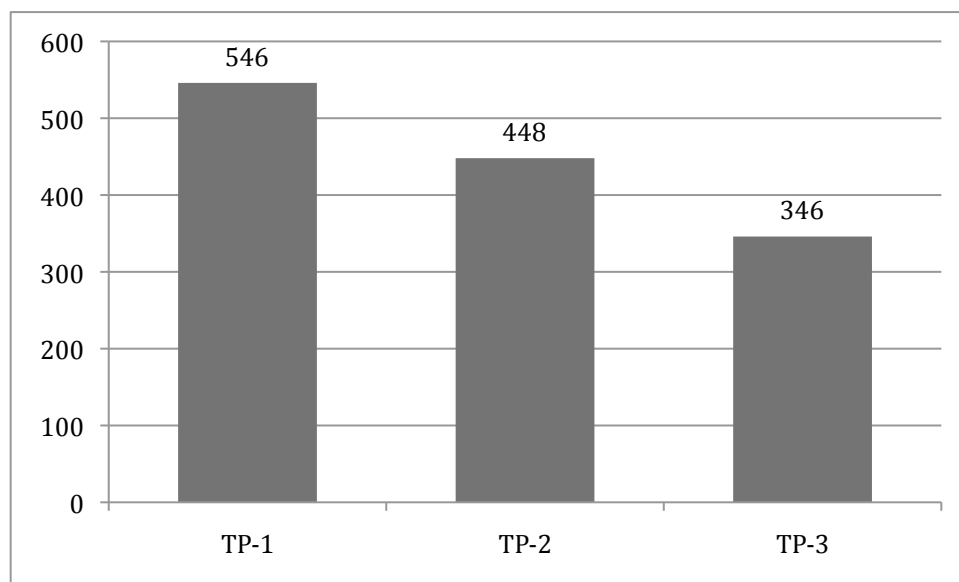
Research Question 2

To answer RQ2 (How do students’ stories about the University of Kentucky and about home evolve over the course of their first semester?) all events from student

narratives were coded. In total, there were 1,340 events. Of these, 40.7% (n = 546) were from TP-1, 33.4% (n = 448) from TP-2, and 25.8% (n = 346) from TP=3 (see Figure 4.6 and Table 4.6). By examining the number and content of events coded under each time period's associations (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS), themes, and sub-themes, one may begin to understand how students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home evolved over the course of their first semester as college students.

Figure 4.6

Total events by time period



Time Period One

Free-writes for TP-1 (N = 546) were collected from August 30-September 8 and represent the initial weeks of students' first semester in college. Of these, 229 (41.9%) were associated with worst, school events, 193 (35.3%) with best, school events, 87 (15.9%) with best, home events, and 37 (6.8%) with worst, home events (see Figure 4.7 and Table 4.7). By examining the total number and content of events coded under each

of TP-1's associations, themes, and sub-themes, one may better understand what students associated with their initial weeks as first-year college students.

Table 4.6

Summary of TP-1, TP-2, and TP-3 events		
Total Events	N = 1340	%
Time Period One	546	40.7%
Worst, school events	229	41.9%
Best, school events	193	35.3%
Best, home events	87	15.9%
Worst, home events	37	6.8%
Time Period Two	448	33.4%
Worst, school events	195	43.5%
Best, school events	135	30.1%
Best, home events	85	19.0%
Worst, home events	33	7.4%
Time Period Three	346	25.8%
Worst, school events	143	41.3%
Best, school events	99	28.6%
Best, home events	81	23.4%
Worst, home events	23	6.6%

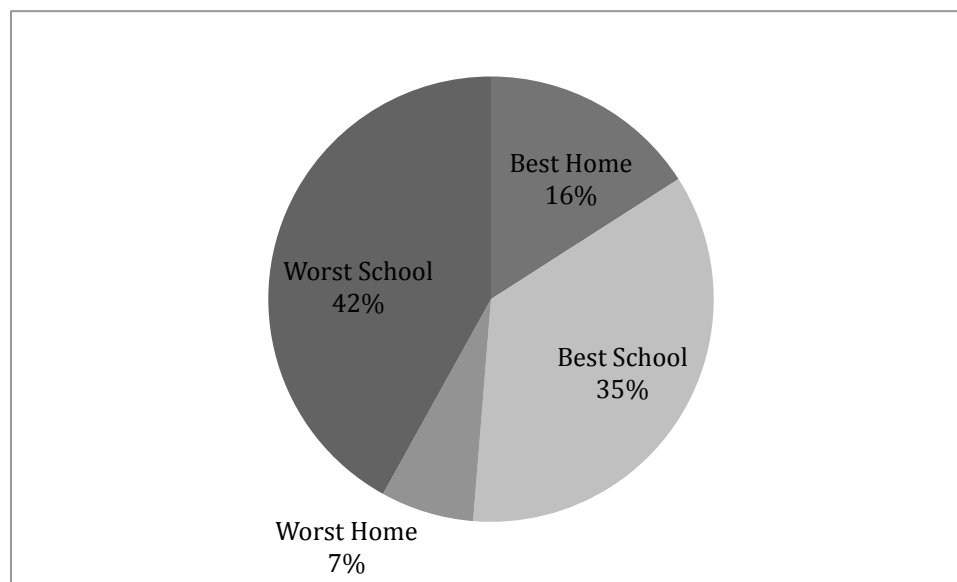
Worst, school events. A total of 229 (41.9%) TP-1 events were coded as worst, school events. As shown in Figure 4.8 and Table 4.8, 61.6% (n = 141) were coded as “Living,” 21.4% (n = 49) as “Navigation,” and 17% (n = 39) as “Academic.”

Living. A total of 141 (61.6%) worst, school events were coded as “Living” during TP-1. Events coded as “Living” related to students struggling in some aspect of their lives as college students outside the classroom. The worst, school theme “Living” produced 10 sub-themes during TP-1: “Physical” (n = 35, 24.8%), “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)” (n = 27, 19.1%), “Social life, network” (n = 25, 17.7%), “Greek life” (n = 16, 11.3%), “Inconveniences” (n = 12, 8.5%), “Doing something alone” (n = 10, 7.1%),

“Work” (n = 7, 5%), “Financial” (n = 6, 4.3%), “UK athletics” (n = 2, 1.4%), and “Other” (n = 1, 0.7%). The sub-theme “Inconveniences” did not include any events that were significant to the first weeks of one’s first year of college, and “Work” only included one, which involved a student realizing that agreeing to work on a weekend would result in missing a home football game.

Figure 4.7

TP-1 events by association



Physical. Thirty-five (24.8%) “Living” events from TP-1 were coded as “Physical.” The majority of these events during the initial weeks of students’ first semester related to them getting or being sick or dealing with injuries or medical conditions, which at times were related to adjusting to college life. One student wrote:

One of the worst events for me over the past week or so would be how sick I have been feeling. As a result of not enough sleep, mixed with too many activities has led to my body catching a cold. I know that this may seem easily avoidable by just taking the necessary measures to go to sleep early and eat well, but with such a full schedule I have found it hard to adjust. I have decided that I will make a change for the future weeks; although, it may not be easy to instigate boundaries for myself, but I will still make an effort to sleep earlier, and take better care of my body. (Student 158)

Table 4.7

Summary of TP-1 events

Total Events	N = 546	%
<i>Worst, school events</i>	229	41.9%
Living	141	61.6%
Navigation	49	21.4%
Academic	39	17.0%
<i>Best, school events</i>	193	35.3%
Academic	18	9.3%
Campus	74	38.3%
Living	86	44.6%
Starting	15	7.8%
<i>Best, home events</i>	87	15.9%
Connection	16	18.4%
Contact	28	32.2%
Visited	15	17.2%
Visiting	28	32.2%
<i>Worst, home events</i>	37	6.8%
Leaving	8	21.6%
Missing	9	24.3%
Trouble	20	54.1%

Being or becoming ill during the initial weeks of their first semester also became intensified because they were away from home, made students miss opportunities to have fun, and added difficulty to their lives. One student wrote:

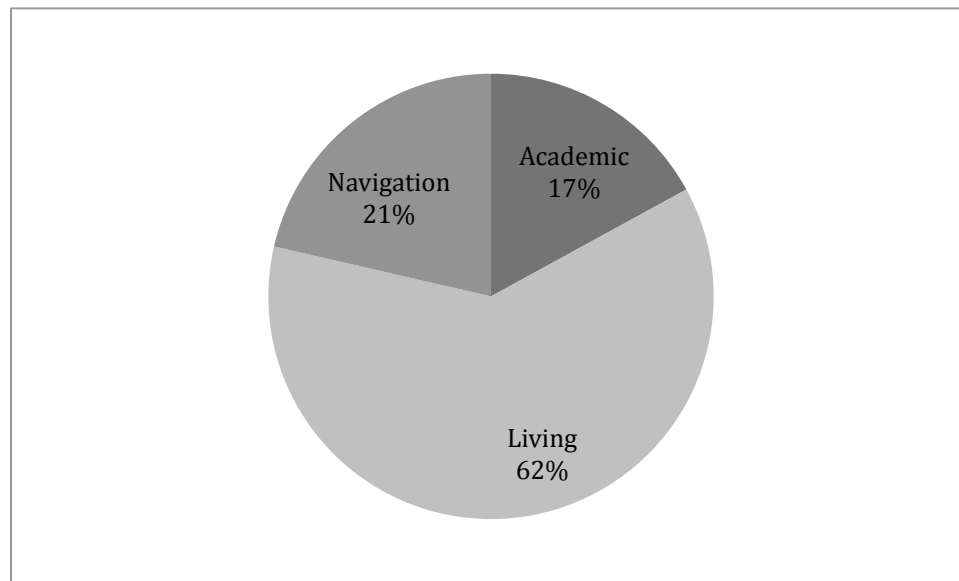
I was so sick that I missed the whole first week of fun activities... I have never been so sick before, and being away from home seemed to make it worse. I'm still in the process of recovering and attending classes has been rough. (Student 280)

In addition to being sick away from home making the event worse, it evolved to students becoming homesick and/or contacting home for comfort and/or advice. One student wrote:

I wasn't the happiest person and I said I was going to go back home because I didn't feel good and I did in fact go home which was predictable because I'm a homebody and I wanted someone to take care of me. (Student 329)

Figure 4.8

TP-1 worst, school themes



Another wrote:

I was very out of my comfort zone and didn't really know where to turn... I was so customized [*sic*] to my mom just bringing me to the doctors back home. I called my mom to see if she could help me in any way and to try and comfort me. I felt bad getting sick the first week here because my roommate had to deal with that and the worry if she'll get sick or not. (Student 341)

Another physical issue students struggled with during the initial weeks of their first semester was managing sleep.

Several students wrote about experiencing issues with their sleep during the initial weeks of their first year of college (Students 225, 319, 347, 393, 405). This included being tired from not sleeping (Students 225, 319) or from the first week of class (Student 347).

Table 4.8

Summary of TP-1 worst, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 229	%
Living	141	61.6%
Physical	35	24.8%
Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)	27	19.1%
Social life, network	25	17.7%
Greek life	16	11.3%
Inconveniences	12	8.5%
Doing something alone	10	7.1%
Work	7	5.0%
Financial	6	4.3%
UK athletics	2	1.4%
Other	1	0.7%
Navigation	49	21.4%
Lost way	19	38.8%
Parking, driving, walking	12	24.5%
Late to, waking up late for class	8	16.3%
Missed class	8	16.3%
University	2	4.1%
Academic	39	17.0%
Workload	25	64.1%
Schedule	7	17.9%
Stressed, overwhelmed	5	12.8%
Bad grade(s)	2	5.1%

One student wrote about having trouble sleeping:

The past 2 nights I haven't been able to fall asleep. I'm not really sure why, possibly because I was overwhelmed or stressed about something. I think tonight I will sleep better because I already have all my homework done, and I may be going home this weekend so I have nothing to be stressed about. (Student 393)

Another wrote about adjusting to college and waking up early for class:

(My worst event) was the night before the first day of class. I was paranoid that I would sleep through my alarm and not wake up for my 8 a.m. class. I woke up and jumped out of my bed in my dorm room and ran to the bathroom to brush my teeth. I was nervous I was going to be late. I was confused to why I was the only person in the bathroom and why it was still so dark. When I got back in my room

I realized it was only 3 in the morning and I was dreaming that it was time to get up. (Student 405)

Other students were not able to sleep as a result (i.e., primary events) of others' actions, which was one of several problems they encountered through their living situations during the initial weeks of their first semester.

Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s). Twenty-seven (19.1%) "Living" events from TP-1 were coded as "Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)." Students were forced to deal with living around others at the beginning of their first semester as college students. Many such events were related to adjusting to life in a residence hall, which began with the hassle of move-in day, which one student described as:

The worst event was just getting here... My boyfriend as well as my parents were already tense on account that I was leaving. I expected this but it was still really hard and upsetting. The traffic was horrible and I was already tired due to waking up early but then I had to unpack everything, which made matters worse. I think I hated it so much because it was so new and unexpected. (Student 323)

Upon settling into life in an undergraduate dormitory, students discovered issues with showers (Students 354), elevators (Student 391), air conditioning units (Student 318), and getting locked out (Students 117, 248, 279, 420). Students also were forced to deal with inconsiderate (e.g., Students 340, 347), sick (e.g., Students 165, 336), and loud (e.g., Students 202, 270, 347) roommates, dormmates, or neighbors. Students also encountered problems with aspects of their social life and members of their social networks.

Social life, network. Twenty-five (17.7%) "Living" events from TP-1 were coded as "Social life, network." Undoubtedly, students faced negatives associated with their social lives, friends, and girl/boyfriends prior to entering college. Regardless, several events during the initial weeks of their first year as college students related to their social lives and social networks and adjusting to college life. Specifically, these events related

to being part of a larger student body than during high school and learning how to manage the newfound freedom associated with going off to college, which included learning how to balance one's academic and social life. One student wrote:

I stayed up with all of my friends on Thursday night until the early hours of the morning. This was a horrible decision. When I awoke at 8 o'clock on Friday the world was not a happy place. I have never been so tired in my life. The whole day was a blur and essentially a waste. But not all was bad. I learned a very valuable lesson: get lots and lots of sleep on school nights. (Student 240)

Students also encountered difficult moments early in their first semester through their participation in the University's Greek system.

Greek life. Sixteen (11.3%) "Living" events from TP-1 were coded as "Greek life." During the initial weeks of their first semester, these events related to students included: (a) the stress of rush week, recruitment, and bid day (e.g., Students 245, 331, 430); (b) not getting or turning down a bid to an organization (e.g., Students 125, 213, 312); and (c) friends not getting bids (e.g., Student 116). One student described rush week as "very hectic and stressful" and "overwhelming" to the point she "felt as if (she) was going to go crazy" (Student 424). Another called rush week "one of the most stressful and exhausting weeks of (her) life," and everyone in her sorority group agreed. She continued, "My parents tried to tell me that this was supposed to be fun, but I could not find anything fun about it. I'm so happy that formal recruitment is over" (Student 245). Fraternity rush was also "long and tiring" (Student 348), and one student expressed disappointment in not receiving a bid:

They said that they had a good time hanging out with me and everyone liked me. Though my personality wasn't a fit, that week still showed me that I have to have confidence in my own personality to meet new people and create new friendships. Even though I was a bit upset, I still have no regrets going there and doing something I thought I'd never do. (Student 312)

Students also found that being alone could be challenging during the first few weeks of their first year as college students.

Doing something alone. Ten (7.1%) “Living” events from TP-1 were coded as “Doing something alone.” Many of these events (e.g., embarrassing moments) were not significant to the initial weeks of one’s life as a college student; however, two were. One student wrote about how not doing laundry for two weeks created a situation that “was not a fun experience,” but she learned a lesson and as a result “will now be making time to do laundry each week” (Student 132). Another wrote about how not having an extended network of friends can make life lonely during the initial transition to college:

The worst event was on a Saturday when I was sitting alone in my dorm room. Usually, I have something going on, but I didn’t know anyone quite yet and my roommate went out to a party and I stayed in the room, trying to find something to do. I ended up watching movies until I fell asleep. (Student 195)

Students also encountered financial difficulties related to the initial weeks of their first year of college.

Financial. Six (4.3%) “Living” events from TP-1 were coded as “Financial.” Of these, two were unique to the first few weeks of transitioning to college. One student wrote about how he would be unable to make money by cutting grass after going off to college, and another about wondering how she would pay for college. She wrote:

As I settled in, reality struck. How am I going to pay for all of this? The dread I felt was unbelievable. I scrambled looking for these loans that seemed to hide from me. It’s always been that ‘there’s always sunshine after the storm’ and this was true. I know it will all fall into place. (Student 422)

Two students discussed the challenges of settling into life as a college student athlete.

UK athletics. Two (1.4%) “Living” events from TP-1 were coded as “UK athletics.” In them, a pair of student athletes wrote about facing intense practice

conditions as new student athletes. One described running mile repeats after an hour and a half practice as “miserable” (Student 425), and the other found running the auditorium stairs “extremely painful.” Finally, one event, which could not be coded under another “Living” sub-theme contained a narrative about transitioning to life as a college student.

Other. One (0.7%) “Living” event from TP-1 was coded as “Other.” The event was about a student struggling with her transition to the University of Kentucky.

Students faced additional challenges on campus during the initial weeks of their first semester that related to finding their way around various aspects of campus, college life, and the University.

Navigation. A total of 49 (21.4%) worst, school events were coded as “Navigation” during TP-1. Events coded as “Navigation” related to students navigating their way around campus, dealing with University bureaucracy, and managing their daily schedules. The worst, school theme “Navigation” produced five sub-themes during TP-1: “Lost way” (n = 19, 38.8%), “Parking, driving, walking” (n = 12, 24.5%), “Late to, waking up late for class” (n = 8, 16.3%), “Missed class” (n = 8, 16.3%), and “University” (n = 2, 4.1%).

Lost way. Nineteen (38.8%) “Navigation” events from TP-1 were coded as “Lost way.” During the first few weeks of their first semester, several students had a difficult time locating their classrooms and/or the buildings in which they were located (e.g., Students 326, 330, 343, 414). This event was “embarrassing,” part of the “very hectic” first day of classes (Student 314), and resulted in students feeling “very confused when looking for (their) classroom buildings around campus... lost, tired, confused, [and like

a] baby freshman” (Student 424). One student found not only assistance from older students but empathy as well:

I got lost going to my first class. I was trying to read a map and carry all my books because I didn't have a backpack yet. I was lost trying to find Dickey Hall. I was alone but asked for help of 2 students sitting on a bench... They didn't mind at all showing me how to get there. I am so grateful that they were there to help me because without them I would have never made it there. The male that was helping me was showing me on the map where to go and pointing to different buildings that I should look for while I am walking. The female was cracking jokes and talking about how when she was a freshman she did the same exact thing. (Student 343)

Other students went to the wrong classes or to class at the wrong time (e.g., Students 250, 375). Others found it difficult navigating campus on foot and in automobiles.

Parking, driving, walking. Twelve (24.5%) “Navigation” events from TP-1 were coded as “Parking, driving, walking.” Nine of these events related to parking cars on campus (e.g., finding a parking spot, getting towed, receiving a parking ticket). One student was “very angry and upset” when she couldn't find a parking place (Student 399). After receiving a parking ticket, one student was “shocked,” and the event made her “mad for the rest of the day” (Student 231). Another student felt “mislead” about where to park after retuning to his car and finding a ticket on his car's windshield (Student 394). One student had a hard time finding his car:

I was walking to my car in K lot from Haggin Hall and when I got to K lot I had forgotten where I parked my car. So I looked where I thought I parked and it wasn't there. I finally just started walking up and down all the aisles until I found it. After about 5 minutes of walking around, I finally found it. This event made me feel rather dumb for forgetting where I parked. (Student 261).

Another student wrote about the intensity of traversing campus on foot (Student 246).

Several students had a difficult time navigating their time management, which resulted in being late for or missing class.

Late to, waking up late for class. Eight (16.3%) “Navigation” events from TP-1 were coded as “Late to, waking up late for class.” Waking up late for class during the first few weeks of their semester left students “confused and rattled” (Student 137) and was the result poor time management. One student wrote:

The worst thing that has happened to me recently was probably being 10 minutes to my very first college class. I woke up really early to make it to my 8’ o'clock [*sic*] on time, but not early enough. I had to go to K-Lot and not knowing how long of a walk it would be I just had to guess which was completely wrong. On the way to Commonwealth from my house I got get stuck in morning rush hour traffic. Finally when I inched my way to the parking lot at 7:45 I still thought I was fine until I realized just how far it was. I was almost sprinting by 8 and getting lost didn’t help my cause either. By the time I rolled into class everyone was already there and in mid lecture. I was embarrassed but still not the last one to walk in. (Student 196)

One student who was late to class during the initial weeks of his first semester commented, “I just thought to myself, ‘what an awesome way to start off college’” (Student 230). Missing class early in their college careers also bothered students.

Missed class. Eight (16.3%) “Navigation” events from TP-1 were coded as “Missed class.” Missing class during the initial weeks of their first semester made students feel “horrible” (Student 163). One student who missed class by oversleeping wrote:

I was very upset with myself. I wanted to keep a perfect attendance rate in all of my classes my first semester. I told my teacher but I did not make an excuse and took responsibility in my fault and accepted my consequences. I have made sure, since then, to get my homework down much earlier to avoid any future problems of the same nature. (Student 163)

Two students had problems with university services during the initial weeks of their first year of college.

University. Two (4.1%) “Navigation” events from TP-1 were coded as “University.” One student wasted three meals on a meal plan (Student 256), and the

other experienced a financial aid mix-up (Student 358). Students also encountered academic hardships at the beginning of their college careers.

Academic. A total of 39 (17%) worst, school events were coded as “Academic” during TP-1. Events coded as “Academic” related to students being bothered by or frustrated with some aspect of their coursework. The worst, school theme “Academic” produced four sub-themes during TP-1: “Workload” (n = 24, 64.1%), “Schedule” (n = 7, 17.9%), “Stressed, overwhelmed” (n = 5, 12.8%), and “Bad grade(s)” (n = 2, 5.1%). Neither of the events coded as “Bad grade(s)” were unique to events from the first few weeks of one’s college career.

Workload. Twenty-five (64.1%) “Academic” events from TP-1 were coded as “Workload.” During the initial weeks of students’ first semester, many of these events related to students adjusting to the requirements of college coursework and managing one’s schoolwork. Such events related to understanding, struggling with, and being frustrated over assignments (e.g., Student 104, 121, 180, 379, 385) and experiencing difficulty with online textbook sites and online homework (e.g., Students 160, 290). Several students expressed concern and/or frustration with the overall amount of work they associated with being in college (e.g., Students 149, 272, 324, 408), which included having homework the first day of class (Student 409). One student found it difficult to go back to class after a long weekend. She wrote, “It was hard to get back into the routine here at UK after a short break. The teachers were sure to jump right into lectures and new lessons, which is what I expected.” Other students found aspects of their schedules challenging during the initial weeks of their first semester as college students.

Schedule. Seven (17.9%) “Academic” events from TP-1 were coded as “Schedule.” These events related to students disliking early classes, not liking an aspect(s) of an individual class, and experiencing long days. While these were significant issues for students, they were not unique to a particular time period.

Stressed, overwhelmed. Five (12.8%) “Academic” events from TP-1 were coded as “Stressed, overwhelmed.” A student found the thought of her first college exam “frightening” (Student 107). One student was overwhelmed with a difficult class and wrote:

College and its classes are a completely new world to me. I feel like my professor is teaching this specific class at the third level, not the introductory level. I feel very overwhelmed in his class and it all seemed to hit me yesterday that I feel like I am in over my head... I was not ready and absolutely flabbergasted by the way his class is going to be. (Student 337)

Two students were stressed/overwhelmed college workload, and one wrote

I got through my first week of class and the syllabuses [*sic*] made me have an anxiety attack because I felt so overwhelmed. My family was involved because anytime they called to ask how I was I would break down telling them how stressed I felt. My family repeatedly [*sic*] told me that I was going to be fine and that it was a big change I would just have to adjust to. (Student 402)

Another student was overwhelmed by number of students in one of his classes:

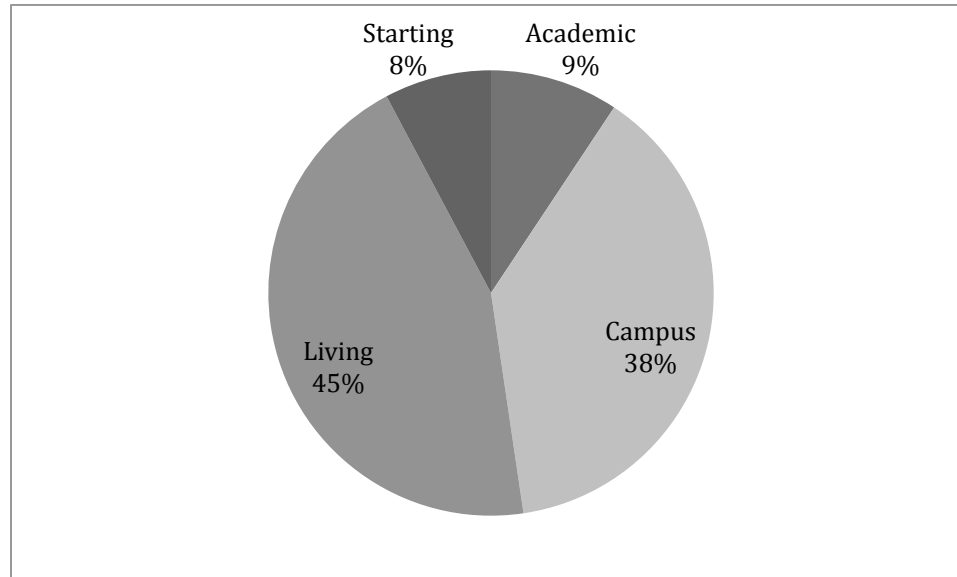
One of the worst events this past week was going to class. I walked into Bio 103 to see over 250 people waiting for class. This came as a shock due to my graduating class being 128. It gave me an overwhelming feeling and a nervousness about college. (Student 351)

Students also wrote about positive events related to the initial weeks of their first semester in college.

Best, school events. A total 193 (35.3%) TP-1 events were coded as best, school events. As shown in Figure 4.9 and Table 4.9, of these 44.6% (n = 86) were coded as “Living,” 38.3% (n = 74) as “Campus,” 9.3% (n = 18) as “Academic,” and 7.8% (n = 15) as “Starting.”

Figure 4.9

TP-1 best, school themes



Living. A total of 86 (44.6%) best, school events were coded as “Living” during TP-1. Events coded as “Living” related to students maneuvering through various aspects of life as college students beyond campus involvement and academic life. The best, school theme “Living” produced four sub-themes during TP-1: “Social life, network” (n = 51, 59.3%), “Meeting people, making friends” (n = 18, 20.9%), “Doing something alone” (n = 15, 17.4%), and “Other” (n = 2, 2.3%).

Social life, network. Fifty-one (59.3%) “Living” events from TP-1 were coded as “Social life, network.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, students engaged in a variety of activities on campus and around Lexington that allowed them to expand their social networks and solidify bonds with the new friends they were making as first-year college students. Students also began to feel like part of their new college community and were able to begin moving past their high school and hometown roots.

Table 4.9

Summary of TP-1 best, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 193	%
Living	86	44.6%
Social life, network	51	59.3%
Meeting people, making friends	18	20.9%
Doing something alone	15	17.4%
Other	2	2.3%
Campus	74	38.3%
Activities, events, non-Greek organizations	33	44.6%
Greek life	29	39.2%
UK athletics	12	16.2%
Academic	18	9.3%
Workload	7	38.9%
Classroom success	4	22.2%
Finding help	4	22.2%
Schedule	3	16.7%
Starting	15	7.8%

One student wrote:

One of the best things that has happened here at UK is just the feeling of acceptance. Even though I know not everyone here accepts me I feel like I've been able to start fresh and start over again. I've been able to meet a lot of new people and stay away from people from high school that I couldn't avoid before. (Student 236)

Doing things with others also presented students opportunities to make new

acquaintances:

While I didn't know that many people here, dinner was so much fun because I got to meet three other girls and become closer with the three I had known. From that dinner, we have all been hanging out on a regular basis, which evidentially makes my time and UK significantly more enjoyable. We spent the whole dinner laughing and having fun, which made me feel really comfortable in the situation, especially because most of the girls went to high school together, so I was worried about feeling out of place. However, that was not the case at all. Because of that dinner, I feel as if I could eventually become even closer with these people, as more friendships start to develop. (Student 215)

This narrative touched on another important element of the first-semester experience, which is gaining acquaintances and establishing friendships.

Meeting people, making friends. Eighteen (20.9%) “Living” events from TP-1 were coded as “Meeting people, making friends.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, students established social bonds through creating new friendships. One student wrote, “I have met a lot of good people and friends that are just like me that I get along with very well. They give me people to hangout with and things to do. I’m not bored in my dorm all the time.” It was possible to meet people in a variety of settings, including meeting “people at (their) dorm, in the classes, and in the cafeteria” (Student 195). Finding friends not only provided companionship but people with whom students could do things, which was important not only to social life but students’ academic lives as well. One student wrote, “I met some great and amazing friends. We have gone to so many activities together, like watching movies and studying” (Student 114). For some students, they were able to expand the diversity of people with whom they were acquainted. This allowed people to meet individuals who “were really cool,” including “people from all over Kentucky, the country, and the world. It was awesome (for students to meet) all these new people.” At times, students were forced or chose to do things in isolation.

Doing something alone. Fifteen (17.4%) “Living” events from TP-1 were coded as “Doing something alone.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, students continued to engage in activities alone to which required tending (e.g., shopping, eating, working out) but also presented opportunities for students to engage themselves on campus and in the community while meeting others. One student wrote:

The best event that happened to me this week was attending Middle School ministry leadership training at Southland [Christian Church]... I got to meet some amazing people who will be leading along side of me. Two girls in particular stand out in my mind that I met that I can tell I will be friends with. (Student 157)

Students also involved themselves with the UK campus and community upon beginning their first semester.

Campus. A total of 74 (38.3%) best, school events were coded as “Campus” during TP-1. Events coded as “Campus” related to students connecting to and involving themselves with the University through various campus activities, events, and organizations. The best, school theme “Campus” produced three sub-themes during TP-1: “Activities, events, and non-Greek organizations” (n = 33, 44.6%), “Greek life” (n = 29, 39.2%), and “UK athletics” (n = 12, 16.2%).

Activities, events, and non-Greek organizations. Thirty-three (44.6%) “Campus” events from TP-1 were coded as “Activities, events, and non-Greek organizations.” Students became engaged on campus during the initial weeks of their first semester through participating in campus events (e.g., a water balloon fight, on-campus movies and comedy acts, a rooftop rave, play festival, and a dance ensemble).

Several students wrote about these events being part of K Week, the University’s welcome week for incoming students and a celebration of the new school year for the entire University. Students discussed the event as providing an arsenal of information and collection of experiences they felt help lay a solid foundation to their life on the UK campus. The event also provided students with opportunities to meet new students, older students, and UK personnel while participating in community service (i.e., Fusion, a one-day service event, which is part of K Week). One student captured the event’s overall impact:

The best thing that has happened to me was just all of K-week [*sic*]. It allowed me to meet a variety of people and I had a lot of fun while doing it. My friend, J. Doe and I went to Big Blue U and were in the big ‘K’ picture. We also had the privilege of learning some of the chants that are performed at sporting events. We went to campus ruckus where we watched fireworks, socialized, and learned about the many organizations on campus. One of the most amazing things I have experiences on campus is being part of CSF [Christian Student Fellowship]. Between 12 o’clock pancakes, synergy, and shift, it is overall the best place to be. (Student 246)

Students also wrote about participating in intramural or club sports (e.g., boxing, flag football, soccer, ultimate frisbee) and extra-curricular activities (e.g., band, color guard).

The University’s Greek system also provided students opportunities to engage themselves on campus.

Greek life. Twenty-nine (39.2%) “Campus” events from TP-1 were coded as “Greek life.” During the initial weeks of students’ first semester, these events were mainly associated with bid day, (e.g., Students 167, 233, 351, 366, 381, 409) and joining a particular Greek organization (e.g., Students 188, 245, 429, 430). Going through the rush and bid process “was very long and stressful” (Student 280) but culminated in students being “beyond excited” (Student 245). One student wrote about this process:

In the past week I have witnessed many new changes to my daily schedule. Some have been great, while others weren’t so appealing. One of the most exciting things that happened to me was bid day. When I opened up that envelope to see that I was a Delta Zeta my excitement for my next four years here at UK exploded. Walking up to the “DZ” house made me feel like it was truly a home away from home... When I found out I was a delta zeta, it was such an exciting time for me that a lot of what happened was a blur... with her soft voice [the sorority president] told (my pledge sisters and me) how excited she was to finally meet us... J. Doe made me feel home when she said “we love our new turtles and are so excited to see you.” (Student 322)

Participation in the University’s Greek system was important to students because fraternities and sororities provided students “a great way to meet people and make new

friendships” (Student 188) early in their first semesters. One student wrote about various things Greek membership offered:

(The fraternity brothers) all talked about the great intermurals [*sic*] I would be apart [*sic*] of and all the academic achievement [*sic*] they could help me make. They also offered their help to me if I wanted to get involved in student government or any other organizations on campus. (Student 149)

The Greek system also allowed students to make connections to home and feel more confident about traveling their first semester away from home. One student explained:

The best event that happened to me this week was when the new members of Theta went to the Theta house one night for dinner. I have been craving a home cooked meal since I have been here. I got my “big” named J. Doe and she was who I was hoping to get. We were both very excited and she said she was so happy to have me as her Theta baby! I found out that J. Doe actually lives very close to me back home but neither of us knew that! I think she will help make my experience at UK even better. (Student 248)

The University of Kentucky Athletic Association provided students opportunities to further connect themselves to the UK community.

UK athletics. Twelve (16.2%) “Campus” events from TP-1 were coded as “UK athletics.” Students expressed excitement during the initial weeks of their first year by proclaiming their pride over the UK football team’s victory over the Louisville Cardinals, the team’s in-state rival (Students 196, 187, 239, 244). While watching the game one student and his friends “cheered of no reason sometimes and (were) caught up in school spirit, which is easy when you go to UK” (Student 187). Students also “went and supported the Cats... [and] sat in the student section and cheered” (Student 234) at other sporting events (e.g., volleyball) despite them not being as widely popular as football. One student wrote, “I must admit before (the UK-Louisville) game I wasn’t a big fan of volleyball. Students also settled into their academic lives during the fall semester’s initial weeks.

Academic. A total of 18 (9.3%) best, school events were coded as “Academic” during TP-1. Events coded as “Academic” related to students finding elation in some aspect of their coursework during the first-semester. The best, school theme “Academic” produced four sub-themes during TP-1: “Workload” (n = 7, 38.9%), “Classroom success” (n = 4, 22.2%), “Finding help” (n = 4, 22.2%), and “Schedule” (n = 3, 16.7%).

Workload. Seven (38.9%) “Academic” events from TP-1 were coded as “Workload.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, students began to realize what being successful in college required and felt good about completing work (e.g., Students 225, 254, 347, 365). One student wrote:

The best event that happened to me this week was last night. I spent about 2 or 3 hours studying in my dorm room. It made me feel accomplished and like I was going to do well in all my classes because I was taking time to work on them... [My roommate and I] decided together that we would use this time to be quiet and finish all of our homework, read, and study. So we were both willing to wait for the fun and more interesting activities we could've done until our school work [sic] was done. Which is something important to both of us. My roommate said we should go ahead and do our homework now so we aren't awake really late tonight. This was predictable because school and homework is [sic] her top priority. (Student 347)

It was a relief for one student to get through the first week of classes:

The best feeling I've had recently was the sense of relief I felt after the first week of classes. I wasn't feeling really worried about starting college, but I was a little anxious. After sitting through my first few classes, seeing what they were all about, and learning my way around campus a little bit, I felt 10x better about my current situation. So far I love all of my teachers, and there is no one class that I'm worried about. (Student 427)

Students' worries about succeeding in college academically were also alleviated when they received a good grade early in their first semester.

Classroom success. Four (22.2%) “Academic” events from TP-1 were coded as “Classroom success.” Receiving a good grade during the initial weeks of their first year

made students realize they could find and enjoy success in their academics. One student explained:

The best event that occurred to me this week was the 96% I got on my first biology quiz. This was the first quiz or test I have taken [*sic*] in college and I was concerned on how to prepare for it. I studied everything I had to study: books, notes, and Blackboard lecture. Receiving the grade after made all the hard work seem so worth it. Now with the first test and a good grade under my belt, makes me feel a little more confident for my first semester of college! It was a standard, huge confident boost in my self-esteem. (Student 217)

Locating assistance was another academic related aspect of the first weeks of students' fall semester.

Finding help. Four (22.2%) "Academic" events from TP-1 were coded as "Finding help." During the initial weeks of their first semester, several students realized that they did not have to face their academic workloads alone and located assistance from friends (Student 423), tutors (Student 106), and The Study, a University service located in the campus' main library (Students 193, 213). One student wrote:

It was worth the time because I was able to finish all my work and receive a good grade on the homework. Next time I need help I am sure I will go to The Study. My tutor was amazing. She taught and re-taught the material until I had it down pat. (Students 213)

Several students also realized they could enjoy aspects of their academic schedules during the fall semester's initial weeks.

Schedule. Three (16.7%) "Academic" events from TP-1 were coded as "Schedule." These three students found themselves enjoying a particular class (Student 226) or their overall class schedule (Students 179, 229). A positive experience with one's classes resulted in one student becoming more interested in a potential major:

The best experience that I've had during the past week has been in my Political Science class. It isn't so much the class itself, it is more because of the instructor. He ran around the room when he told his story, making class exciting. Instead of

my mind wandering, I was focused on what he talked about... He has even made me reconsider what my major will be in a couple of years... He said curse words, keeping everyone enthralled. His lecture wasn't predictable by any means, making the class that more exciting. (Student 226)

Students were also excited about beginning their college careers and lives, which was unique to beginning their first semester.

Starting. A total of 15 best, school events (7.8%) were coded as “Starting” during TP-1. This theme was exclusively associated with TP-1 and did not produce any sub-themes. Students anticipated embarking on their collegiate lives and careers and had “waited for that day for so long” (Student 342). They realized that starting college represented the beginning of “life on (their) own” (Student 404), and the first day on campus “was a first step in learning how college was and what to expect for at least the next four years” (Student 274). Upon arrival, they saw “students everywhere, all types of ages, ethnic backgrounds, races, etc.” (Student 395). One wrote, “My eyes where [*sic*] opened to so many new things. New friends, new home, and new ways of learning. It has become one of the best experiences of my life” (Student 137).

Students would no longer “have to worry about curfew or (their) parents’ nagging” (Student 274), and some felt a sense of independence and maturity. One wrote, “I feel more independent and I am proud to be in college. I’m making my family proud” (Student 137). Starting college made one student feel “good to start (his) path to (his) dreams and aspirations” (Student 377), and another wrote, “I have enjoyed my freedom and opportunity to take on higher responsibilities. I have learned that I can face challenges and deal well with independence and freedom” (Student 405). Despite starting college being a best, school event, it was “bittersweet” (Student 412) as well.

Several students had mixed emotions about the experience and noted the emotional impact of leaving home. One wrote, “You could tell how proud [my mom] was by the glow of her bright white teeth which stood out often... (Moving in) was a great day, but it was very hard to see them go” (Student 271). Another wrote “I was very excited to start off the year but sad missing my family and friends” (Student 341). Similar to the mixed emotions students felt, their family members also had similar reactions:

My mom and sister were both very worried, excited and sad. They were excited for me to be going to a new school in a new place, but very sad that I was leaving. They both cried when they went back home. (Student 341)

While starting college evoked mixed emotions for some students, several other themes emerged related to best, home events.

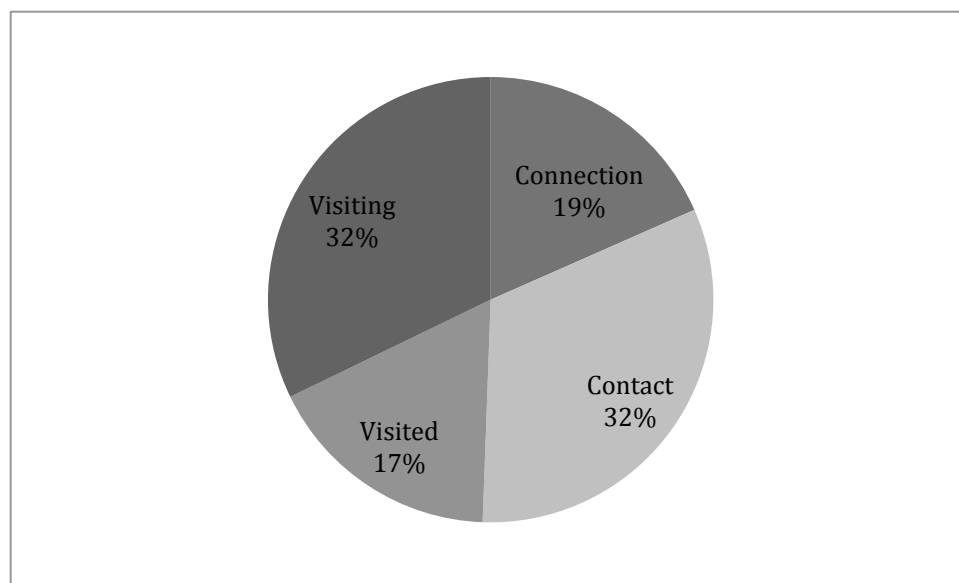
Best, home events. A total of 87 (15.9%) TP-1 events were coded as best, home events. As shown in Figure 4.10 and Table 4.10, of these 32.2% (n = 28) were coded as “Contact,” 32.2% (n = 28) as “Visiting,” 18.4% (n = 16) as “Connection,” and 17.2% (n = 15) as “Visited.”

Contact. A total of 28 (32.3%) best, home events were coded as “Contact” during TP-1. Events coded as “Contact” related to students having contact with home without returning home or being visited at UK by someone from home. The best, home theme “Contact” produced three sub-themes during TP-1: “Seeing, doing” (n = 14, 50%), “Receiving something” (n = 11, 39.3%), and “Talking to, hearing from” (n = 3, 10.7%).

Seeing, doing. Fourteen (50%) “Contact” events from TP-1 were coded as “Seeing, doing.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, these events included students: (a) going to an amusement park (Student 130); (b) watching football (Students

136, 199); (c) hunting (Students 103, 212); (d) riding motorcycles (Student 396); (e) golfing (Student 265), and (f) going to the lake (Students 232, 232). One student wrote about spending time with her son, which she described as “the most fun I’ve had all week” (Student 252). Students were also able to connect to home by receiving gifts and other material items.

Figure 4.10
TP-1 best, home themes



Receiving something. Eleven (39.3%) “Contact” events from TP-1 were coded as “Receiving something.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, these events related to students receiving: (a) a cell phone (Student 109); (b) a package (Student 118); (c) a moped (Student 176); (d) a picture of the family dog (Student 176); (e) brownies (Student 183); (f) a camera lens (Student 263); (g) money (Student 276); (h) a laptop (Student 361, 398); (i) a new car (Student 367); and (j) a letter (Student 391). Items that were more personal in nature (e.g., letter, package) and/or surprises seemed to have a bigger impact. One student explained the meaning of receiving a surprise letter:

I was so surprised and happy to find it that it made me cry... I called her right after and she was very excited and happy to talk to me... My friend talked about how much she missed me and told me about her experiences at college. (Student 391)

Students were also able to establish contact with home by talking to or hearing from someone from home.

Table 4.10
Summary of TP-1 best, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 87	%
Contact	28	32.2%
Seeing, doing	14	50.0%
Receiving something	11	39.3%
Talking to, hearing from	3	10.7%
Visiting	28	32.2%
Visiting home	25	89.3%
Visiting friend(s)	3	10.7%
Connection	16	18.4%
Doing things	11	68.8%
Running into	5	31.3%
Visited	15	17.2%
Visited by girl/boyfriend	7	46.7%
Visited by friend(s)	6	40.0%
Visited by family	2	13.3%

Talking to, hearing from. Three (10.7%) “Contact” events from TP-1 were coded as “Talking to, hearing from.” One student found comfort in receiving a call from her best friend during the initial weeks of her first semester as a college student:

He just told me how things were going in my hometown and that he missed me and couldn’t wait to see me over the weekend. This meant so much to me because he doesn’t really express much emotion when it comes to our relationship... I hadn’t seen him since I moved to Lexington. So actually hearing his voice meant a lot to me and made my week better. (Student 161)

Additional TP-1 best, home events were related to students returning home or visiting friends at other institutions.

Visiting. A total of 28 (32.2%) best, home events were coded as “Visiting” during TP-1. Events coded as “Visiting” related to students leaving the UK campus to visit home or someone from home. The best, home theme “Visiting” produced two sub-themes during TP-1: “Visiting home” (n = 25, 89.3%) and “Visiting friend(s)” (n = 3, 10.7%).

Visiting home. Twenty-five (89.3%) “Visiting” events from TP-1 were coded as “Visiting home.” Going home during the initial weeks of their first semester allowed students to go home for the first time in weeks or a month (e.g., Student 275) and talk about their new lives as colleges students (e.g., Students 120, 138). One student wrote:

My mom and I spent a lot of time in the evenings talking about college. We took the time to figure out why it is that I’ve yet to make any friends. Going home was a refreshing break from this new stressful life at UK. Everything was the same! (Student 138)

Several students wrote about the emotions associated with these visits home early in their first semesters (e.g. Students 156, 243) and the love and affection they were shown from family members (e.g., Students 120, 243). One student wrote:

I got to see everyone and catch up as well as sleep in my own bed. It was good to go home because I missed them all a lot... They all said how much they missed me and how different everything was now that I’m no longer there. I knew they would all say these things but I did not think they would be as sad as they were. (Student 164)

Students were also able to receive advice and support from people at home during visits during the initial weeks of their first semester as college students (e.g., Students 138, 402). One student wrote:

When I went home not only did my boyfriend tell me that everything was going to be okay, but my family also made me feel more confident and I was able to come back to UK feeling relieved and ready to work. (Student 402)

Finally, going home allowed students to enjoy and partake in things related to home that they missed while at college while being excited for future visits (e.g., Students 120, 159, 164). One student wrote:

I loved spending time with my family and getting a few home cooked meals. One night me and my mom sat out on the back porch swing and talked for hours [about] anything and everything. It was great being back home and I loved being able to sleep in my own bed. I also loved being back at my home church and listening to a great preacher...I can't wait until this weekend to do it all over again! (Student 159)

Visiting friend(s). Three (10.7%) “Visiting” events were coded as “Visiting friend(s).” Nothing about these three events was unique during the initial weeks of students first semester. Students also wrote about interacting with fellow University of Kentucky students from their hometown.

Connection. A total of 16 (18.4%) best, home events were coded as “Connection” during TP-1. Events coded as “Connection” related to student connecting with other UK students from home while on campus. The best, home theme “Connection” produced two sub-themes during TP-1: “Doing things” (n = 11, 68.8%) and “Running into” (n = 5, 31.3%).

Doing things. Eleven (68.8%) “Connection” events from TP-1 were coded as “Doing things.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, these events allowed students to maintain bonds and strengthen bonds with fellow UK classmates. Students also discussed the benefits of hanging out with older students from home that attended UK. One student wrote:

The first weekend that I moved in, me and two of my friends hung out every night and got to experience life on campus. We went over to an older friend’s house off campus, and hung out with him and his roommates. It was a blast because I knew most of the guys from high school, and they were all really cool and welcomed us in. (Student 270)

Another wrote, “Since I arrived on campus (my sister’s friend) has really been a great influence on me... We were acquainted before school started, but getting to know him has made me feel I have gained another brother” (Student 158). Even minor events with high school friends had a larger impact:

(Having coffee) wasn’t anything special, I just felt closer to them and a little bit more grown up... We all had good conversations about moving away from home, what we wanted to do with our lives, and what we each wanted out of this college experience.” (Student 337)

Students were also able to make a connection to home when they ran into fellow students from home who attend the University of Kentucky.

Running into. Five (31.3%) “Connection” events from TP-1 were coded as “Running into.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, these events related to students coincidentally running into familiar faces from home on the UK campus. One student wrote:

Yesterday I was walking to get my football tickets, alone, I’m always alone. Then out of nowhere I hear someone yell my name and I look up to see one of my best friends from high school, who is a junior here now. We talked for a while and made plans to meet up for dinner. This really meant a lot to me, because every meal that I’ve eaten here has been by myself... It was really great to actually have someone company for once. (Student 247)

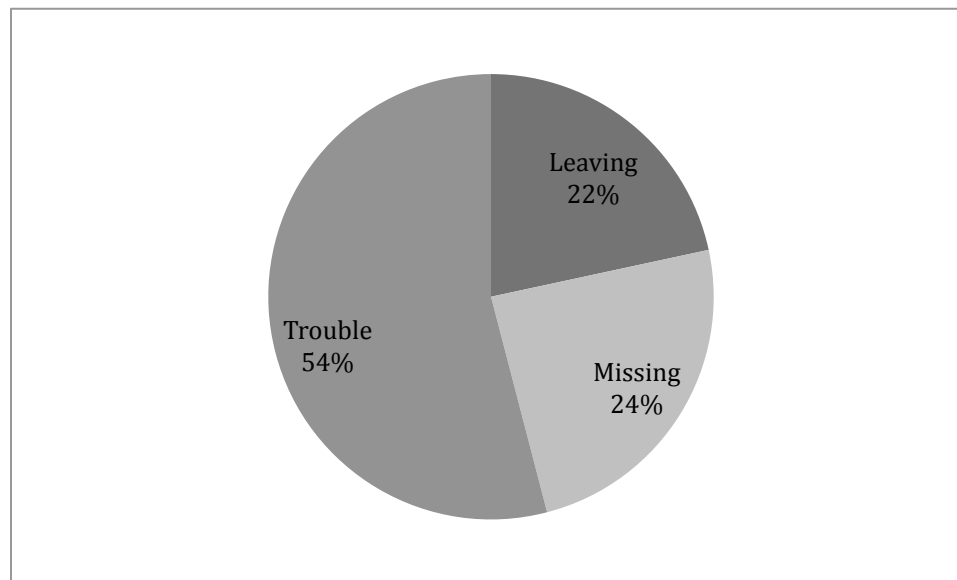
Visited. A total of 15 (17.2%) best, home events were coded as “Visited” during TP-1. Events coded as “Visited” related to students receiving visits from a person or people from home. The best, home theme “Visited” produced three sub-themes during TP-1: “Visited by girl/boyfriend” (n = 7, 46.7%), “Visited by friend(s)” (n = 6, 40%), and “Visited by family” (n = 2, 13.3%). During the initial weeks of their first semester, these visits related to students receiving support (e.g., Student 113, 379). One student noted the distance that going off to college created between her and her boyfriend and that “it’s

the first time (they've) ever been this far apart" (Student 160). Several of the visits from others were surprises (e.g., Student 172, 251, 258, 324). Students wrote additional stories about home that were perceived as being negative.

Worst, home events. A total of 37 (6.8%) TP-1 events were coded as worst, home events. As shown in Figure 4.11 Table 4.11, of these, 54.1% (n = 20) were coded as "Trouble," 24.3% (n = 9) as "Missing," and 21.6% (n = 8) as "Leaving."

Figure 4.11

TP-1 worst, home themes



Trouble. A total of 20 (54.1%) worst, home events were coded as "Trouble" during TP-1. Events coded as "Trouble" related to students being concerned about home or someone from home, experiencing problems at home or with someone from home, or receiving bad news about someone from home. The worst, home theme "Trouble" produced four sub-themes during TP-1: "Illness, injury, death" (n = 9, 45%), "Bad news" (n = 8, 40%), "Inconveniences" (n = 2, 10%), and "Argument" (n = 1, 5%). While several of these events made students worry about people from home, the content of

“Trouble” did not contain any unique characteristics related to the initial weeks of students’ first semester. However, the first few weeks of being away from home made several students miss their families, friends, and significant others.

Table 4.11

Summary of TP-1 worst, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 37	%
Trouble	20	54.1%
Illness, injury, death	9	45%
Bad news	8	40%
Inconveniences	2	10%
Argument	1	5%
Missing	9	24.3%
Leaving	8	21.6%
Leaving home, starting college	8	100%

Missing. A total of nine (24.3%) worst, home events from TP-1 were coded as “Missing.” During the initial weeks of their first semester, these events related to students missing home, being unable to talk to a boyfriend (Student 109), or see a loved one while home (Students 123, 161, 497). Most of these events were related to students being homesick (Students 118, 136, 344, 384, 400, 407). Specifically, students wrote about seeing others go home early in the semester when the student could not, being homesick during the first nights away from home, and adapting to living in Lexington.

One student wrote:

The worst event this past week was watching everyone go home to visit their families this weekend and I was stuck on campus because I live 6 hours away. I was homesick and jealous of everyone who got to go home. I was stuck alone in my dorm. Everyone who went home this weekend factored into my gloom. I watched kids get packed up & picked up by their families to go home, they were all so excited. Each person walked out of their dorm building with a smile on their face because they got to go home. They were lucky to see family and their pets. (Student 123)

Another wrote:

The worst event that happened to me in the past few weeks was how homesick I was the first few nights here. It was rough for me to go from having my boyfriend, best friends, and family all around me to have them be 2 hours away. It doesn't seem like much, but it feels like forever at times. The worst night was one night when my roommate was gone and I was alone in the room for the night. It was all I could think about. I feel much better now though! (Student 400)

Another wrote:

One of the worst events over the past week was when I was homesick last week. Coming from a very small hometown, I'm used to knowing everyone. But at UK, it's a different story. Even though I'm very talkative once you get to know me, I seem quite shy at first, so it's hard to make friends. (Student 136)

Several students wrote about moving out of their parents' homes and away from their hometowns.

Leaving. A total of 8 (21.6%) worst, home events were coded as "Leaving" during TP-1. Events coded as "Leaving" related to students leaving family members or others from home. The worst, home theme "Leaving" produced one sub-theme during TP-1: "Leaving home, starting college" (n = 8, 100%).

Leaving home, starting college. Eight (100%) "Leaving" events from TP-1 were coded as "Leaving home, starting college." This "Leaving" subtheme was unique to the initial weeks of students' first semester and resulted in students having "to say goodbye to the 'pampered' life of a high schooler" (Student 404). Despite students' parents and other family members being "proud of... happy for... and excited for" their first-year college students "they'd miss (them) so so much" (Student 378), and "parents were very sad at the fact that (they were) leaving them" (Student 262). Saying goodbye for one student took "a while. No tears were shed [*sic*] but (he) knew they would miss (him), and (he) them" (Student 412). Not everyone was able to hold his or her composure. One

student wrote, “My younger brother was crying, so was my mom” (Student 403) and another that his little brother was “extremely distressed” when he had left home and was “gone for whole weeks without coming back” (Student 134). For another student:

This event was unpleasant because (he) left several good friends to go away to college, and the fear that the friendships will never be the same because of the distance. The goodbyes were predictably sad, however, the line of communication is still open and (he) hope(s) to keep these bonds.” (Student 401)

Another student described leaving home as:

It takes a lot of getting used to and it is very hard to see my parents drive away, even though they are not to [sic] far away. Even though it is sad to say goodbye to my family, it is a good opportunity to become an adult and independent. My parents, although they miss me dearly, are very supportive and we keep in constant contact via texting, phone calls, and Skype chats. (Student 413)

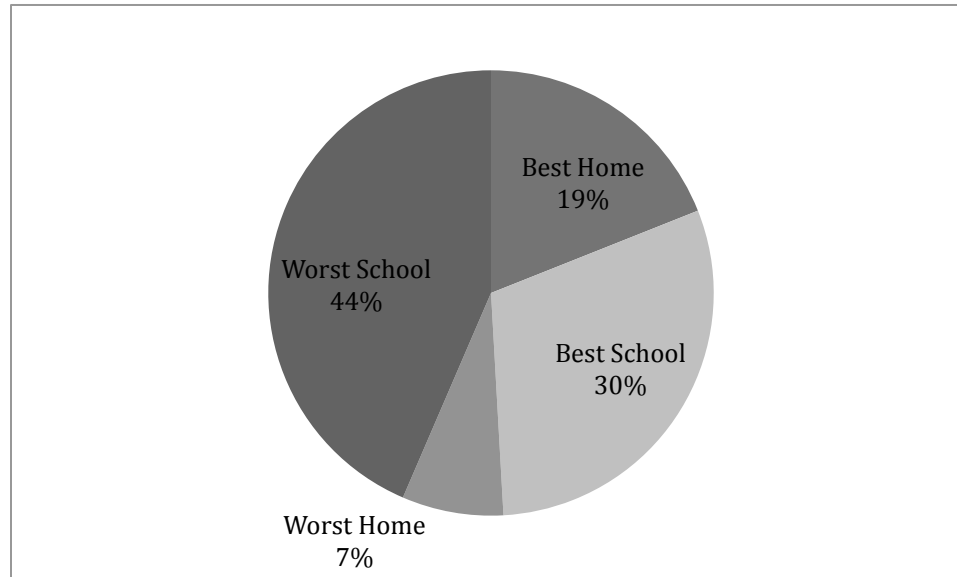
After leaving home and beginning college, students found out during the initial weeks of their first semester that factors of their new lives at college resulted in them being distressed.

Time Period Two

Free-writes for TP-2 (N = 448) were collected from October 4-8 and represent the midterm period of students’ first semester in college. Of these, 195 (43.5%) were associated with worst, school events, 135 (30.1%) with best, school events, 85 (19%) with best, home events, and 33 (7.4%) with worst, home events (see Figure 4.12 and Table 4.12). By examining the total number and content of events coded under each of TP-2’s associations, themes, and sub-themes, one may better understand how students perceived the middle of their first semester as college students.

Figure 4.12

TP-2 events by association



Worst, school events. A total of 195 (43.5%) TP-2 events were coded as worst, school events. As shown in Figure 4.13 and Table 4.13, of these, 57.4% (n = 112) were coded as “Living,” 37.9% (n = 74) as “Academic,” and 4.6% (n = 9) as “Navigation.”

Living. A total of 112 (57.4%) worst, school events from TP-2 were coded as “Living” during TP-2. Events coded as “Living” related to students struggling in some aspect of their lives as college students outside the classroom. The worst, school theme “Living” produced nine sub-themes during TP-2: “Physical” (n = 31, 27.7%), “Social life, network” (n = 19, 17%), “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)” (n = 18, 16.1%), “Inconveniences” (n = 17, 15.2%), “UK athletics” (n = 12, 10.8%), “Doing something alone” (n = 8, 7.1%), “Other” (3, 2.7%), “Financial” (n = 2, 1.8%), and “Greek life” (n = 2, 1.8%).

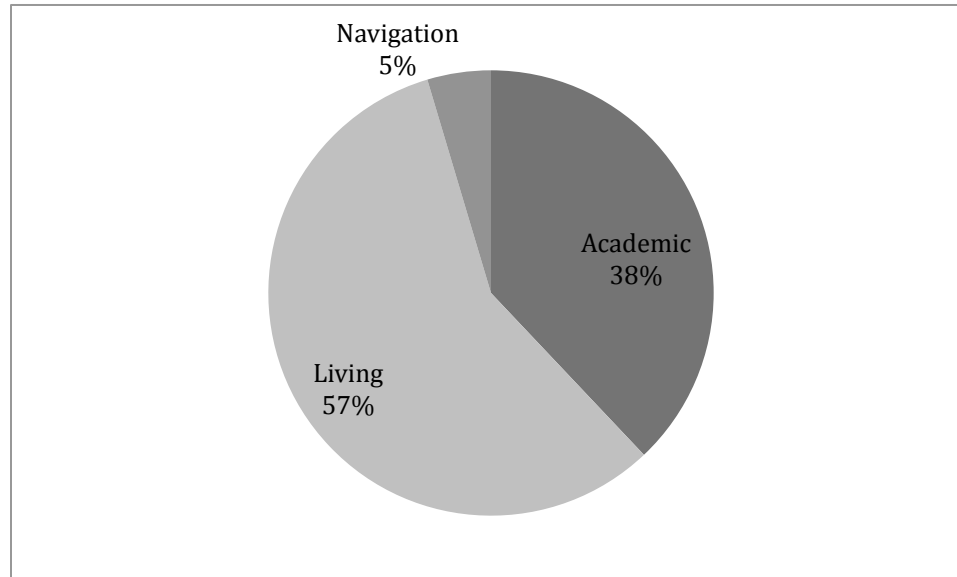
Table 4.12
Summary of TP-2 events

Total Events	N = 448	%
Worst, school events	195	43.5%
Academic	74	37.9%
Living	112	57.4%
Navigation	9	4.6%
Best, school events	135	30.1%
Academic	26	19.3%
Campus	47	34.8%
Living	62	45.9%
Best, home events	85	19%
Connection	4	4.7%
Contact	23	27.1%
Visited	21	24.7%
Visiting	37	43.5%
Worst, home events	33	7.4%
Leaving	4	12.1%
Missing	5	15.2%
Trouble	24	72.7%

Physical. Thirty-one (27.7%) “Living” events were from TP-2 coded as “Physical.” Being sick (e.g. Students 155, 215, 220, 252, 341, 279, 395, 402, 406) or injured (e.g., Students 229, 275, 366) was not only a physical problem but caused greater issues for some students in and out of the classroom. One wrote, “I hate being ill because it hinders all the activities I take part in, whether it is eating, sleeping, or paying attention in class. Everything becomes just a little bit worse and normal daily activities turn into nuncences [*sic*]” (Student 158).

Figure 4.13

TP-2 worst, school themes



Students also wrote about physical problems related to being tired (Students 130, 178) or receiving a lack of sleep around midterm (Students 153, 159). One student “had so much homework lately that (she had) been staying up all night, most nights” (Student 178), and another “was super tired and found it hard to stay awake in most of (her) classes” (Student 159). For some students, getting sick was the result of stress and/or a lack of sleep related to their school workloads (e.g., Students 215, 384). One student explained:

I got hardly any sleep the past weekend because I was running around so much and I was exhausted to the point of getting sick. As soon as classes were over yesterday I raced back to my room and immediately fell asleep. I felt shakey [*sic*] and weak and all I wanted was my bed. It made me feel much better once I got my 3½ hour nap in! (Student 384)

Other students contacted someone from home when they became ill (e.g., 154, 215). One wrote:

I decided this was brought on by a lack of sleep, which I have been trying to regain, but between all the work an constant activities, it has been hard to do so I called my mom, which is what I do every time I have a problem and she gave me a doctors [*sic*] name and number. With her help, I was then able to call and schedule a doctors [*sic*] appointment with the hopes of feeling better. (Student 215)

Table 4.13

Summary of TP-2 worst, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 195	%
Living	112	57.4%
Physical	31	27.7%
Social life, network	19	17%
Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)	18	16.1%
Inconveniences	17	15.2%
UK athletics	12	10.8%
Doing something alone	8	7.1%
Other	3	2.7%
Financial	2	1.8%
Greek life	2	1.8%
Academic	74	37.9%
Workload	41	55.4%
Bad grade(s)	19	25.7%
Stressed, overwhelmed	11	14.9%
Schedule	3	4.1%
Navigation	9	4.6%
Missed class	6	66.7%
Parking, driving, walking	2	22.2%
Late to, waking up late for class	1	11.1%

Being sick around midterm of their first semester caused some students to worry about falling behind:

I hope that once I am completely over the illness it will not come back. With midterms just around the corner I do not want to be ill. I have a lot of preparing to do for exams and I am starting to get nervous about taking them. Between ROTC commitments, class, and homework I have not had much time to spend preparing for these exams. Hopefully this weekend I will be able to catch up on some studying and much needed sleep. (Student 220)

Students also wrote about aspects of their social lives that they perceived as the worst event that occurred in the weeks around midterm.

Social life, network. Nineteen (17%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Social life, network.” Events during the time around midterm included: (a) breaking up with a girl/boyfriend (Students 361, 287); (b) experiencing situations that involved the police (Student 169, 241, 289); (c) dealing with drinking incidents (Students 135, 428); (d) having social life take time from studying (Students 218, 362); (e) being called out for using the n-word (Student 182); (f) having a friend get robbed and beat up (Student 132); and (g) being in charge of a group of friends (Student 330). Students also encountered problems during the time around midterm with their roommates or neighbors and living in University housing.

Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s). Eighteen (16.1%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s).” Events related to living in University housing included: (a) having no warm water in the showers (Student 268); (b) losing electricity (Student 176); (c) dealing with broken elevators (Student 350); (d) carrying lots of clothes to one’s dorm room (Student 123); (e) getting locked out (Student 364); and (f) being fined for the dorm alcohol policy (Student 426). Several students wrote about having roommate issues (e.g., arguments, feeling left out, not getting along with, them being inconsiderate) (Students 133, 189, 223, 267, 270, 317, 329, 341, 357, 379, 406). One student wrote:

Once I got home last night around 11 o’clock, I felt even more left out because my roommate was gone. It was kind of aggravating because I never know where he is at [*sic*]. Multiple times in the last week he has gone home to Louisville on weeknights and stayed the night there. Not once has he told me where he was going and I have to find out from someone else. (Student 270)

Another wrote:

My roommate greeted me as I entered my room with his usual “s’up bud,” left, and I came in to the room to find all my stuff either thrown about or destroyed and the place a pit. I wanted to stab him too. Not really, but you know what I mean. (Student 406)

Students also dealt with untimely issues during the time around their first semester in college.

Inconveniences. Seventeen (15.2%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Inconveniences.” During the time around midterm of their first semester, students had to deal with issues related to things not working properly: (a) bikes (Students 272, 396, 423); (b) phones (Students 172, 248); (c) computers (Student 243); (d) chargers (Student 183); and (e) automobiles (Student 145, 382). Students also wrote about: (a) locking keys in their cars (Students 136, 217, 227); (b) losing wallets (Students 230, 351); (c) being in a car accident (Student 138); (d) having debris blown on one’s self (Student 400); and (e) walking in the rain (Student 358). Several students noted that they contacted home for assistance when dealing with these inconveniences (e.g., Students 138, 217, 382).

UK athletics. Twelve (10.8%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “UK athletics.” Events included: (a) UK losing a football game (Students 190, 239, 273, 274); (b) standing in line or camping out for tickets (Students 214, 342); and (c) not getting tickets (Student 255). These events related to students’ school spirit and emotional attachment to the University’s athletic teams. One wrote, “[Losing] the game put me in a bad mood for most of the day on Saturday and it makes me mad thinking about it... As

long as our team gets better, there should not be anymore problems.” Another described it as:

The worst thing that happened to me was the walk back from the football game. UK ended up losing so me and my friends just walked back to our dorm in silence. We were all sad and wished the game had turned out different.” (Student 239)

Student athletes wrote about their: (a) busy schedule (Student 410); (b) frustrating practice (Student 188); (c) tough workout (Student 425); (d) poor tryout performance (Student 143); and (e) inability to go home until Christmas (314). Other students wrote about being alone or negative things happening to them around midterm as their worst event.

Doing something alone. Eight (7.1%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Doing something alone.” Students wrote about: (a) experiencing clumsy moments (e.g., dropping a plate in the cafeteria, falling down the steps or when walking) (Students 312, 334, 420); (b) being pulled over and taken in (Student 348); (c) experiencing bad weather at the World Equestrian Games (Student 373); and (d) getting mugged (Student 424). Two students wrote about being alone and/or having nothing to do (Students 367, 391).

One had nothing to do on a weekend and used the time to study and another wrote:

There was nobody on our floor so it was eerily quiet and boring. There was nothing going on that night and nobody to hangout with in my dorm so I sat in my room all night and hated every minute of it. (Student 391)

Three students wrote about events that could not be coded as another “Living” sub-theme.

Other. Three (2.7%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Other.” One wrote about a series of campus robberies that happened on campus during the time around midterm. She wrote:

The worst event that panned was a few weeks ago when we were having a series of robberies. They were happening in various locations and it was frightening all of the students. The reporters said that the first two involved two African American males and the last one involved a Caucasian male. It was very unpredictable and scared all of the students on campus. (Student 246)

A pair of students wrote about negatives that happened in their financial lives during the time around midterm of their first semester.

Financial. Two (1.8%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Financial.”

One student lost \$100 in the student parking lot (Student 398), and the other overdrew her checking account (Student 352). She vowed that it will “not happen again” and “will make sure of it” (Student 352).

Greek life. Two (1.8%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Greek life.”

One student was late to a sorority meeting (Student 165); the other had to wake up early for a pledge test (Student 279). Students also discussed academic aspects of their lives when writing about the time around midterm of their first semester as college students.

Academic. A total of 74 (37.9%) worst, school events were coded as “Academic” during TP-2. Events coded as “Academic” related to students being bothered by or frustrated with some aspect of their coursework. The worst, school theme “Academic” produced four sub-themes during TP-2: “Workload” (n = 41, 55.4%), “Bad grade(s)” (n = 19, 25.7%), “Stressed, overwhelmed” (n = 11, 14.9%), and “Schedule” (n = 3, 4.1%).

Workload. Forty-one (55.4%) “Academic” events from TP-2 were coded as “Workload.” The time around midterm resulted in students facing increased workloads with which they had to cope. Students wrote about: (a) managing a heavy workload (e.g., Students 186, 283, 378); (b) failing to do work (e.g. Students 126, 331, 406, 427); (c) experiencing late nights or long hours studying (e.g., Students 201, 260, 266, 347, 372);

(d) dealing with exams (e.g., Students 149, 162, 290); and (e) preparing for or delivering speeches (e.g., Students 201, 260, 266, 347). One student's narrative captured the overall experience:

Even though (my exam) does not happen until tonight, it has completely screwed up my entire week. My friends and I have spent every free moment we could in order to study for this exam. Sadly, just this one exam has caused me to neglect much of my work from other classes and I still have just a slight grasp on the material. It is by far the hardest class I am taking right now and I am feeling overwhelmed because of it... if I can make it through just this one exam, I believe I will be able to stick it out for the rest of the semester. It all depends on this one exam. (Student 162)

Students anticipated "absolute killer weeks... [and] started to worry and became very anxious" (Student 263) during the time around midterm. This workload related to quizzes, homework assignments, exams, and speeches, and students noted increasing amounts. "Although the homework is doable, it's really beginning to pile up" wrote one student (Student 408). When reacting to a difficult assignment, one student commented, "It was the hardest thing ever. I hated it. I couldn't understand any of it. It was terrible!!!" (Student 235).

Some students struggled to manage everything at this point in their collegiate careers, which required a student to take six straight hours of notes (Student 389) and another to study "20 hours per day on average" (Student 372). One student described three exams and a speech in one week (Student 378) and another wrote:

I'm still getting used to college so the load of a major paper and computer science test is quite a lot, especially for someone who never had to study in high school. But I guess I will have to tough it out for now. (Student 283)

Other students were not as attentive to their work as others. Students wrote about procrastinating (e.g., Student 331), getting behind (e.g., Students 129, 406), or being unmotivated (e.g., Student 427) around midterm, and at least one student forgot about an

assignment (e.g., Student 277) and disappointed classmates (Student 415). One wrote, “I procrastinated on a homework assignment and had to stay up really late. It was an extremely stressful time and just not any fun” (Student 331). For some, the first experience with a college midterm made them realize they needed to distribute their study time differently. One student wrote:

I thought that I knew the material but once I got to the exam I felt like everything went out of my head. I couldn't remember everything I needed to. I believe it is because I focused so much on anatomy that I didn't spend as much time studying for chemistry like I should have. (Student 370)

The time around midterm resulted in several students writing about staying up late or needing long periods of time to study.

Overnighters and lengthy study sessions during the midterm period left students “exhausted” (Student 347) and as one student explained, “Not only do you have to do a lot of work you don't have much sleep” (Student 201). Another student “was in the library for so long and just wanted to go to sleep” (Student 324). A lot of student time around midterm of their first semester in college was spent studying for, thinking about, and taking exams.

Students spent considerable time studying for and agonizing over midterm exams.

One student described the midterm experience as:

All week I have been at the library studying for my computer science test on Wednesday. When I have been studying for this I feel like I am getting nothing accomplished because there is so much information that could be on the test. Once I take the test I have to immediately start studying again for my CIS 110 class. This test should be much easier because I have had a lot more experience with the information in this class. While studying I have found it useful to study with someone... This studying has helped me because he can explain things I don't know... Studying for these tests has been the worst thing about the last week because I have been at the library late every night and not getting much sleep. (Student 149)

Another student wrote

I spent copious amounts of time on Monday afternoon and Tuesday preparing for the test. Yet when it came time to take it today, I didn't feel as prepared as I originally thought I was. I had difficulty explaining and supporting my answers on the essays and therefore don't feel confident in my work. (Student 290)

Studying for and taking midterms was stressful for students (e.g., Students 152, 282, 331, 374) who also stressed over and spent a lot of time preparing for speeches around midterm.

The experience of “work(ing) on speeches all week” was “stressful” (Student 203) and left students “nervous and anxious to get the speech over with” (Student 374). Despite working so diligently on preparing a good speech, the delivery experience was “terrifying” (Student 392). One wrote, “It was so embarrassing but I have a really hard time controlling my emotions when I'm nervous. I felt as if the whole class was looking at me like I was crazy” (Student 375). Another student “predict(ed) it (was) going to be awful” (Student 199), while one was “very worried (she) (would) Rush (her) speech and not meet the time requirements” (Student 232). Several students wrote about giving speeches in their Composition and Communication I classes for which they provided free-writes (i.e., CIS 110: Composition and Communication I) (e.g., Students 194, 196, 199, 203, 232). One student “spent most of the day yesterday working on this speech” and “messed up several times” (Student 194) while another delivering a speech after completion of her narrative wrote, “Let's just cross fingers I do well” (Student 196). Students could hope for the best, but not everyone was satisfied with their grades at the time around midterm of their first semester.

Bad grade(s). Nineteen (25.7%) “Academic” events from TP-2 were coded as “Bad grade(s).” Upon learning about these bad grades, students were “upset” (e.g.,

Students 137, 332, 354), “pretty mad” (Student 261), “very angry” (Student 354), and “disgusted” (Student 144). A student commented, that a bad grade “lowers not only your grade by also your overall self-esteem and your confidence in all the work that you do” (Student 209), and such a grade resulted in at least one student “questioning why (he) was in that class” (Student 258).

Several students had these reactions because they thought they adequately prepared for or did better on the exam or assignment in question (e.g., Students 137, 144, 209, 354). Another student wrote: “I just did a terrible job on (my math test) and I don’t know why. I was quite upset” (Student 202). Bad grades resulted from a “lack of studying” (Student 416), were “a huge letdown” (Student 209), and resulted in students learning lessons (e.g., Students 209, 212). One wrote:

All of my grades were terrible but that showed me that I really have to study harder. My time that I should spend studying, I have spent hanging out and sleeping which I should start to focus on school more. After seeing my grades I have made a promise to myself that I Will start working hard to pull my grades up. If I continue on the path I am headed the next 4 years may become a lot longer or may not happen for me. (Student 212)

Students also mentioned other characters in their narratives about bad grades, including parents, roommates, and instructors.

One student studied with and was consoled by a roommate after an exam (Student 343), and another’s roommate told her, “it is okay to learn from your mistakes and you will do better next time” (Student 403). Two students discussed instructors when writing about a bad grade. One wrote:

I was upset because my studio teacher wrote me a rather mean letter about how my work isn’t good... My studio teacher, who is usually pretty nice, which is why I was offended when she didn’t like my project and said I don’t put enough effort in (I am usually at studio until 5 a.m. mult. times a week). (Student 322)

The other wrote:

Before the exam (my professor) talked about how to prepare and I did all of it. After the exam I went to her, just to ask what I might have done wrong/where I went wrong and how to fix it for the next time and she simply made me feel like an inferior idiot for failing. (Student 179)

Only one student's narrative evolved to home:

I was very dissatisfied [*sic*]... When I told my mom, she was kind of dissatisfied [*sic*] but surprisingly wasn't mad and told me "you'll do better next time." After this I know exactly how to study for the next test. Hopefully, I will be more satisfied with the next exam grade. I asked my friends how they did. I felt a little better since they didn't do so well either. My friend J. Doe... made a 93%, so I know who I'll be studying with next time. This taught me how I should study now so even though it was my worst event of the past week, I learned from it. (Student 271)

The time around midterm left some students feeling stressed out or swamped because of schoolwork to the point that it was the focal point of their narratives, which produced their worst event during the time around midterm of their first semester.

Stressed, overwhelmed. Eleven (14.9%) "Academic" events from TP-2 were coded as "Stressed, overwhelmed." Students felt stressed about various aspects of their academic lives (Students 198, 244, 259, 319, 337, 401, 421) and overwhelmed by their coursework and studies (Students 196, 211, 245, 427). A stressed out student wrote, "All the projects are catching up with me, especially this speech, and the stress is mounting...

I am a little freaked out" (Student 401), and an overwhelmed student wrote:

I've been overwhelmed lately and I'm getting into the bad habit of forgetting school as soon as my last class gets out Friday and not thinking about it again until 9:00 Monday morning. I'm finding it hard to get motivated and am worried my grades will suffer as a result of it. I need to find a way to overcome this temporary obstacle ASAP. (Student 427)

Several students used both of the sub-themes words in their narratives (e.g., Students 245, 319). One wrote:

The worst event that happened to me is I have been extremely stressed. I have a big anatomy test coming up and it is really stressing me out to try and prepare for it while also trying to keep up with all my other classes. It makes me feel very overwhelmed, but I have great friends to keep me calm and help me study. (Student 319)

Some students were able to turn to home during these difficult times, but others could not. Several events coded under this sub-theme evolved to home. One wrote:

Stressful college life in general is killing me. My girlfriend [is] scared, alone, hates being away from me. My parents don't help, no money or emotional support. My friends are nonexistent. Basically everything since college started has led me to think that I am not where I should be and I hate that. (Student 198)

Another wrote about seeking assistance from his parents as well as managing the time around midterm of his first semester:

I have been working my butt off trying to bring up a bad grade and it just isn't working. I am up until about 2 or 3 every night studying and doing homework. Going every day on that little sleep is draining. Everyone told me that college is awesome because you make your own hours and have all the free time you want. Wrong. College is hard and I never have any free time except on the weekends. My parents try to help me manage my time but it is hard to manage your time when you don't have any time to manage. I am learning to say no to my friends when they ask me to hang out because I have work to do. College is fun and I enjoy the experience I am gaining here at UK. I have funny stories about all nighters with my friends and trying to have a study session but it turning into more of a social session. Which causes me to stay up half the night studying because I was to [sic] busy socializing to study. I have always heard that in college you sleep whenever you can. Whoever said that first was right. Sleep is very hard to come by in college and it seems like everyone is tired. Having to run on empty is hard but I am managing to do it. I don't know what I'm going to do when I get a job. (Student 211)

Students also did not enjoy various aspects of their class scheduled around midterm of their first semester.

Schedule. Three (4.1%) "Academic" events from TP-2 were coded as "Schedule."

Two students wrote about not liking a class, including one who wrote,

I don't even like going to my TA when I do have questions during his lab time. That's why I go to a different TA for advice on my work... Just the thought of [losing my scholarship] is high-risk and it makes me very angry. (Student 222)

Another student wrote about a tough day of classes:

The worst thing that has happened to me in the last week was my entire day yesterday (Tuesday). On Tuesdays, I do not get done with class until five o'clock and they are usually very frustrating. Yesterday was no exception. After class I had to go to my friend's apartment and work on homework from 5:30 to 10:30. I am extremely exhausted and stressed out because of the amount of projects and tests that I must do in the next week. Last night was even worse, however, because while I was studying, my two best friends were out partying and having a blast. I felt left out and was mad because I had a ton of work to do and they barely had any at all. I guess that the amount of work I do is the price I must pay for majoring in engineering. (Student 270)

Students also discussed issues navigational issues when writing about the time around midterm of their first semester as college students.

Navigation. A total of nine (4.6%) worst, school events were coded as "Navigation" during TP-2. Events coded as "Navigation" related to students navigating their way around campus, dealing with University bureaucracy, and managing their daily schedules. The worst, school theme "Navigation" produced three sub-themes during TP-2: "Missed class" (n = 6, 66.7%), "Parking, driving, walking" (n = 2, 22.2%), and "Late to, waking up late for class" (n = 1, 11.1%). In the events coded as "Parking, driving, walking," two students had their cars towed (Students 126, 196).

Missed class. Six (66.7%) "Navigation" events from TP-2 were coded as "Missed class." One student wrote about sleeping through class (Student 414) and another about forgetting class time (Student 207). Missing class made a student feel "very irresponsible, like a child," and when he realized it "(his) roommate could have thought a bomb was about to go off [because] (he) was freaking out and yelling when (he) looked at the clock" (Student 148). Another student vowed to not to repeat the event:

I was very disappointed at myself, as I've been trying not to do that. I don't miss classes very often because I think it's very important to go... I want to make an effort to not let it happen again. This first semester is one of the most important, and I want to get myself into good study habits and a good routine. If I do that, I'm confident I'll be ready for the harder classes in the coming years. On a related note, I'm also going to try to get more sleep if I can, so I won't be as tired in the mornings. (Student 147)

Missing class stressed one student out:

It completely stressed me out. Most students would probably put this under the best thing that happen to them this week, but I hate missing class... I love teachers that are so understanding. I hope that I never have to miss class again! It puts you so far behind and it is tough to make that kind of stuff up. It's not like high school at all... I will try my hardest to not miss class again! (Student 280)

Another student was stressed out after being late to class.

Late to, waking up late for class. One (11.1%) "Navigation" event from TP-2 was coded as "Late to, waking up late for class." The event involved a student waking up late for class, which had bigger implications during the time around midterm:

Everyone had already started by the time I had arrived and I was very stressed. The test wasn't terrible, but it was very difficult for me to focus because of my stress level. This was my worst experience because it was the time when I was the most stressed out and I had to push through it alone. I made it through though but it was a struggle to say the least. (Student 206)

Students also wrote about positive events related to the weeks around midterm of their first semester in college.

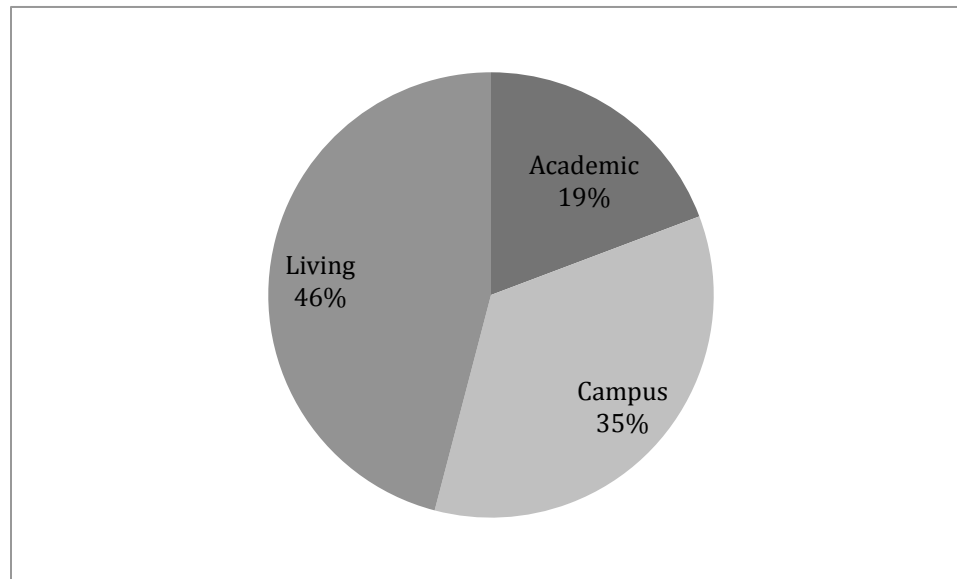
Best, school events. A total of 135 (30.1%) TP-2 events were coded as best, school events. As shown in Figure 4.14 and Table 4.14, of these 45.9% (n = 62) were coded as "Living," 34.8% (n = 47) as "Campus," and 19.3% (n = 26) as "Academic."

Living. A total of 62 (45.9%) best, school events were coded as "Living" during TP-2. Events coded as "Living" related to students maneuvering through various aspects of life as college students beyond their campus involvement and academic lives. The

best, school theme “Living” produced five sub-themes during TP-2: “Social life, network” (n = 40, 64.5%), “Doing something alone” (n = 13, 21%), “Financial” (n = 4, 6.5%), “Meeting people, making friends” (n = 4, 6.5%), and “Other” (n = 1, 1.6%).

Figure 4.14

TP-2 best, school themes



Social life, network. Forty (64.5%) “Living” events from TP-2 were coded as “Social life, network.” In addition writing narratives about doing things and going places (e.g., Students 136, 193, 206, 240, 341) with their friends around midterm, students also wrote about expanding relationships (e.g. Students 155, 218, 331). One student wrote:

I have been talking to J. Doe for a while and have slowly got in her good graces. Hopefully now this can blossom into something great. Since then things have been on the road upwards so needless to say I am optimistic. We are even hosting a movie night in my Dorm [*sic*] where hopefully I can work some magic. I guess we will just have to see where this goes. (Student 155)

Hanging out with others provided students a “stress reliever” (e.g., Students 270, 408) but also made them happy (e.g., Students 218, 362). One student wrote:

I got to hang out with a girl by the name of J. Doe. She’s in my UK 101 class and we ran into each other quite a bit over the weekend. I instantly could tell she was

a nice individual and a good girl. I saw her in Commons when I was eating with friends. I just couldn't get over how pleasant she was. So, I left my friends and went to her table. Random, but I'm glad I did. I believe she enjoyed it too. The next day we saw each other at UK 101. She initiated conversation by asking me how my weekend was. This might be a simple question, but one I believe was an invitation to feel free to talk to her. After class I walked out with her. We talked. We were both interested in maybe spending time with each other. I ask [*sic*] her what she was doing that night. She said "nothing." We exchanged numbers and went our ways. We started texting about whatever then I ask if my roommate and I could join them at Ovid's. She said "yes." So we met her and her roommate at Ovid's. We talked nonstop for an hour and a half. So many things were revealed and discovered in that one hour and 30 min. We then walked back to (ineligible) hall. This whole event went very well. I am happy. (Student 218)

Table 4.14

Summary of TP-2 best, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 135	%
Living	62	45.9%
Social life, network	40	64.5%
Doing something alone	13	21%
Financial	4	6.5%
Meeting people, making friends	4	6.5%
Other	1	1.6%
Campus	47	34.8%
UK athletics	21	44.7%
Activities, events, non-Greek organizations	15	31.9%
Greek life	11	23.4%
Academic	26	19.3%
Classroom success	18	69.2%
Workload	8	30.8%

Students also found enjoyment in doing things by themselves around midterm.

Doing something alone. Thirteen (21%) "Living" events from TP-2 were coded as "Doing something alone." During the time around midterm these events included: (a) resting (Students 139, 418); (b) getting a job (Student 250); (c) being excited about the seasonal chance (Student 392); (d) shortening a skateboarding commute (Student 173);

(e) reaching a fitness goal (Student 285); and (e) attending events alone (e.g., Students 174, 348, 373). Events related to students' finances also were written about during the time around midterm.

Financial. Four (6.5%) "Living" events from TP-2 were coded as "Financial." One student wrote about discovering she could use her University Flex Dollars at Starbucks (Student 410). Two wrote about events related to financial aid (Students 198, 379). One described himself as "a college kid who is scared beyond belief about the future," and the other was "so thrilled and relieved to have money to buy school supplies and money to buy groceries" (Student 379). Students continued to write about meeting people and making friends around midterm.

Meeting people, making friends. Four (6.5%) "Living" events from TP-2 were coded as "Meeting people, making friends." Of the four students who wrote about making acquaintances around midterm, two were of the romantic variety (Students 378, 396). The event from one's student's narrative could not be coded under any of the "Living" sub-themes.

Other. One (1.6%) "Living" event was coded as "Other." This event from this student's narrative was about how things were going well with school and in his social life and that his family and friends were supportive (Student 365). Students also wrote about positive events in their lives around midterm of their first semester related to being involved on campus.

Campus. A total of 47 (34.8%) best, school events were coded as "Campus" during TP-2. Events coded as "Campus" related to students connecting to and involving themselves with the University through various campus activities, events, and

organizations. The best, school theme “Campus” produced three sub-themes during TP-2: “UK athletics” (n = 21, 44.7%), “Activities, events, non-Greek organizations” (n = 15, 31.9%), and “Greek life” (n = 11, 23.4%).

UK athletics. Twenty-one (44.7%) “Campus” events from TP-2 were coded as “UK athletics.” Students wrote about: (a) attending (e.g., Students 141, 142, 199, 231, 239) and tailgating for (e.g., Students 196, 232) home football games; (b) traveling for road football games (e.g., Students 215, 274); and (c) receiving tickets to Big Blue Madness, an event celebrating the first practice for the women’s and men’s basketball teams (e.g., Students 273, 334, 416). Getting tickets to the event was “a big deal” because students “love UK basketball” (Student 334), and several students wrote about camping out for tickets (e.g., Students 234, 273, 342). One wrote:

We had to camp out and it was very uncomfortable, it was fun... Me, my boyfriend, and two friends were camping out from Wednesday until Saturday morning when we had to stand in line. It was very cool. I met a lot of the basketball players and Coach Cal too. (Student 273)

Student athletes wrote about beating Tennessee on their field (Student 400) and having Saturday off from football (Student 231). Students also wrote their involvement with campus event and non-Greek organizations around midterm.

Activities, events, non-Greek organizations. Fifteen (31.9%) “Campus” events from TP-2 were coded as “Activities, events, non-Greek organizations.” Events unique to the time around midterm were the Christian Student Fellowship (CSF) fall retreat (Students 158, 159, 166, 271), 80s party (Student 227), and international night (Student 222). The CSF retreat was “an amazing experience” (student 158). One student wrote, “(My friend and I) were both excited... At the end of the retreat we both would say, ‘we’re glad we came, and it changed our lives’” (Student 271), and another called it the

“greatest, most encouraging part of (her) week.” Students also wrote about attending on-campus movies (Students 229, 414, 428) and winning intramural games (Students 206, 261). One student wrote about a road trip with his club tennis teammates. Despite “the weekend (being) short, (their) time to bond was huge” (Student 312). Students also involved themselves on campus by participating in fraternities and sororities.

Greek life. Eleven (23.4%) “Campus” events from TP-2 were coded as “Greek life.” Events were about receiving a big sis (Students 180, 248, 421) or big brother (Student 149) and attending Greek events (Students 223, 260, 266, 424). Big brother night at the fraternity was described as:

Your big brother is someone you like to be around, someone you can talk to, and someone that helps you out... I like hanging out with him. I know I can ask him anything and he has already started helping me a lot. (Student 149)

One student wrote about how her sorority sisters “comforted (her) about (her) recent breakup with (her) boyfriend” (Student 344). Students also found positive aspects of the time around midterm during their first semester related to academics.

Academic. A total of 26 (19.3%) best, school events were coded as “Academic” during TP-2. Events coded as “Academic” related to students finding elation in some aspect of their coursework during the first-semester. The best, school theme “Academic” produced two sub-themes during TP-2: “Classroom success” (n = 18, 69.2%) and “Workload” (n = 8, 30.8%).

Classroom success. Eighteen (69.2%) “Academic” events from TP-2 were coded as “Classroom success.” Earning a good grade around midterm resulted in students being “happy” (e.g., Student 216, 366), “excited” (e.g., Student 350), and “proud” (e.g., Student 326). Students also wrote about telling a parent about these grades and noted how the

parents were happy for and proud of their first-year college students (e.g., Students 217, 326). Several students described the amount of work associated with earning good grades and how these grades boosted their confidence that they could succeed in college.

One student wrote:

It showed all my studying and focusing paid off. I almost jumped out of my chair when I saw the grade in red pen at the top. Going into college I was very nervous and was not quiet [*sic*] ready to find out what college was all about. I was so happy I called my mom right away, of course she was very excited and wouldn't stop saying how proud she was of me. (Student 217)

For others, they were nervous about the exam or assignment associated with the good grade. One wrote:

I got myself worked up over nothing... I was so proud I calmed myself down in order to deliver a great speech... My classmates provided me with good feedback and most of their comments were positive. I immediately called my parents after my speech and told them how it went. They were happy it went well considering I called them the night before and expressed my concerns to give the speech. But I'm glad I've gained the confidence to speak naturally. (Student 326)

Students also found enjoyment in various aspects of their coursework around midterm of their first semester.

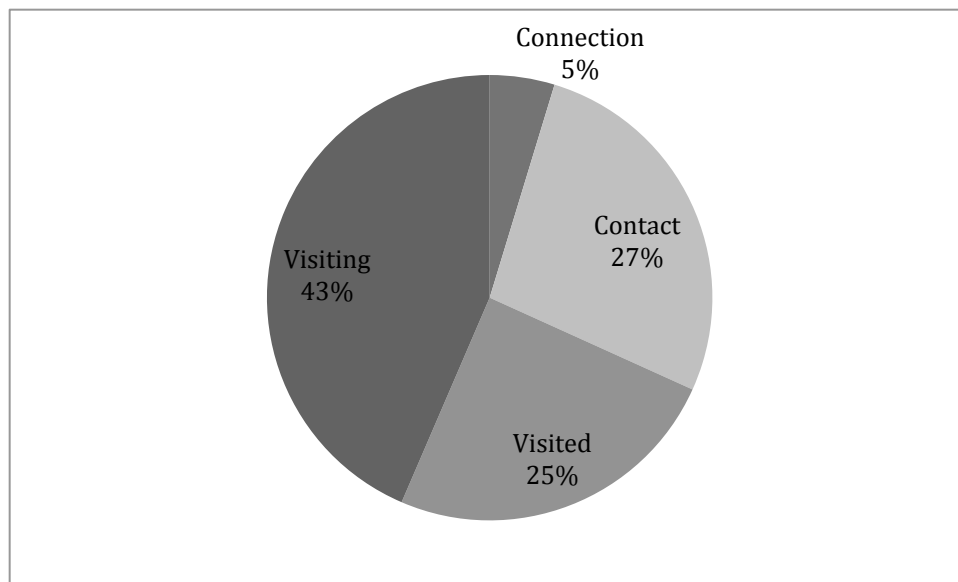
Workload. Eight (30.8%) “Academic” events from TP-2 were coded as “Workload.” During the time around midterm these events included: (a) meeting deadlines or finishing work (Students 317, 395, 403, 420); (b) having to do no schoolwork on a Saturday (Student 270); (c) being given extra time on a paper (Student 183); (d) helping a friend study (Student 327); and (e) taking an easy exam (Student 358). Completing work provided one student “a feeling of accomplishment and getting a lot done” (Student 395), and not having to do homework on a weekend was for one student “a nice break because recently school has become very challenging and (he) needed a time to relax and not worry about anything” (Student 270). By helping a friend, one

student “learned more and engraved (the material) in (her) mind” (Student 327). Students also wrote about home events they perceived as the best event that occurred around midterm of their first semester as college students.

Best, home events. A total of 85 (19%) TP-2 events were coded as best, home events (N = 85). As shown in Figure 4.15 and Table 4.15 of these 43.5% (n = 37) were coded as “Visiting,” 27.1% (n = 23) as “Contact,” 24.7% (n = 21) as “Visited,” and 4.7% (n = 4) as “Connection.”

Figure 4.15

TP-2 best, home themes



Visiting. A total of 37 (43.5%) best, home events were coded as “Visiting” during TP-2. Events coded as “Visiting” related to students leaving the UK campus to visit home or someone from home. The best, home theme “Visiting” produced three sub-themes during TP-2: “Visiting home” (n = 32, 86.5%), “Visiting friend(s)” (n = 4, 10.8%), and “Visiting girl/boyfriend” (n = 1, 2.7%). Nothing about the event coded as

“Visiting girl/boyfriend” was unique to the narrative being written around midterm of the student’s first semester.

Table 4.15

Summary of TP-2 best, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 85	%
Visiting	37	3.5%
Visiting home	32	86.5%
Visiting friend(s)	4	10.8%
Visiting girl/boyfriend	1	2.7%
Contact	23	27.1%
Seeing, doing	12	52.2%
Talking to, hearing from	6	26.1%
Receiving something	5	21.7%
Visited	21	24.7%
Visited by family	12	57.1%
Visited by friend(s)	6	28.6%
Visited by girl/boyfriend	3	14.3%
Connection	4	4.7%
Doing things	4	100%

Visiting home. Thirty-two (86.5%) “Visiting” events from TP-2 were coded as “Visiting home.” Students noted comforting aspects they found when visiting home during the time around midterm, including: (a) doing so for the first time in a while (e.g., Students 131, 154, 213); (b) eating home cooked meals (e.g., Students 163, 213, 425); (c) sleeping in one’s own bed (e.g., Students 154, 213, 349); and (d) relaxing away from the stress of college life (e.g., Students 154, 213, 282, 382). One student’s narrative captured several aspects of stories about retuning home around midterm:

The best thing that happened to me this past week was being able to go home and see my entire family. My mom, sister, dad, and brother were all home. We ate a good home cooked meal, and I was able to relax a little bit from the busy college lifestyle. We are also building an addition onto the house so I was able to see

how far they have progressed during my time away. Even though they had been remodeling in my room, I was still able to sleep in the same bed I had been sleeping in since I was just a little child. Coming back to the farm from such busy city was a relief. I missed the open fields and lack of buildings near and far. I didn't hear sirens going off just the sounds of nature; very relaxing. I had privacy too. I wasn't crammed in a tiny room with another guy for a few days. I had a separate bathroom, with privacy. The shower was 3 times as big as the one in the dorms, and I didn't have to wear flip flops [*sic*] to avoid foot fungus or any other strange disease. It was a couple of days where I didn't worry about my homework (though I probably should have), didn't worry about finding something entertaining to do, or having to spend money on food, gas, and entertainment. It was all in all a great weekend. I couldn't have asked for more. (Student 213)

Students' stories about visiting friends around midterm of their first semester were similar in nature.

Visiting friend(s). Four (10.8%) "Visiting" events from TP-2 were coded as "Visiting friend(s)." Only one contained information relative to the time around midterm:

I haven't seen either of (my friends) in almost 2 months, so when I walked into their room they both started screaming and Jenna gave me a huge hug and started crying. I was so excited to see them and be with all my friends... It was one of the funnest [*sic*] weekends I've had. (Student 376)

Students' stories about having contact with individuals from home also contained unique characteristics during TP-2.

Contact. A total of 23 (27.1%) best, home events were coded as "Contact" during TP-2. Events coded as "Contact" related to students having contact with home without returning home or being visited at UK by someone from home. The best, home theme "Contact" produced three sub-themes during TP-2: "Seeing, doing" (n = 12, 52.2%), "Talking to, hearing from" (n = 6, 26.1%), and "Receiving something" (n = 5, 21.7%).

Seeing, doing. Twelve (52.2%) "Contact" events from TP-2 were coded as "Seeing, doing." Events coded as "Seeing, doing" around midterm of their first semester

included: (a) celebrating birthdays (Student 123); (b) meeting parents at road football games (Students 212, 280); (c) going to a bachelorette party; (d) taking road trips (Students 253, 258); (e) riding horses (Student 256); (f) attending a wedding (Student 330); and (g) rafting (Student 411). Several of these stories related to students being away from these individuals from home for lengthy periods of time since their last contact. One student notes how his family members “all talked about how much they missed and loved me” (Student 316). Another wrote:

Being so far away from my family is tough... Getting to see them made me feel great. I love my family and I wish they were all closer to me. But I guess that is my fault because I chose to go to a school so far away... They really brighten my day... I can't wait to see my family again. (Student 280)

Students were also able to connect to home by talking to or otherwise hearing from people from home.

Talking to, hearing from. Six (26.1%) “Contact” events from TP-2 were coded as “Talking to, hearing from.” One of these stories related to being away from home for a while:

I had kept forgetting to call (my parents) and sometimes a week will go by and I will completely forget to call them. When I finally called them, it was because my father had called me earlier that morning asking why I hadn't called in such a long time. When he asked this, I remembered I had not called them all last week. When I called later that night, I had a conversation with my father on school, and a conversation with my mom on why she chose to major in philosophy. (Student 283)

It was important for several students to receive things from home, especially items that came from the heart.

Receiving something. Five (21.7%) “Contact” events from TP-2 were coded as “Receiving something.” During the midterm period of their first semester as college students, these items included: (a) a new car (Student 155); (b) a package (Students 175,

268); (c) food (Student 257); and (d) a new bike (Student 423). Students who wrote about receiving a package or food noted additional excitement, which one student described as, “My mom sent me homemade cookies, which was the best thing I have ate [sic] since being on this campus... I was very happy and high fived my roommate” (Student 268). Another wrote, “It made my week knowing that she thought about me and cared enough to send me something she knew I would enjoy” (Student, 175). One student called home to thank her mother for a personalized gift:

The best event this week would have to be that my mom sent four boxes of food! My best friend from home came to visit me and when she arrived, she opened up the trunk to 4 boxes of food from my mom. There were all sorts of things in there from cookies, to pretzels, to candy, to my personal favorite, pickles! I immediately called my mom, and told her how excited I was to receive the food. (Student 257)

Details from students’ stories about having visitors on campus also related to not seeing these individuals in some time and the emotions that accompanied the visits.

Visited. A total of 21 (24.7%) best, home events were coded as “Visited” during TP-2. Events coded as “Visited” related to students receiving visits from a person or people from home. The best, home theme “Visited” produced three sub-themes during TP-2: “Visited by family” (n = 12, 57.2%), “Visited by friend(s)” (n = 6, 28.6%), and “Visited by girl/boyfriend” (n = 3, 14.3%).

Visited by family. Twelve (57.2%) “Visited” events from TP-2 were coded as “Visited by family.” Stories about being visited by family during the time around midterm noted the time between visits (e.g., Student 147, 357, 206), the emotions associated with visits (e.g., Students 337, 399), the ability to showcase UK and provide insight into students’ UK lives during visits (e.g., Students 319, 357), and the enjoyable nature of such visits (e.g., Students 147, 164, 319, 351, 357).

Students were “excited” (Student 357) for their families to visit, and it was “so good to spend time with them showing them around campus... It was really nice to be with family” (Student 319). “It was fantastic to hang out with them and talk about everything that has happened since school started” (Student 351). One student wrote, “(My parents) kept hugging me, kissing me, and almost crying” (Student 399). These midterm visits allowed students and families to express and talk about “how much (they) missed each other and what (they’ve) been up to” (Student 164). One student’s narrative focused on her parents continued adjustment to her being away from home, “(My mom) is pretty emotional still with the whole (my boyfriend and I) going to off to college. (My dad) is just proud of us for being up here and living and enjoying life” (Student 337).

These events, even if simple, meant a lot to students:

I haven’t really seen my family much since I’ve been here and they surprised me by coming up on Monday to spend the day with me... Something as simple as spending time with my family means the world to me now since I don’t get to take advantage of seeing them all the time. (Student 206)

Students also appreciated visits during the time around midterm of their first semester as college students from their friends from home.

Visited by friend(s). Six (28.6%) “Visited” events from TP-2 were coded as “Visited by friend(s).” These visits represented the first time several students had seen their friends from home who visited the UK campus (e.g., Students 272, 290) and allowed students to provide their visiting friends insight into their UK lives (e.g., Students 267, 290). One student was “almost in tears” when her best friend from home visited around midterm. Another student wrote:

Because I live over 4 hours from Lexington, I rarely get a chance to see many of my high school friends... I got to show her all about UK and the campus/campus life here. It was interesting to see her reaction to the differences between here and

where she attends college. Getting to catch up and exchanging stories was the best event that happened to me in the last week. (Student 290)

Students also enjoyed time associated with visits from their girl/boyfriends.

Visited by girl/boyfriend. Three (14.3%) “Visited” events from TP-2 were coded as “Visited by girl/boyfriend.” For one of these students, the visit allowed him and his girlfriend to explore the UK campus and downtown Lexington (Student 134). Another wrote about her boyfriend’s visit, which allowed her to do things she hadn’t been able to very often, if at all, before the midterm period:

He drove six hours to get her on Friday and stayed til Sunday night. This was definitely the best weekend I have had here at UK because I did not have to do any homework, I got off campus, went shopping, and spent time with my boyfriend. It was nice to get away from school and the campus because since I do not have a car here I cannot get away whenever I want. I also got to explore more of Lexington and eat at different restaurants. I cannot wait til he visits again in November. (Student 220)

Several students wrote about being able to connect with students from their hometowns around midterm who also attend the University of Kentucky.

Connection. A total of four (4.7%) best, home events were coded as “Connection” during TP-2. Events coded as “Connection” related to students connecting with other University of Kentucky students from home while on campus. The best, home theme “Connection” produced one sub-theme during TP-2: “Doing things” (n = 4, 100%). One student wrote about establishing a nickname for a group of UK students, all of who were from the same hometown:

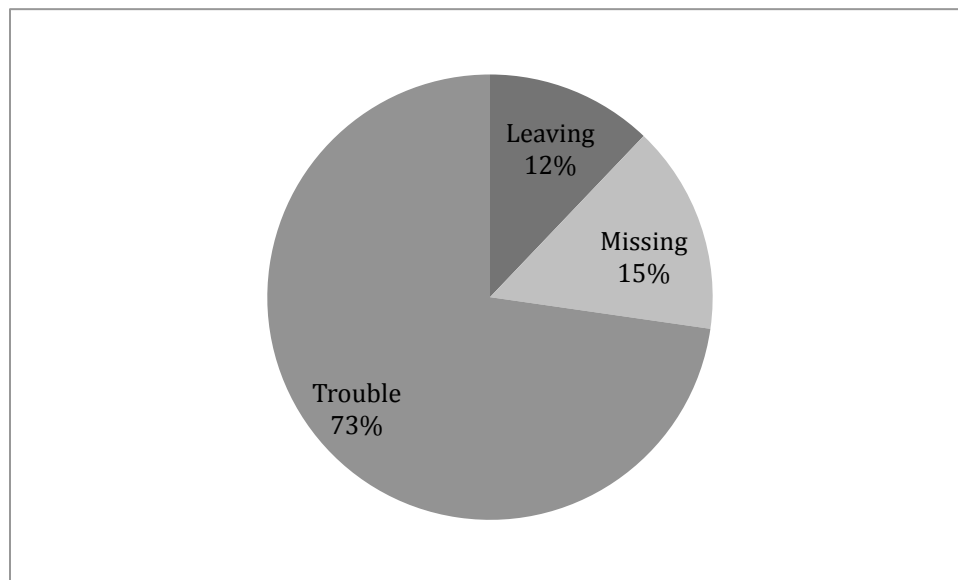
The best thing that happened to me this week was my friend’s birthday... The people involved were the closest friends I have made while at UK. We call ourselves the ‘stoop kids’ because we are all from inner city louisville [*sic*] and we all met because of our attraction to sitting out on the stoop all day the first few weeks. Boys, girls, and of all personalities and stereotypes have made the closest of friends through the stoop. (Student 145)

Additional negative events in students' lives around midterm of their first semester as college students were related to various aspects of students' lives at home.

Worst, home events. A total of 37 (7.4%) TP-2 events were coded as worst, home events. As shown in Figure 4.16 and Table 4.16, of these 72.7% (n = 24) were coded as "Trouble," 15.2% (n = 5) as "Missing," and 12.1% (n = 4) as "Leaving."

Figure 4.16

TP-2 worst, home themes



Trouble. A total of 24 (72.7%) worst, home events were coded as "Trouble" during TP-2. Events coded as "Trouble" related to students being concerned about home or someone from home, experiencing problems at home or with someone from home, or receiving bad news about someone from home. The worst, home theme "Trouble" produced five sub-themes during TP-2: "Illness, injury, death" (n = 14, 58.3%), "Bad news" (n = 4, 16.7%), "Inconveniences" (n = 3, 12.5%), "Argument" (n = 2, 8.3%), and "Other" (n = 1, 4.2%). Events coded as "Bad news," "Inconveniences," and "Other" were not unique to the time around midterm.

Table 4.16

Summary of TP-2 worst, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 37	%
Trouble	24	72.7%
Illness, injury, death	14	58.3%
Bad news	4	16.7%
Inconveniences	3	12.5%
Argument	2	8.3%
Other	1	4.2%
Missing	5	15.2%
Leaving	4	12.1%
Returning to school	4	100.0%

Illness, injury, death. Fourteen (58.3%) “Trouble” events from TP-2 were coded as “Illness, injury, death.” During the time around midterm, students wrote about: (a) hearing about the hospitalization of parents, siblings, and grandparents (Students 150, 151, 262, 368, 399); (b) learning about the death of a family member or family friend (Students 250, 322, 365); (c) attending a funeral (Students 356, 413); (d) seeing someone from home suffer through an injury (Students 242, 276); and (e) putting the family dog down (Students 340, 353). Students expressed concern for individuals who were in the hospital for an illness or surgery, and one was troubled because being away at school made it difficult to receive information about his sick father:

I was unable to see him and I had a lack of communication in knowing what was going on with him. I was unable to contact him or find out any information on what was going on while he was in the hospital. The lack of communication scared me because I was at a loss in information, I was scared or a full week until he finally got out of the hospital. (Student 262)

Despite writing about a funeral as his worst event, one student noted the event allowed him to see his family, “It was great seeing all my family again, including distant relatives

that I had not seen in a long time” (Student 413). Students were also troubled by arguments with someone from home during the time around midterm of their first semester.

Argument. Two (8.3%) “Trouble” events from TP-2 were coded as “Argument.” The sub-theme “Argument” related to students quarreling with someone from home. One student wrote about arguing with her mom because the student could not come home on a weekend around midterm. She wrote, “(My mom) wanted me to come home next weekend and I told her I couldn’t because one of my friends were [*sic*] coming up and I told her I would go home the following weekend” (Student 124). Another student discussed an argument that resulted from her mom not letting go of her aging daughter who recently revealed a secret boyfriend of eight months. She wrote:

The worst event that happened was going home this past weekend. I couldn’t, or rather “wasn’t allowed,” in Mom’s house. I had to stay at my Mamaw’s and Papaw’s house... Mom wouldn’t speak to me at all, only to tell me to go to Subway to get her some food. This was actually a little degrading to me personally. When my boyfriend was on his way to pick me up, Mom started having a panic attack. She kept shaking all over... Mom knew Billy (my boyfriend) was on his way. Instead of waiting upstairs when he came to pick me up, so she wouldn’t have to see him, she decided to walk home. Thankfully we live a mile or so a part otherwise her walk would’ve been very long... Mom then called Mamaw and told her for me to stay the night at Mamaw’s house because she felt like she needed to be alone. To me, I think she just wanted me to feel bad. It may be a crappy daughter move of me, but I didn’t feel bad. Mom just threw a temper tantrum because for once in my life, I did something for me. (Student 226)

Students also wrote about events related to being unable to see people from home or being homesick during the time around midterm of their first semester.

Missing. A total of five (15.2%) worst, home events from TP-2 were coded as “Missing.” During the time around midterm, these events related to students being unable to go home (Students 251, 332, 390) or be with someone from home (Student

256) as well as being homesick and depressed (Student 346). One student wrote, “All my friends came home from college and I wasn’t able to go home this week... They

BEGGED me to find a ride home” (Student 332). Another wrote:

I started getting depressed because I was away from home so much. I don’t have anyone to talk to and I hadn’t seen my best friends in weeks (they go to Louisville). I was just feeling extremely lonely, especially when my mother and I were on the outs. I was feeling depressed and worried about school. I felt like I was having anxiety attacks all week! I missed my family, friends, and boyfriend and they’re all so far away that I felt like I had no one to talk to... I’m still settling into school. I’m not use [*sic*] to all of this yet. I’ve met new people but I don’t know them well enough to talk to them about how I’m feeling. At the beginning of the semester, our advisors told us we would start feeling like this but things would get better. (Student 346)

Additional worst, home events during the time around midterm related to students returning to school after visiting home.

Leaving. A total of four (12.1%) worst, home events were coded as “Leaving” during TP-2. Events coded as “Leaving” related to students leaving family members or others from home. The worst, home theme “Leaving” produced one sub-theme during TP-2: “Returning to school” (n = 4, 100%).

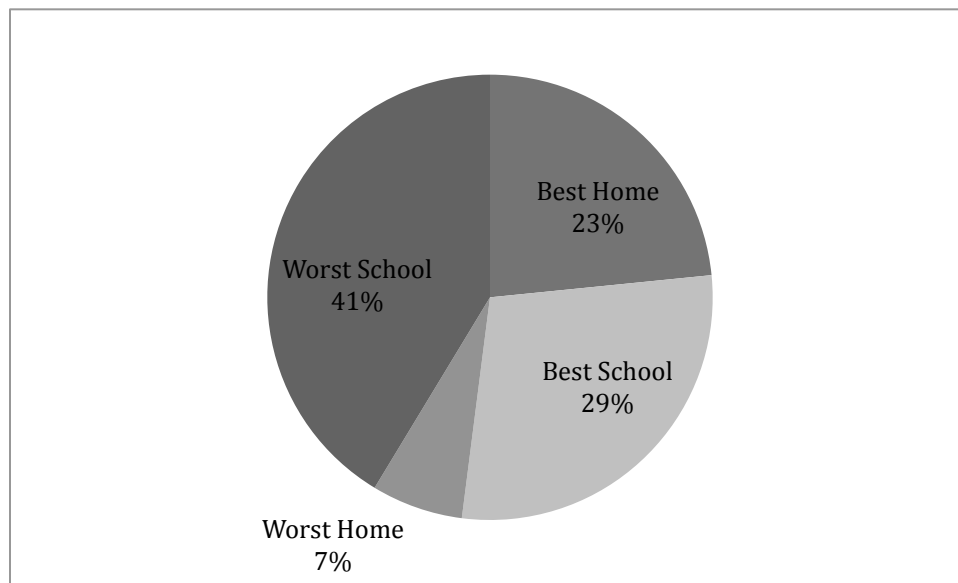
Returning to school. Four (100%) “Leaving” events from TP-2 were coded as “Returning to school.” Students wrote about: (a) having to leave friends (Student 142); (b) leaving home (Students 231, 411); and (c) saying good by to one’s mom (Student 385). In reference to leaving home and heading back to school, one student wrote, “I hate leaving my family every weekend and coming back to school” (Student 231), and another “My mom was very sad and I almost cried. My mom said ‘stay safe and don’t do anything dumb” (Student 411). The student who wrote about leaving her mother described her mom as “very emotional” and how “she gets sad every time (her daughter)

leave(s) her” (Student 385). Students also wrote about perceived worst events that occurred during the time around midterm that were related to school.

Time Period Three

Free-writes for TP-3 (N = 346) were collected from November 8-12 and represent the latter weeks of students’ first semester in college. Of these, 143 (41.3%) were associated with worst, school events, 99 (28.6%) with best, school events, 82 (23.4%) with best, home events, and 23 (6.6%) with worst, home events (see Figure 4.17 and Table 4.17). By examining the total number and content of events coded under each of TP-3’s associations, themes, and sub-themes, one may better understand what students associate with the latter weeks of their first semester as college students.

Figure 4.17
TP-3 events by association



Worst, school events. A total of 143 (41.3%) TP-3 events were coded as worst, school events. As shown in Figure 4.18 and Table 4.18, of these, 51.7% (n = 74) were coded as “Living,” 42.7% (n = 61) as “Academic,” and 5.6% (n = 8) as “Navigation.”

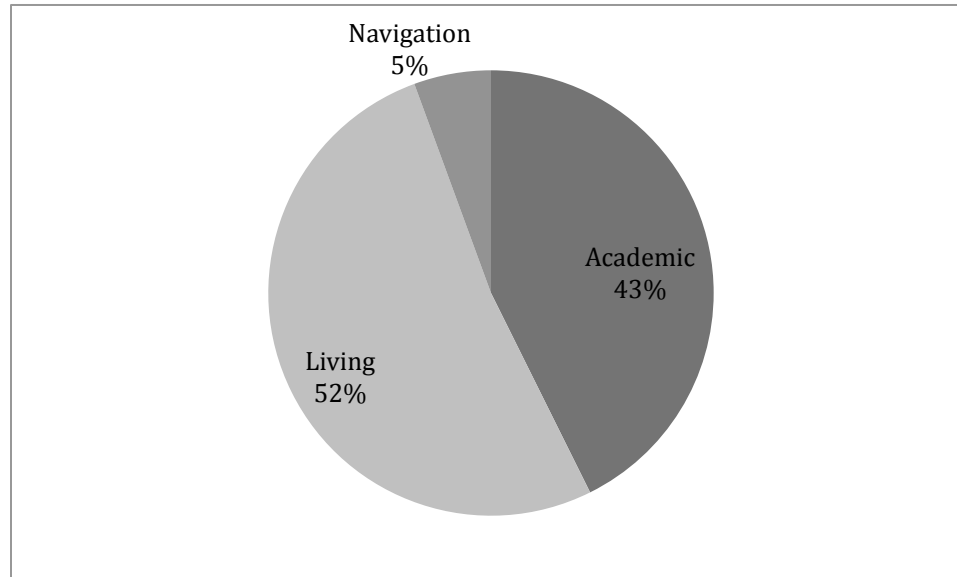
Table 4.17
Summary of TP-3 events

Total Events	N = 346	%
Worst, school events	143	41.3%
Living	74	51.7%
Academic	61	42.7%
Navigation	8	5.6%
Best, school events	99	28.6%
Living	50	50.5%
Campus	30	30.3%
Academic	18	18.2%
Other	1	1%
Best, home events	81	23.4%
Visited	33	40.7%
Visiting	25	30.9%
Contact	22	27.2%
Connection	1	1.2%
Worst, home events	23	6.6%
Trouble	11	47.8%
Missing	8	34.8%
Leaving	3	13%
Other	1	4.3%

Living. A total of 74 (51.7%) worst, school events were coded as “Living” during TP-3. Events coded as “Living” related to students struggling in some aspect of their lives as college students outside the classroom. The worst, school theme “Living” produced nine sub-themes during TP-3: “Social life, network” (n = 18, 24.3%), “Physical” (n = 17, 23%), “Inconveniences” (n = 11, 14.9%), “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)” (n = 8, 10.8%), “UK athletics” (n = 7, 9.5%), “Doing something alone” (n = 6, 8.1%), “Work” (n = 4, 5.4%), “Financial” (n = 2, 2.7%), and “Other” (n = 1, 1.4%).

Figure 4.18

TP-3 worst, school themes



Social life, network. Eighteen (24.3%) “Living” events from TP-3 were coded as “Social life, network.” Two students wrote about boring Friday nights with friends (Students 145, 212), and one was attending a party that was broken up by the police (Student 226). Several students wrote about bad events related to drinking (e.g., getting caught drinking, going on a date with someone who blacked out, being hungover, dealing with a drunk) (Students 235, 289, 408, 424). Others wrote about worrying or seeing their friends struggle (e.g., Students 362, 358), including one who wrote about a friend who was raped:

Seeing someone you care about hurt is the worst pain you can imagine... I had a huge relief as if I made a difference in someone’s life. I feel better knowing she is getting help and will always know I am there for her! Being a friend is a great quality and knowing they always have your back makes everything so much better! Now I no [*sic*] she trusted and came to me I can always trust in her and go to her. (Student 217)

Table 4.18

Summary of TP-3 worst, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 143	%
Living	74	51.7%
Social life, network	18	24.3%
Physical	17	23.0%
Inconveniences	11	14.9%
Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)	8	10.8%
UK athletics	7	9.5%
Doing something alone	6	8.1%
Work	4	5.4%
Financial	2	2.7%
Other	1	1.4%
Academic	61	42.7%
Workload	26	42.6%
Bad grade(s)	18	29.5%
Stressed, overwhelmed	11	18.0%
Schedule	5	8.2%
Other	1	1.6%
Navigation	8	5.6%
Scheduling spring semester	4	50.0%
Missed class	2	25.0%
Lost way	1	12.5%
University	1	12.5%

One student was “kind of hurt” after being rejected by two females (Student 427), and another was concerned about a friend who was deployed to Afghanistan (Student 361). Other students wrote about being sick or dealing with other physical issues (e.g., sleep trouble, injuries) during the latter part of their first semester as college students.

Physical. Seventeen (23%) “Living” events from TP-3 were coded as “Physical.” Students wrote about; (a) being sick (e.g., Students 197, 293, 240, 336, 359, 422); (b) experiencing sleep trouble (Students 130, 222, 237, 343); (c) being injured (Students 163,

352, 413); and (d) passing out while giving blood (Student 364). Two students contacted home when they became ill. One went home to see his father, a doctor, and another wrote, “I kept getting sick so I called my mom and she said ‘I am concerned about you so when you come home we’ll go to a the doctor!’” (Student 359). Other students were forced to deal with inconveniences during the latter part of their first semester at the University of Kentucky.

Inconveniences. Eleven (14.9%) “Living” events from TP-3 were coded as “Inconveniences.” Students wrote about: (a) losing keys, wallets, debit cards, and IDs (students 137, 241, 275, 277, 399, 412); (b) having a car break down (Student 152); (c) forgetting a video game (Student 394); (d) breaking an Xbox (Student 276); (e) having something stolen (Student 274); and (f) getting stuck in the rain without an umbrella (Student 365). Students also encountered difficulties with their living situation during the latter part of their first semester.

Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s). Eight (10.8%) “Living” events from TP-3 were coded as “Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s).” Students wrote about: (a) calling the police on neighbors (Student 227); (b) dealing with noise in their dorm (Students 218, 346); (c) seeing roommates struggle (Students 322, 368); (d) arguing with a roommate (Student 340); and (e) having one’s roommate and his parents walk in while laying in bed with a female (Student 418). One student turned to home when dealing with an inconsiderate roommate:

I called my mom this morning and told her what was going on. She said I needed to have a talk with (my roommate) about it before it happens frequently. I need to be nice about it so it doesn’t start an argument. I guess it’s just one of those things I’m going to have to deal with now that I’m living with someone else. (Student 208)

Other students' worst events during the latter part of their first semester were related to University of Kentucky athletics.

UK athletics. Seven (9.5%) "Living" events from TP-3 were coded as "UK athletics." All but one of the narratives that produced these events were written about being student athletes; the non-student athlete did not enjoy attending a lopsided football game despite UK winning (Student 210). Student athletes wrote about: (a) early practices (Students 410, 425); (b) too much dance (Student 188); (c) soccer season ending (Student 400); (d) bad weather (Student 207); and (e) losing a football game (Student 206). Other students wrote about negatives that happened to them alone.

Doing something alone. Six (8.1%) "Living" events from TP-3 were coded as "Doing something alone." One student wrote about being alone when other students went home and another about having nothing to do. He explained:

I was bored and tried for long periods of time without any resolve to go out and find something to do with someone. I spent a lot of time alone in my room... There was virtually no one I could bring myself to call. I sat alone and even thought I wanted to call a few people and see them, as I haven't in a long time, I just couldn't force myself to do it. (Student 406)

Other students wrote about events related to work or their finances, and one student's event could not be coded under a "Living" sub-theme.

One student was not happy with her work schedule (Student 186) and another about having to work on a weekend (Student 202). A student was laid off during the latter part of the semester and wrote, "I am currently trying to figure out how to stay in school, pay off my truck, and pay for the rest of my tuition" (Student 415). Another student was worried about being unable to pay for school during the spring semester

(Student 129). Other students wrote about events related to their academics as the worst event during the latter portion of their first semester as college students.

Academic. A total of 61 (42.7%) worst, school events were coded as “Academic” during TP-3. Events coded as “Academic” related to students being bothered by or frustrated with some aspect of their coursework. The worst, school theme “Academic” produced five sub-themes during TP-3: “Workload” (n = 26, 42.6%), “Bad grade(s)” (n = 18, 29.5%), “Stressed, overwhelmed” (n = 11, 18%), “Schedule” (n = 5, 8.2%), and “Other” (n = 1, 1.6%). The event coded as “Other” was about a student losing a school notebook” (Student 409).

Workload. Twenty-six (42.6%) “Academic” events from TP-3 were coded as “Workload.” Several students’ worst event during the latter part of their first semester was studying for or taking exams (e.g., Students 233, 344, 345, 404). One wrote,

All I have basically been doing is studying... I am the one who has to push myself to study and do well on the exams... I study a week or two before my exams because I want to do well. Sadly, studying is not enjoyable. (Student 345)

Seven students wrote about studying late at night or for long periods of time or on weekends (Students 123, 141, 162, 285, 290, 327, 347). This resulted in a 12-hour library session for a student (Student 327) and another wrote, “It was awful because I was getting tired and I didn’t really enjoy the last day of my weekend because of those dang flashcards” (Student 123). One student wrote:

All of my teachers have just kept piling on more and more stuff each week. Finally, when I thought I was all caught up at least a little bit, all of my classes simultaneously dropped bombs on me... Feeling the pressure and fearing that I was going to drop so far behind in school that I couldn’t catch up I decided to pull an all nighter to get my mind where it needed to be and get my assignments in order. (Student 162)

Another student was forced into a late night of schoolwork because of procrastination:

I chose socialization with friends over homework and studying. I realized at the time that this was a bad decision. Yet, I did it anyways. I didn't realize how bad of a decision it was until I woke up from a measly 5 hours of sleep on Monday morning and had to go to class. I learned a lesson from this bad experience, don't put off what needs to be done. You should do it first and save the fun stuff for afterwards. (Student 290)

Additional students wrote about: (a) struggling with an assignment (Student 126, 245); (b) missing deadlines or forgetting about work (e.g., Students 148, 201, 283); and (c) managing an intense workload. This workload resulted in one student writing, "I probably won't be able to do anything fun this weekend or next" (Student 239) and another, "Sometimes, it's like (my professors) act like their class is the only one I'm taking and others, actually let up on the work assigned... It was difficult to deal with the large projects running together" (Student 349).

Students were also ready for a break from school and struggled to keep going, which one described as, "Now that the semester is getting into its second half I can see myself procrastinating more. It is solely my fault but can be fixed easily" (Student 401). Another had to resist the urge to place social life before academics, "They both tried to persuade me at first but I would not give in because studying for my test was more important, but after saying no a few times they understood" (Student 118). A student wrote, "I'm just ready for a break since we haven't really had any time off. I definitely can't wait for Thanksgiving" (Student 133) and another commented, "Oh well, it's break soon" (Student 324). Additional students' worst events were the result of performing poorly on exams, quizzes, or assignments.

Bad grade(s). Eighteen (29.5%) "Academic" events from TP-3 were coded as "Bad grade(s)." A student was failing and was advised to drop two classes by her mother

and advisor (Student 348) and another became a part-time student after being forced to drop a class (Student 280). One student wrote:

I studied really hard but I didn't get the grade I wanted. This is really upsetting for me because grades are really important when applying to nursing school. I'm trying to learn from it and work harder but it's also making me start to doubt myself. Hopefully, I will do better next semester. (Student 366)

Another wrote, "I felt disappointed because I wanted to do well. I told myself I probably wasn't going to do well because I didn't understand the material even w/ tutoring" (Student 402).

Several students included a parent, instructor, and/or advisor as characters in their stories (e.g., Students 106, 135, 348, 403); one wrote, "I cried and called my dad and he helped me through it. I also went and talked to my professor about it" (Student 403).

Another wrote:

I was heart broken because everything I had put so much effort into was gone. I feel really bad about myself. I called my mom and she was very supportive for me. My mom assured me everything would be okay. (Student 106)

Additional students wrote about being stressed because of or overwhelmed with schoolwork during the latter part of their first semester as college students.

Stressed, overwhelmed. Eleven (18%) "Academic" events from TP-3 were coded as "Stressed, overwhelmed." Several students were overwhelmed with their cumulative school load (e.g., Students 158, 282, 330). One wrote:

The worst event in the past week or so was when I put off doing so much work that it piled up into a seemingly insurmountable load. I'm taking 17 hours this semester at UK and that adds up to a lot of work that I don't have much time for. A key factor that adds into this is my bad study habits. Since I was young I have been very bad at time management and this has led to many days where I realized there were many things due the next day that I had not started on. This past week I just barely got all of my assignments done and as a result I was stressing until the end. (Student 158)

Others stressed over: (a) exams (Student 330); (b) a particular class (Student 271); (c) upcoming work (e.g., Students 149, 223); and (d) whether or not to drop a class(es) (e.g., Students 271, 280). Some students stressed over multiple aspects of their academic lives.

Most of my stress is caused by this project we are doing in class. There is so much to do for it. Also, you can't always rely on other people... Also, we have to go to the library and get secondary research on our topic. It's just all stressing me out. I can't wait for this project to be over or I can't wait for Thanksgiving because I need a break for school. I will be able to relax with my family, and destress [*sic*] for a couple of days. That will be nice. (Student 216)

Some students were ready for a break (e.g., Students 216, 282), including one who wrote:

I have been stressing and working hard on my upcoming work but it never seems to go away... During these next two weeks I am going to have to stay focused on my work to get all of this done. It is going to be extremely stressful after it is over. Thanksgiving break is near. Hearing everyone talk about stressing over these two weeks let me know I am not alone and I have help. I am probably going to try and get a study group together for any of my exams. This will help a lot and take some of the stress off of me. Study groups have always helped me learn the materials better and I think this will be no exception. Also, if I learn the material better it will take stress off of me and will let me do better and work faster of [*sic*] my other homework for these two weeks. (Student 149)

Students also wrote about issues associated with their schedules during the latter part of their first semester as college students.

Schedule. Five (8.2%) “Academic” events from TP-3 were coded as “Schedule.”

Two students had issues with early morning classes (Students 231, 232), and one did not like a math class (Student 190). Another student was having a complex about dropping a class and wrote:

I called my parents about it and they always say, “You have to do what is best for you.” I really hope this was the best decision and that everything will work out for the best in the future. I know that one class is not going to make or break my future. I just hate the feeling of failure or not giving my everything. I guess I will live and learn and know how to handle situations similar to this in the future. (Student 225)

One student was upset that her UK 101 first-year seminar was ending and wrote, “I know I should be happy because it’s one less class that I have to worry about, but I just know that I will probably never hang out with the friends I met in UK 101 because we won’t see each other much” (Student 108). Other students faced a variety of issues related to navigating around Lexington and through the University.

Navigation. A total of eight (5.6%) worst, school events were coded as “Navigation” during TP-3. Events coded as “Navigation” related to students navigating their way around campus, dealing with University bureaucracy, and managing their daily schedules. The worst, school theme “Navigation” produced four sub-themes during TP-3: “Scheduling spring semester” (n = 4, 50%), “Missed class” (n = 2, 25%), “Lost way” (n = 1, 12.5%), and “University” (n = 1, 12.5%). One student’s missed class resulted in missing an exam (Student 230), and the other was “disappointed” in himself for doing so (Student 147). A student wrote about getting lost and stuck in traffic (Student 213); another wrote about having to pay money to move out of a University dorm (Student 398).

Scheduling spring semester. Four (50%) “Navigation” events from TP-3 were coded as “Scheduling spring semester.” This was an event that was unique to TP-3 and something students had yet to experience (Students 319, 321, 356, 367). Two students received assistance from their advisors. One wrote:

I was sitting in my dorm room trying to organize it and get my schedule to work for five hours! It was very stressful, but I’m so glad it’s done. Good thing my advisor is good at her job and helped me out! (Student 356)

The other explained, “My adviser told me to have a back up plan, however my backup classes were full to [sic]” (Student 321). Another student wrote:

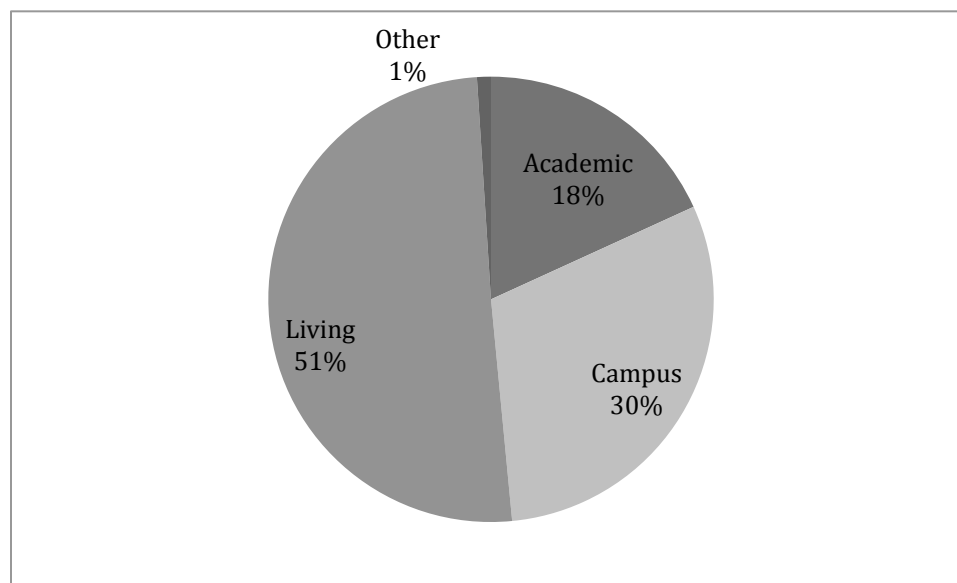
The worst event that happened is when I registered for classes a lot of the ones I wanted to take were gone. It really stressed me out because I was on my own and had no idea what to do. I feel like it took forever to figure out my schedule and how it would work. (Student 319)

The fourth student wrote, “I wasn’t able to get in any classes I wanted... it was real disappointing [*sic*]” (Student 367). Students also wrote about positive school events that happened during the latter portion of their first semester at the University of Kentucky.

Best, school events. A total of 99 (28.6%) TP-3 events were coded as best, school events. As shown in Figure 4.19 and Table 4.19, of these, 50.5% (n = 50) were coded as “Living,” 30.3% (n = 30) as “Campus,” 18.2% (n = 18) as “Academic,” and 1% (n = 1) as “Other.”

Figure 4.19

TP-3 best, school themes



Living. A total of 50 (50.5%) best, school events were coded as “Living” during TP-3. Events coded as “Living” related to students maneuvering through various aspects of life as college students beyond campus involvement and academic life. The best, school theme “Living” produced five sub-themes during TP-3: “Social life, network” (n =

37, 74%), “Doing something alone” (n = 5, 10%), “Financial” (n = 3, 6%), “Other” (n = 3, 6%), and “Meeting people, making friends” (n = 2, 4%).

Table 4.19

Summary of TP-3 best, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 99	%
Living	50	50.5%
Social life, network	37	74%
Doing something alone	5	10%
Financial	3	6%
Other	3	6%
Meeting people, making friends	2	4%
Campus	30	30.3%
UK athletics	20	66.7%
Activities, events, non-Greek organizations	5	16.7%
Greek life	5	16.7%
Academic	18	18.2%
Classroom success	13	72.2%
Workload	4	22.2%
Schedule	1	5.6%
Other	1	1%

Social life, network. Thirty-seven (74%) “Living” events from TP-3 were coded as “Social life, network.” In addition to writing about doing things (e.g., attending movies and concerts, eating out, taking road trips, partying, sleeping in with romantic partners or roommates, exercising, having a girls’ night, decorating for Christmas) with their friends, roommates, and other members of their social circles (e.g., Students 114, 126, 186, 227, 234, 241, 282, 346, 362, 396, 410), several students wrote about expanding relationships through these activities. Time with friends resulted in “good conversation” (Student 188) that allowed them to “get things off (their) chests” (Student 130) while they “cut up and (had) a good time” (Student 186). Some events coded under

this sub-theme were related to students' romantic interest (e.g., Students 135, 242, 273, 418). For one this was the result of sleeping in (Student 418) and for another it was a first kiss, which she described as:

The best thing that happened to me in the last week would have to be when the guy I really liked kissed me for the first time. It was seriously amazing I wish I could relive it again. He is the most kind-hearted, loving genuine guy I have ever met and I always have so much fun with him. Sometimes a first kiss is kind of just blah, well this was not like that, this was a fireworks show on the 4th of July. (Student 242)

Several students wrote about feeling responsible in their social lives, including one who was the designated driver (Student 155) and another who was able to curb his roommate's amount of Xbox play. He wrote, "We didn't get accepted to UK to play Xbox. We were accepted because the society demands an educated public" (Student 317). Students also enjoyed doing things alone during the latter part of their first semester as college students.

Doing something alone. Five (10%) "Living" events from TP-3 were coded as "Doing something alone." Events were; (a) purchasing new shoes (student 158); (b) finishing a driving class (Student 348); (c) sleeping in (Student 400); (d) finishing a book (Student 422); and (e) winning a contest (Student 428). Other students wrote about positives related to their finances toward the latter portion of their first semester in college.

Financial. Three (6%) "Living" events from TP-3 were coded as "Financial." One of these events was related to a student realizing he was charged out of state tuition and another about receiving money from the University of Kentucky. Three events could not be coded under another "Living" sub-theme.

Other. Three (6%) “Living” events from TP-3 were coded as “Other.” One was about a student being excited and happy at the University of Kentucky during the latter part of her first semester of college. She wrote:

I have been very happy and excited over the past week. This has happened @ the University Kentucky and some things that have contributed to my joy are my friends my family and my “great” academic standing. I am so glad that I decided to further my education and I am started to realize the positive benefits of these moves now at the end of my first college semester. My family is very proud of me and they show this by continuing to encourage me to presue [sic] my dreams. And my friends are along with this journey w/ me. (Student 358)

Students continued to write about making new acquaintances toward the latter part of their first semester as college students.

Meeting people, making friends. Two (4%) “Living” events from TP-3 were coded as “Meeting people, making friends.” One was able to learn about a new religion, Buddhism, through his new acquaintances (Student 406). Students also experience positive events toward the latter part of their first semester that related to being involved on the University of Kentucky campus.

Campus. A total of 30 (30.3%) best, school events were coded as “Campus” during TP-3. Events coded as “Campus” related to students connecting to and involving themselves with the University through various campus activities, events, and organizations. The best, school theme “Campus” produced three sub-themes during TP-3: “UK athletics” (n = 20, 66.7%), “Activities, events, non-Greek organizations” (n = 5, 16.7%), and “Greek life” (n = 5, 16.7%).

UK athletics. Twenty (66.7%) “Campus” events from TP-3 were coded as “UK athletics.” Events included: (a) attending basketball games (Students 132, 138, 199, 232, 235, 236, 239, 274, 427); (b) going to and/or tailgating for football games (Students 142,

319, 347, 339) ; (c) watching a volleyball match (Student 312); (d) acquiring tickets; (e) being recognized as a student athlete (Student 314); and (f) receiving information about becoming a student manager for the basketball team (Student 351).

Students were “very excited” to (Student 138) and had “a blast” when they attended basketball games, especially when they sat in the Eruption Zone, the student section located along one of the court’s baselines, (e.g., Students 132, 199, 236) with “all the other crazy students” (Student 236). One student wrote about appearing on the game’s television broadcast (Student 199).

Several students wrote about winning basketball tickets through a lottery (Students 108, 364, 365). A student was “very excited to be one of the first groups called,” which resulted in tickets in prime seats (Student 364), and one was upgraded to Eruptions Zone seats (Student 365). Another student wrote:

On top of getting picked in this lottery I found out that my best friend here at UK also got picked for the lottery! I was afraid at first because I thought I was going to have to attend alone once I wouldn’t know anyone, but God blessed me!
(Student 108)

Students also wrote about the attending football games, including the season’s final home game.

College football Saturdays in Lexington in the latter part of students’ first semester were “a fun activity” (Student 142) they did with their friends that included tailgates where people “were all decked out in blue, & brought tons of good food” (Student 339). It was “a pretty awesome thing” for a gymnast to be recognized on the field during a game (Student 314). One student wrote, “The best event that happened this week was going to the last home football game. It was kind of sad to know that it was

the last [game of the season]" (Student 319). Other students wrote about participating on campus in ways outside the University athletics.

Activities, events, non-Greek organizations. Five (16.7%) "Campus" events from TP-3 were coded as "Activities, events, non-Greek organizations." Events included: (a) UK fight night (Student 274); (b) a salsa club event (Student 229); (c) the Baptist Christian Ministry retreat (Student 276); the club frisbee team's success (207); and Dance Blue, a 24-hour charity event that was "really fun and relaxing" (Student 246). Other students wrote about participating in fraternities and sororities in the latter part of their first semester.

Greek life. Five (16.7%) "Campus" events from TP-3 were coded as "Greek life." Four events were related to attending Greek events (Students 216, 223, 354), and another student wrote about her sorority initiation, which was "a day (she) will remember for the rest of (her) life" (Student 359). Some students' best events toward the latter part of their first semester were related to various aspects of their coursework.

Academic. A total of 18 (18.2%) best, school events were coded as "Academic" during TP-3. Events coded as "Academic" related to students finding elation in some aspect of their coursework during the first-semester. The best, school theme "Academic" produced three sub-themes during TP-3: "Classroom success" (n = 13, 72.2%), "Workload" (n = 4, 22.2%), and "Schedule" (n = 1, 5.6%).

Classroom success. Thirteen (72.2%) "Academic" events from TP-3 were coded as "Classroom success." Receiving a good grade during the latter part of their first semester was an "incredible feeling" (Student 289) that left students feeling "so happy" (Student 148), "extatic [*sic*]" (Student 332), "elated" (Student 148), and "accomplished"

(Student 217). A student earned praise from his teaching assistant (Student 217), and one received positive feedback on a project (Student 332). One student wrote about how a good grade boosted her confidence:

The best event that happened has happened to me in the past week was getting an A on my anthropology 242 exam. This class is an upper level anthropology class and I have not formal experience in the anthropology subject, it is a challenging class for me. The majority of the class is upperclassmen, which is intimidating to a first semester freshman. The first few weeks of the class I was not only intimidated by the subject matter but by the class in general. But after the first exam, I realized that if I took good notes in class, did the assigned reading, and studied for the tests, making a good grade was not impossible. So for the third exam that I just took, I did all of the above and realized that a good grade is just a few hours of studying away. (Student 290)

Another student not only discussed how receiving a grade made him feel but also offered advice to future first-year college students:

The weeks come and go here at college. Time flies by. Days are jam packed and nights are wild...It is an incredible feeling to know that your grade is well deserved and that your hard work has paid off. If there is any message I could give an incoming freshman, it would be to get ahead, get to know your professors, and to be socially balanced in their first semester. (Student 289)

Several students' best events in the latter part of their first semester as college students related to their workload.

Workload. Four (22.2%) "Academic" events from TP-3 were coded as "Workload." A student wrote about getting an exam over with (Student 327), and another about finishing homework early (Student 423). Two students enjoyed interviews associated with class projects (Students 107, 330), one of which was with a homeless man (Student 330).

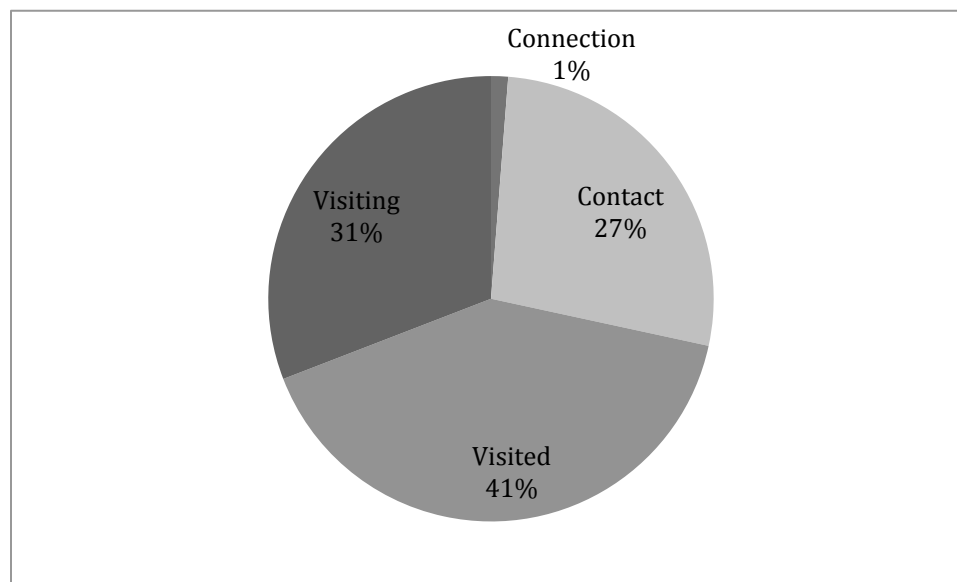
Schedule. One (5.6%) "Academic" event from TP-3 was coded as "Schedule." In it, the student wrote about being happy upon having a class canceled (Student 368). One student's event could not be coded under another best, school theme. Students also wrote

about positive home events that happened during the latter portion of their first semester at the University of Kentucky.

Best, home events. A total of 81 (23.4%) TP-3 events were coded as best, home events. As shown in Figure 4.20 and Table 4.20, 40.7% (n = 33) were coded as “Visited,” 30.9% (n = 25) as “Visiting,” 27.2% (n = 22) as “Contact,” and 1.2% (n = 1) as “Connection.”

Figure 4.20

TP-3 best, home themes



Visited. A total of 33 (40.7%) best, home events were coded as “Visited” during TP-3. Events coded as “Visited” related to students receiving visits from a person or people from home. The best, home theme “Visited” produced three sub-themes during TP-3: “Visited by family” (n = 28, 84.8%), “Visited by friend(s)” (n = 3, 9.1%), and “Visited by girl/boyfriend” (n = 2, 6.1%). Neither of the narratives that produced events coded as “Visited by girl/boyfriend” contained significant details, but visits from family members were discussed extensively.

Table 4.20

Summary of TP-3 best, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 81	%
Visited	33	40.7%
Visited by family	28	84.8%
Visited by friend(s)	3	9.1%
Visited by girl/boyfriend	2	6.1%
Visiting	25	30.9%
Visiting home	23	92%
Visiting friend(s)	1	4%
Visiting girl/boyfriend	1	4%
Contact	22	27.2%
Seeing, doing	17	77.3%
Receiving something	4	18.2%
Talking to, hearing from	1	4.5%
Connection	1	1.2%
Doing things	1	100%

Visited by family. Twenty-eight (84.8%) “Visited” events from TP-3 were coded as “Visited by family.” Visits from family during the latter part of students’ first semester as college students were “really nice” (Student 220), “awesome” (Student 357), and “so much fun” (Student 233) and resulted in students being “very excited” (Student 337), “very happy” (Student 149), and “so thankful” (Student 340). One student wrote, “I really enjoyed every minute I was able to spend with my family and it made my week that I was able to see them” (Student 225).

These visits were, for some students, the first time they had seen their parents in weeks or even months (e.g., Students 111, 149, 151, 275, 345). A student explained, “I do not get to go home very often and my mom works a lot... I’m very excited to see her for the first time in a while” (Student 275). Several students wrote about their parents

and/or siblings coming to visit for family weekend (e.g., Students 131, 147, 151, 163, 208, 237, 280, 336, 337). One student wrote:

It was a great time. I really miss my parents so it was nice seeing them. They brought me things from home and took me shopping. So it was a great time. I was pretty sad when they left though. I wanted them to stay longer than a day. I hope they decide to come down here again. (Student 208)

Visits also allowed students and parents to do things with and for one another.

Students took their parents to UK sporting events (e.g., Students 147, 149, 209, 245, 357), introduced them to their friends (e.g., Students 233, 245, 399), and shared their University of Kentucky and Lexington lives (e.g., Students 147, 151, 220, 233, 399).

One student wrote, “We went to the football game and tailgated with my sorority. My parents had the chance to meet some of my new friends and experience Big Blue Nation” (Student 399). Parents “tried to do something special for (their student)” (Student 120) and took their daughters and sons shopping (e.g., Students 149, 208, 240, 280), out to eat (e.g., Students 147, 149, 240, 280), and put them up in hotels (e.g., Students 220, 280, 340). One student wrote:

One of the best things that happened was my parents came in town to visits and we ate very well and went shopping. They bought me a lot of stuff which was fun... My parents were extremely happy to see me and quick to do whatever I wanted. (Student 240)

Students also noted the emotions attached with these visits, which included seeing, being with, and saying goodbye to their parents (e.g., Students 149, 240, 275, 337, 340, 357). One student wrote, “My mom and dad were both very excited to see me and I was happy to be with them as well... We laughed and hugged a lot” (Student 337). These visits also reiterated the levels of support families had for their first-year college students. A student explained, “(My dad) was positive and very supportive of me”

(Student 355). Being visited by friends during the latter portion of their first semester was also important to first semester students.

Visited by friend(s). Three (9.1%) “Visited” events from TP-3 were coded as “Visited by friend(s).” “It was nice being able to hang out and spend time with” (Student 197) friends from home when they came to visit. One student wrote, “Words cannot even describe how excited and happy I was to see (my best friend from high school). I felt like I could finally be myself for the first time since I’ve been down here. It was definitely a good visit” (Student 421). Another student’s mother surprised her by bringing her two best friends to visit. She wrote, “My mom brought two of my best friends here for family weekend without telling me. It made me really happy to see them because since school, I really haven’t got to see them” (Student 137). Students also wrote about visiting home or people from home as their best event during the latter portion of their first semester as college students.

Visiting. A total of 25 (30.9%) best, home events were coded as “Visiting” during TP-3. Events coded as “Visiting” related to students leaving the UK campus to visit home or someone from home. The best, home theme “Visiting” produced three sub-themes during TP-3: “Visiting home” (n = 23, 92%), “Visiting friend(s)” (n = 1, 4%), and “Visiting girl/boyfriend” (n = 1, 4%).

Visiting home. Twenty-three (92%) “Visiting” events from TP-3 were coded as “Visiting home.” These visits allowed students opportunities to spend time with their families (e.g., Students 124, 201, 206, 231, 272, 285, 343, 370, 403, 404) as well as their friends (e.g., Students 145, 190, 215, 231, 243, 244, 356, 402). One wrote, “It was such a nice break from my regular routine (at school). I loved sleeping in my own bed and

showering without flip flips on... Nashville will always be my home” (Student 324). At least one student went home “with a lot on (her) mind and (her) plate” (Student 153) and another found the visit “very supportive” (Student 201). Several students wrote about spending time with both (e.g., Students 113, 121, 344). One wrote:

I tried to spent time with all of (my friends) but I found myself wanting to be around my family most. They all asked about school and how it was to be home, etc. I really loved being able to sit down and talk instead of over the phone.
(Student 344)

Another student wrote about visiting high school friends who live in Nashville, TN.

Visiting friend(s). One (4%) “Visiting” event from TP-3 was coded as “Visiting friend(s).” For this student, “It was nice to get away from Lexington and spend time with friends that (he hadn’t) seen in a while” (Student 159). Another students’ best event toward the latter part of his first semester was traveling to North Carolina to see his girlfriend.

Visiting girl/boyfriend. One (4%) “Visiting” event from TP-3 was coded as “Visiting girl/boyfriend.” This event was special for the student because “he hadn’t seen (his girlfriend) in 3 weeks so it was amazing seeing her again” (Student 200). The ability to have contact with people from home without visiting or being visited by them was the best event for other students toward the latter part of their first semester.

Contact. A total of 22 (27.2%) best, home events were coded as “Contact” during TP-3. Events coded as “Contact” related to students having contact with home without retuning home or being visited at UK by someone from home. The best, home theme “Contact” produced three sub-themes during TP-3: “Seeing, doing” (n = 17, 77.3%), “Receiving something” (n = 4, 18.2%), and “Talking to, hearing from” (n = 1, 4.5%). The event coded as “Talking to, hearing from” did not contain significant details, but

students appreciated being able to see and do things with people from home without going home or being visited.

Seeing, doing. Seventeen (77.3%) “Contact” events from TP-3 were coded as “Seeing, doing.” Toward the latter part of their first semester, events included: (a) eating together (Students 133, 213); (b) celebrating election results (Student 143); (c) hunting (Student 144); (d) attending a pig roast (Student 162); (e) attending a concert (Student 203); (f) seeing a newborn (Student 228); (g) attending sporting events (Students 285, 353); (h) celebrating a birthday (Student 395); (i) going to a movie (Student 397); and (j) time in general (Students 141, 326, 341). The events weren’t as important as the time spent in the presence of their loved ones, which one student described as, “The best part of spending time with my family is that we don’t even have to do much to enjoy our time together, but just the physical presence of the family together puts a smile on my face” (Student 326). Students were also provided contact with home through receiving gifts and other items from home.

Receiving something. Four (18.2%) “Contact” events from TP-3 were coded as “Receiving something.” The sub-theme “Receiving something” related to students being given things from someone from home. Toward the end of their first semester, students wrote about receiving: (a) a gift (Student 152); (b) new clothes (Student 211); (c) a care package (Student 341); and (d) money (Student 416). The student who received the care package was the most excited as it was something that “cheered (her) up” (Student 341). One student was able to make contact with home by doing something with a friend from her hometown.

Connection. A total of one (1.2%) best, home event was coded as “Connection” during TP-3. The event coded as “Connection” related to a student connecting with other UK students from home while on campus. The best, home theme “Connection” produced one sub-theme during TP-3: “Doing things” (n = 1, 100%).

Doing things. One (100%) “Connection” event from TP-3 was coded as “Doing things.” This student wrote about watching an Ohio State Buckeyes football with a friend from home. She wrote, “We ordered some pizza and had some good laughs. OSU started winning and J. Doe and I became happy campers and enjoyed the rest of the night” (Student 115). Students also wrote about worst events toward the latter part of their first semester as college students that were associated with home.

Worst, home events. A total of 23 (6.6%) TP-3 events were coded as worst, home events. As shown in Figure 4.21 and Table 4.21, of these, 47.8% (n = 11) were coded as “Trouble,” 34.8% (n = 8) as “Missing,” 13% (n = 3) as “Leaving,” and 4.3% (n = 1) as “Other.”

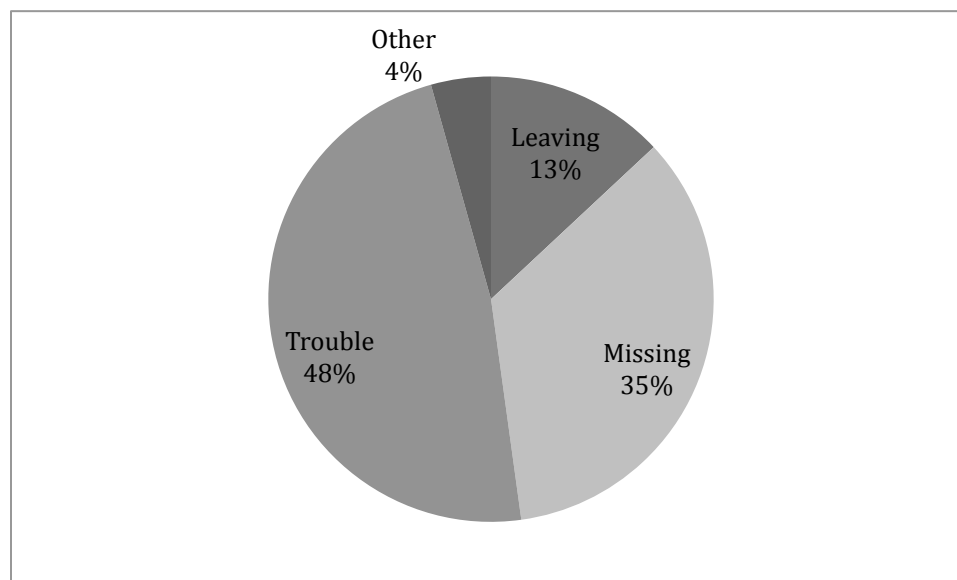
Trouble. A total of 11 (47.8%) worst, home events were coded as “Trouble” during TP-3. Events coded as “Trouble” related to students being concerned about home or someone from home, experiencing problems at home or with someone from home, or receiving bad news about someone from home. The worst, home theme “Trouble” produced five sub-themes during TP-3: “Bad news” (n = 3, 27.3%), “Illness, injury, death” (n = 3, 27.3%), “Argument” (n = 2, 18.2%), “Inconveniences” (n = 2, 18.2%), and “Other” (n = 1, 9.1%).

Bad news. Three (27.3%) “Trouble” events from TP-3 were coded as “Bad news.” A student discovered his role model was not as great a person as originally thought

(Student 143); another learned her parents would not pay for her car repairs, which she through was unfair since she was forced to pay for them on her own (Student 273). Another student received bad news regarding her interest in transferring to another university (Student 115). Other students wrote about someone from home experiencing health issues.

Figure 4.21

TP-3 worst, home themes



Illness, injury, death. Three (27.3%) “Trouble” events from TP-3 were coded as “Illness, injury, death.” A student lost a friend (Student 370), and another found out a family friend was diagnosed with cancer (Student 351). The situation appeared grave for one student’s father:

My father was hospitalized in Ohio while attending a conference. He’s a non-conforming diabetic and had his little toe removed before the gangrene could spread any further. It’s probably the beginning of the end for him judging from the dark red splotches on his legs. He told me, ‘what’s the point of living if you can’t eat what you want?’ I’ve heard heroine addicts say the same thing.” (Student 194)

In the same narrative, the student wrote, “Nothing good happened. Maybe next week” for his best event. Five other events were coded under the theme “Trouble” in the latter part of students’ first semester.

Table 4.21

Summary of TP-3 worst, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 23	%
Trouble	11	47.8%
Bad news	3	27.3%
Illness, injury, death	3	27.3%
Argument	2	18.2%
Inconveniences	2	18.2%
Other	1	9.1%
Missing	8	34.8%
Leaving	3	13%
Returning to school	2	66.7%
Family leaving after visit	1	33.3%
Other	1	4.3%

Argument, inconveniences, and other. A pair of students wrote about arguing with siblings from home (Students 124, 342). One student got locked out when home (Student 211), and one experienced car trouble on the way home (Student 234). Another student wrote about having a poor lunch experience with his cousin (Student 405). Other students wrote about being homesick and their inability to travel or see someone from home.

Missing. A total of eight (34.8%) worst, home events from TP-3 were coded as “Missing.” During the latter part of their first semester these events related to: (a) students being unable to see a best friend while home (Student 138) or unable to go home (Students 236); (b) families being unable to attend family weekend (Students 215, 270,

341), and (c) students being homesick (Students 160, 243, 279). A student wrote: “(My mom) was really looking forward to seeing me and getting to spend time with me, but all of my homework and tests piled up this week so I had to stay and work on school”

(Student 236). One student wrote:

My family did not come down for (family) weekend and I haven’t seen my parents since I moved down here. I am very homesick and this weekend just made me more upset seeing everyones [*sic*] families. And none of my friends were around because all their families were here or they went home or the weekend. (Student 341)

Another wrote:

I Skyped with my parents yesterday and got very homesick. My dad was dressed in his Bears t-shirt watching the Chicago Bears play and my mom was in the kitchen making chili. It reminded me of a typical fall Sunday afternoon at my house so I got a little sad because I wish I could have been home to enjoy that time with my parents and family. My mom and dad assured me that Thanksgiving is coming up faster than even and I will be home before I know it. (Student 160)

Additional worst, home events during TP-3 related to students returning to school after visiting home or someone from home or one’s family leaving after visiting the University of Kentucky.

Leaving. A total of 3 (13%) worst, home events were coded as “Leaving” during TP-3. Events coded as “Leaving” related to students leaving family members or others from home. The worst, home theme “Leaving” produced two sub-themes during TP-3: “Returning to school” (n = 2, 66.7%) and “Family leaving after visit” (n = 1, 33.3%).

One student encountered “a lonely seven hour car ride back to Kentucky” while returning from visiting his girlfriend. “(He) tried to listen to music, but (he) was still too sad so (he) just sat in silence the first few hours” (Student 200). Another student wrote:

(My family) came down for the family weekend and that was so much fun but then they left and it was sad to say goodbye... My mom was the most predictable

by saying things like, I'm so proud of you, I love you, and I'll miss you... I just keep reminding myself that I'll be home in 14 days for Thanksgiving. (Student 331)

An additional event could not be coded under any worst, home theme during the latter portion of students' first semester.

Other. A total of one (4.3%) worst, home event was coded as "Other" during TP-

3. In this narrative, the student was unable to come up with a worst event after being visited by his parents for family weekend:

It was nice to see them because I have been away and I hadn't seen them in quite some time... They were so excited to see me and I was excited as well... It was a particularly great day because I got to see the people I really care about and who care about me as well... It could be possible that I cannot think of anything [to write about as a worst event] because seeing my loved ones completely trumps anything bad that could have happened. I was so excited to see them that I looked over anything that may or may not have happened. (Student 151)

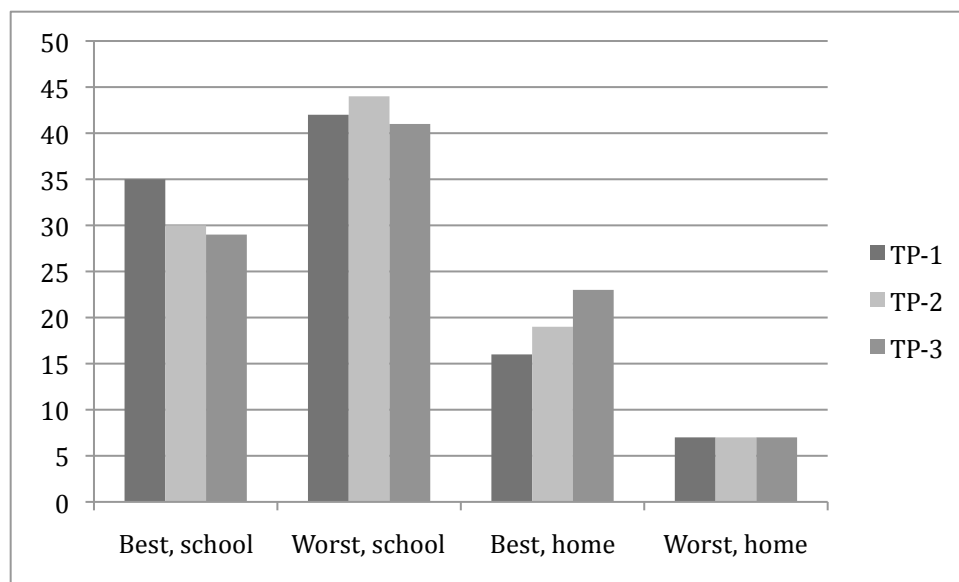
Research Question 2 Summary

Students wrote about best, school events decreasingly less often over each time period (see Figure 4.22). The best, school theme "Living" increased in frequency across the three time periods, but best, school events coded as "Campus" decreased across time. The best, school theme "Academic" peaked at TP-2, and the association's theme "Starting" was unique to TP-1. Students wrote about worst, school events the most during TP-2, but the frequency of these events were not consistent over time (see Figure 4.22). The worst, school theme "Navigation" was most frequently written about during TP-1. Worst, school events coded as "Living" decreased across each time period, and the number of "Academic" worst, school events increased each time period. Students wrote about best, home events increasingly more over each time period (see Figure 4.22). The best, home theme "Visited" increased in frequency across each time period, and

“Visiting” was most often written about during TP-2. Best, home events coded as “Contact” was most frequently written about during TP-1, and students wrote about “Connection” best, home events less often over time. (see Figure 4.22) Students wrote about worst, home events consistently over each of the three time periods. Worst, home events coded as “Trouble” were most often written about during TP-2. The number of worst, home events coded as “Leaving” decreased over time, and the worst, home theme “Missing” most frequently appeared during TP-3.

Figure 4.22

Events by association over time



Research Question 3

To answer RQ3 (What are students’ stories about the University of Kentucky and about home who do not return to UK for a second semester?), it was first necessary to determine which of the study’s participants did not return for a second semester at UK. According to information provided by the University Associate Registrar, Data Management, 22 (8.3%) of the 264 participants did not re-enroll for a second semester

(A. Campbell, personal communication, January 19, 2011). Demographic figures for these students were calculated and other personal information examined.

The majority ($n = 18$, 81.8%) of the 22 students who did not return for a second semester were females and four (18.2%) were males. Additional demographic and related information was not available for one student. The original sample contained 133 females (50.4%) and 109 males (41.3%). Seventeen (77.3%) of non-returning students self-reported their race as white (78% of the original sample was white, $n = 206$), two (9.1%) as black or African American (6.8% of the original sample was black or African American, $n = 18$), one (4.5%) as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (less than 1% of the original sample was Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, $n = 1$), and one (4.5%) as being white and black/African American (2.3% of the original sample reported their race as other, $n = 6$).

Most ($n = 17$, 77.3%) of the non-returning students lived in a dorm at the beginning of their first semester, two (9.1%) lived in an apartment or rental house, one (4.5%) lived with one or more of her parents. One student self-reported that she lived in a University dorm in the initial few weeks of her first semester but reported living with her parents toward the end of the semester. The majority of participants from the original sample (78.4%, $n = 207$) reported living in a University dormitory, and the remainder of the sample reported different living situations, including living in an apartment or rental house (7.2%, $n = 19$), living with one or more of their parents (3.5%, $n = 10$), with another family member or family members (less than 1%, $n = 1$), in a Greek house (less than 1%, $n = 1$) or in another type of living arrangement (1.5%, $n = 4$).

The self-reported primary caregiver of six (27.3%) students graduated high school, five (22.7%) completed some college, five (22.7%) earned a bachelor's degree, and five (22.7%) held graduate or professional degrees. Over half of the study's original sample reported that their primary caregiver earned a bachelor's degree (31.8%, n = 84) or a graduate or professional degree (20.8%, n = 55). Forty-four students in the original sample (16.7%) reported their primary caregiver graduated high school, one (less than 1%) student that s/he completed some college, and one (less than 1%) that s/he completed some high school.

Of the 22 students who did not return for a second semester, 15 (68.2%) reported having close friends from "home" attending the University of Kentucky compared to six (27.3%) who did not. The majority (75.8%, n = 200) of students from the original sample reported having close friends from "home" attending the University of Kentucky compared to 15.9% (n = 42) of students from the original sample who said they have no close friends from home attending UK.

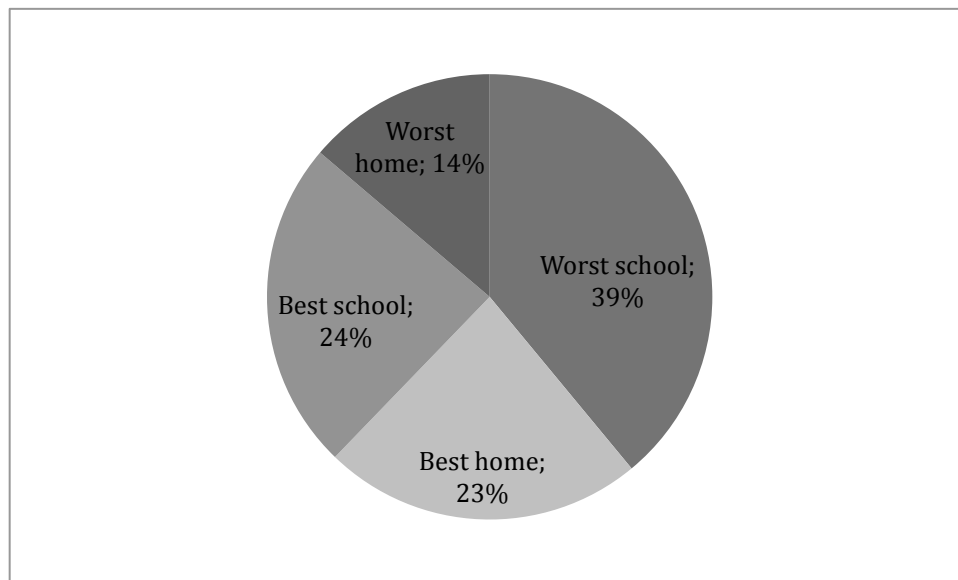
Half (n = 11) of the 22 students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester self-reported their hometown as being in Kentucky, and nine identified their hometown as being outside the state. Most (n = 181, 68.6%) students from the original sample self-reported their hometowns as being in Kentucky, and 60 (22.7%) of students from the original sample reported they were from outside the state. Twenty-three students (8.7%) from the original sample did not provide information about their hometown. The free-writes for the 22 non-returning students were pulled from the entire data set and re-read before being examined by overall themes and longitudinally.

Research Question 3A

To answer RQ3A (What are the overall themes?), coded events (i.e., their themes and sub-themes) from the narratives of students who did not return for a second semester at the University of Kentucky were examined. The narratives from the 22 non-returning students produced 97 events. Of these, 35.1% (n = 34) were worst, school events, 30.9% (n = 30) best, home events, 21.6% (n = 21) best, school events, and 12.4% (n = 12) worst, home events (see Figure 4.23 and Table 4.22). By examining the number of events coded under each association, (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS) and the number and content of each association's themes and sub-themes, one may begin to understand non-returning students' stories about UK and about home during their first and only semester at the University of Kentucky.

Figure 4.23

Non-returning students' stories by association



Worst, school events. The narratives from the 22 non-returning students produced 34 worst, school events. Of these, 64.7% (n = 22) were coded as “Living,” 20.6% (n = 7) as “Academic”, and 14.7% (n = 5) as “Navigation” (see Figure 4.24 and Table 4.23).

Table 4.22

Summary of non-returning students’ total events by association and theme

Total Events	N = 97	%
Total Worst School	34	35.1%
Living	22	64.7%
Academic	7	20.6%
Navigation	5	14.7%
Total Best Home	30	30.9%
Visiting	13	43.3%
Contact	11	36.7%
Visited	4	13.3%
Connection	2	6.7%
Total Best School	21	21.6%
Living	12	57.1%
Campus	7	33.3%
Academic	2	9.5%
Total Worst Home	12	12.4%
Trouble	8	66.7%
Missing	3	25%
Leaving	1	8.3%

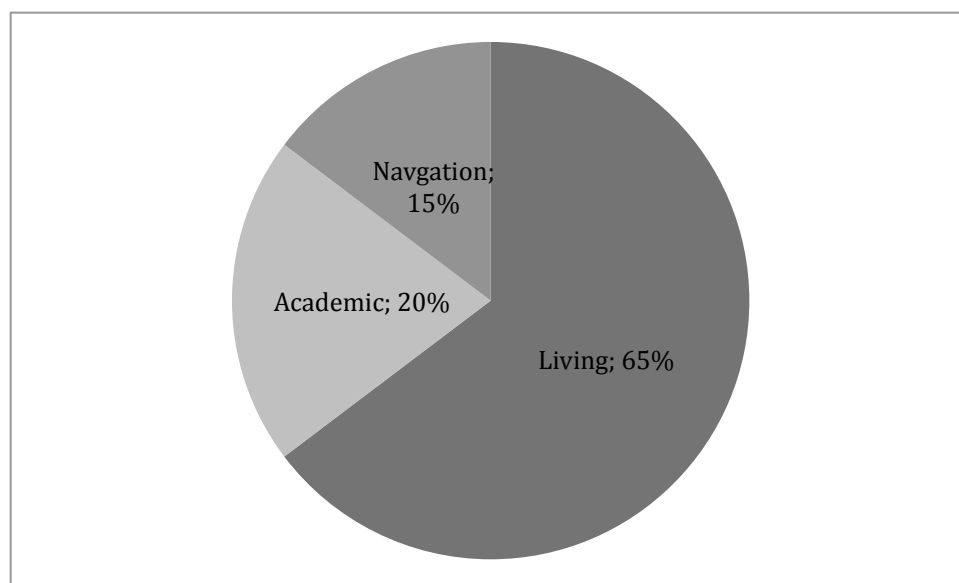
Living. Twenty-two worst, school events from non-returning students were coded as the theme “Living,” which related to students struggling in some aspect of their lives as college students outside the classroom. Eight students wrote about facing illnesses or injuries (e.g., Students 139, 229, 253, 253, 280). One wrote about being “sick miserably,” (Student 120) and one drew a sad face after writing she had been sick (Student 109). Four non-returning students dealt with roommate issues during their only

semester as UK students (Students 115, 120, 133, 157). A difficult roommate caused one student to write, “Needless to say... we hate each other” (Student 115). Three students wrote about negatives associated with their jobs (Students 252, 339, 396) and one wrote about breaking up with his girlfriend, which resulted in him feeling “crushed.” He continued, “It has only been a week since it happened and it still makes me sick... It ended all wrong, it happened over face book [*sic*] of all places. It was mutual but I still miss it” (Student 287). One student who experienced a poor adjustment during the initial weeks of her first semester wrote about wanting to be closer to home:

The worst event that has happened was when I realized I am not a big fan of UK, and don't know how long I will stay here. It was one night in my dorm I just realized I am not myself and want to be closer to home and all of my friends and family. I told my mom and she agreed and supported me 100% but said to give it some time. I am going to stay the semester but might be transferring to the University of Iowa second semester to be closer. It's only been two weeks though so I cannot make my decisions yet. (Student 376)

Figure 4.24

Non-returning students' total worst, school themes



Academic. Seven worst, school events from non-returning students’ narratives were coded as the theme “Academic,” which related to students being bothered by or frustrated with some aspect of their coursework. One student wrote about being “frustrated” over a homework assignment (Student 121), and another was “very nervous” before delivering a speech and “relieved” after doing so (Student 339). Two students wrote about contacting home when they were stressed and overwhelmed with schoolwork. One wrote:

I was very stressed out and had a little bit of a breakdown. I talked to my family members... and they all gave me support. They all told me the same thing in that I need to believe in myself and believe that everything would work out. I appreciated and I was thankful for their words of wisdom and guidance. (Student 353)

Table 4.23

Summary of non-returning students’ total worst, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 34	%
Living	22	64.7%
Physical	8	36.4%
Dorm, roommate(s), neighbor(s)	4	18.2%
Inconveniences	3	13.6%
Work	3	13.6%
Doing something alone	1	4.5%
Social life, network	1	4.5%
UK athletics	1	4.5%
Other	1	4.5%
Academic	7	20.6%
Workload	4	57.1%
Stressed, overwhelmed	2	28.6%
Bad grade(s)	1	14.3%
Navigation	5	14.7%
Lost way	1	20%
Missed class	2	40%
Parking, driving, walking	2	40%

The other wrote:

I was just so stressed out that I started to cry. I was at my apartment and on the phone with my mom. She always makes everything so much better. She always knows what to say and how to make me laugh... Every time this happens, it's always her that makes everything better. (Student 259)

Navigation. Five worst, school events from non-returning students' narratives were coded as the theme "Navigation," which related to students navigating their way around campus, dealing with University of Kentucky bureaucracy, and managing their class schedules. Missing class "completely stressed (one student) out;" she also wrote, "I hate missing class... I love teachers that are so understanding" (Student 353). After missing class, another student wrote, "I just felt awful. I felt like the worst person on the earth [*sic*]" (Student 287). His narrative also revealed bigger issues he faced during his transition to college:

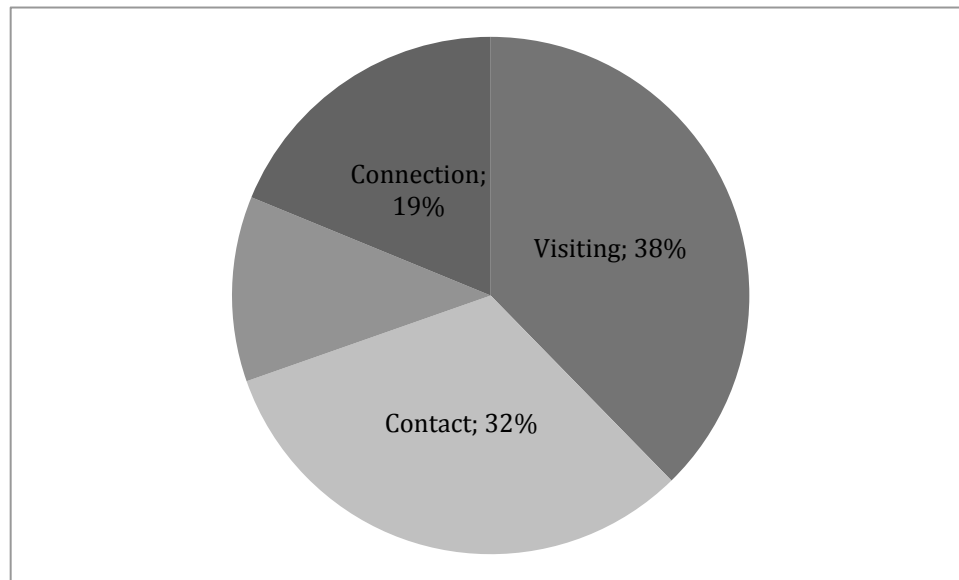
I am not totally ready for college, and my life choices now affect the rest of my life. I am not ready for life. I have been spoiled my whole life and haven't accepted responsibility for things I have done. I need a reality check, badly. I want to tell people about my events but I don't want people knowing, yet I need somebody to tell my thoughts to so I don't explode. But I don't know who I can tell. I am nervous and scared and I don't want people to judge my lifestyle even though they will regardless if I want them to or not. (Student 287)

Another student "started crying because there was so much traffic and (she) was just overwhelmed" (Student 259). Students who left the University of Kentucky following their first semester also wrote stories about positive events that were associated with home.

Best, home events. The narratives from the 22 non-returning students produced 30 best, home events. Of these, 43.3% (n = 13) were coded as "Visiting," 36.7% (n = 11) as "Contact," 13.3% (n = 4) as "Visited," and 6.7% (n = 2) as "Connection" (see Figure 4.25 and Table 4.24).

Figure 4.25

Non-returning students' best, home themes



Visiting. Thirteen best, home events from non-returning students' narratives were coded as the theme "Visiting," which related to students leaving the UK campus to visit someone from home. Ten of these events were related to students going home and three to them visiting friends at another college. It was an emotional journey when non-returning students went home to visit family and/or friends or traveled to other colleges to visit high school friends.

For one student, visiting home was "the overall highlight and best event that has occurred in (her) life within the past week or so" (Student 139). A student described a visit home as being "on the bright side of things" during which her parents also demonstrated their emotion (Student 120). She wrote, "My mom couldn't stop smiling and my dad was just so happy to see me happy and doing well. It felt so great to be home and see everyone." One student noted that "it's always nice" (Student 138) to visit home to see family and another was "so happy" (Student 161) to do so. Several other students

wrote about how happy their families were when the student visited home (e.g., Students 161, 353, 385). A student who wrote about visiting her two best friends from home at another college described the elation the trio felt upon her arrival. She wrote, “When I walked into their room they both started screaming and J. Doe gave me a big hug and started crying” (Student 376). One non-returning student wrote about negative emotions he encountered while home. He discussed a difficult adjustment to college life when writing about going home and how he faced uncertainty. He wrote, “I have a huge burden on my shoulders right now and it is potentially terrible” (Student 287).

Table 4.24

Summary of non-returning students’ total best, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 30	%
Visiting	13	43.3%
Visiting home	10	76.9%
Visiting friends(s)	3	23.1%
Contact	11	36.7%
Seeing, doing	8	72.7%
Talking to, hearing from	2	18.2%
Receiving something	1	9.1%
Visited	4	13.3%
Visited by family	2	50%
Visited by friend(s)	1	25%
Visited by girl/boyfriend	1	25%
Connection	2	21.6%
Doing things	2	100%

Contact. Eleven best, home events from non-returning students’ narratives were coded as the theme “Contact,” which related to students having contact with people from home without returning home or by engaging in an activity that was not the result of someone from home coming to UK exclusively to visit a student. One student met her

dad, step mom, and grandparents in Mississippi where they visited her brother at his college. She wrote:

Being so far away from my family is tough... Getting to see them made me feel great. I love my family and I wish they were all closer to me. But I guess that is my fault because I chose to go to a school so far away... They really brighten my day... I can't wait to see my family again. (Student 280)

Another student wrote about spending time with her son in two free-writes; in one narrative she described this time as “the most fun (she'd) had all week” and during the second visit she “also enjoyed the fact that (her) boyfriend was there to spend time with the two of (them) as well” (Student 252).

Even if these events were simple in nature, they had an impact on non-returning students. One student explained, “The best part of spending time with my family is that we don't even have to do much to enjoy our time together, but just the physical presence of the whole family together puts a smile on my face” (Student 326). Upon seeing some high school friends at a high school band competition, one student's friends “all came running up and gave (her) hugs” (Student 253). Another student wrote about talking with an ex-boyfriend and how he “missed (her) and missed the relationship (they) had” (Student 115). She continued, “I on the other hand am a little hesitant to jump back with him because I fear it will not work. I am happy we are talking again and hopefully things will fall into place.” Another student wrote about the emotions a friend discussed during a phone call and how this made the student feel:

He just told me... that he missed me and couldn't wait to see me over the weekend. This meant so much to me because he doesn't really express much emotion when it comes to our relationship... I hadn't seen him since I moved to Lexington. So actually hearing his voice meant a lot to me and made my week better. (Student 161)

Visited. Four best, home events from non-returning students' narratives were coded as the theme "Visited," which related to students receiving visits from a person or people from home. Specifically, these students wrote about visits from a boyfriend, a best friend, one's family, and one's mother. Students also wrote about the emotions of being visited by someone from home on the University of Kentucky campus during their only semester on campus.

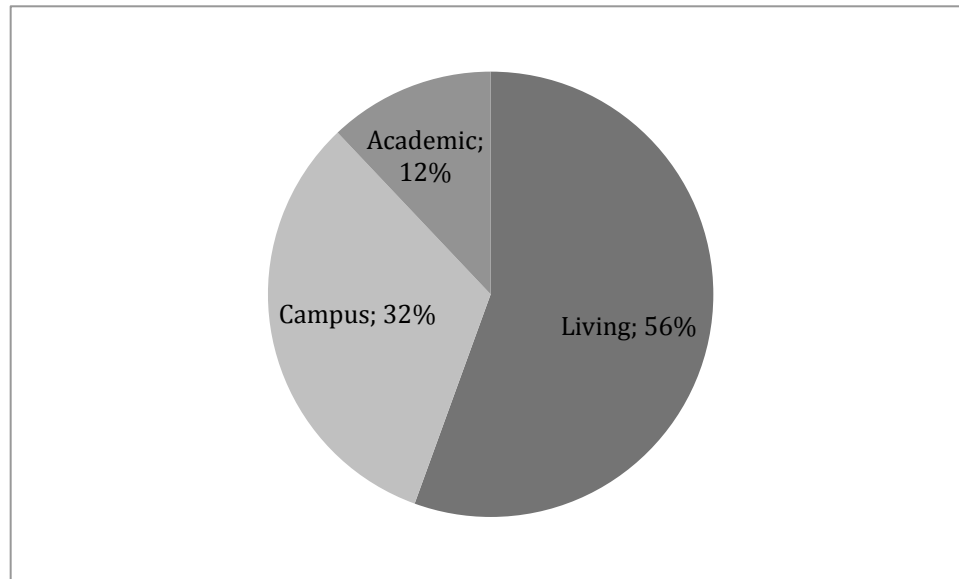
A visit from one student's boyfriend was not only the best event of her week "but probably (her) best event of the month" (Student 400). One student wrote it was "so good" to see her best friend when she visited, and another student wrote, "My brother was so excited to finally come see me and where I go to school. It made his week he said!" (Student 120). A student was "so excited" to see her boyfriend when he visited that she "couldn't help but to jump in his arms" when they greeted one another in the airport "with affection and enthusiasm" (Student 400). Another student wrote about the emotions related to her mom visiting for family weekend. She wrote, "It was nice to catch up with my mom and hangout with her... This weekend was lazy but I enjoyed it very much because I spent quality time with my mom. I really miss her" (Student 280).

Connection. Two best, home events from non-returning students' narratives were coded as the theme "Connection," which related to students connecting with other UK students from home while on campus. Specifically, these events were about attending a party with friends from home (Student 339) and watching a hometown team's football game at a Lexington restaurant with a friend from home (Student 115). Despite leaving after one semester, students who did not return to the University of Kentucky in the spring managed to find and write about positive events related to school.

Best, school events. The narratives from the 22 non-returning students produced 21 best, school events. Of these, 57.1% (n = 12) were coded as “Living,” 33.3% (n = 7) as “Campus,” and 9.5% (n = 2) as “Academic” (see Figure 2.26 and Table 4.25).

Figure 4.26

Non-returning students’ total best, school themes



Living. Twelve best, school events from non-returning students’ narratives were coded as the theme “Living,” which related to students maneuvering through various aspects of life as college students beyond campus involvement and academic life. Of these, three were related to students meeting people and making friends (Students 229, 385, 396) and five to students doing things with other UK students (e.g., eating off campus, going on a date, attending a party, seeing a movie) (Students 121, 133, 287, 376, 396). Despite not returning for a second semester at UK, one student “experienced [a] college Friday night,” which he considered “awesome fun” (Student 287). Four best, school events from non-returning students were about doing things alone (Students 139, 157, 229, 400).

Table 4.25

Summary of non-returning students' total best, school themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 21	%
Living	12	57.1%
Social life, network	5	41.7%
Doing something alone	4	33.3%
Meeting people, making friends	3	25%
Campus	7	33.3%
Activities, events, non-Greek organizations	3	42.9%
UK athletics	3	42.9%
Greek life	1	14.3%
Academic	2	12.4%
Classroom success	1	50%
Schedule	1	50%

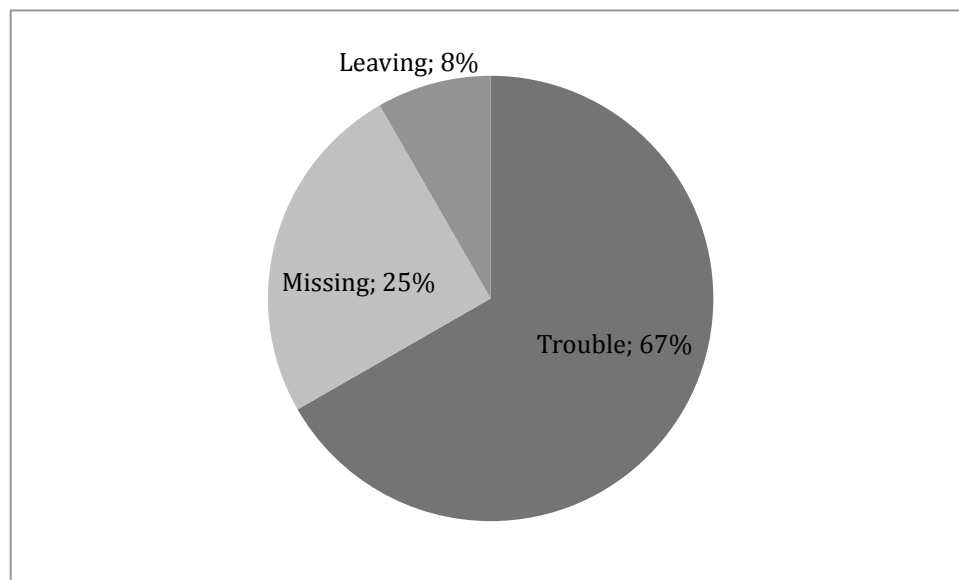
Campus. Seven best, school events from non-returning students' narratives were coded as the theme "Campus," which related to students connecting to and involving themselves with the University through various campus activities, events, and organizations. Students who did not return for their spring semester at UK wrote about: (a) joining a sorority (Student 280); (b) seeing a movie on campus (Student 229); (c) tailgating for and attending a UK football game (Student 339); and (d) attending a salsa club event (Student 229). One wrote about her soccer team's victory (Student 400) and another about being in marching band (Student 253). The young woman was "so excited" about sorority bid day but descried rush week as "very long and stressful" (Student 280), and the student "couldn't stop laughing" because of how much fun she had attending a salsa club event (Student 229). Members of the soccer team were "really excited" after beating Tennessee on UT's home field (Student 400). The student who was a member of the UK marching band "love(d) rehearsals," and being part of the team was "an awesome feeling" that made her "super excited" (Student 253).

Academic. Two best, school events from non-returning students' narratives were coded as the theme "Academic," which related to students finding elation in some aspect of their coursework during the first-semester. These events were specifically related to one non-returning student enjoying her classes (Student 229) and another receiving a good speech grade (Student 326). The least amount of coded events produced by students who did not return for a second semester at the University of Kentucky were worst, home events.

Worst, home events. The narratives from the 12 non-returning students produced 12 worst, home events. Of these, 66.7% (n = 8) were coded as "Trouble," 25% (n = 3) as "Missing," and 8.3% (n = 1) as "Leaving" (see figure 4.27 and Table 4.26).

Figure 4.27

Non-returning students total worst, home themes



Trouble. Eight worst, home events from non-returning students’ narratives were coded as the theme “Trouble,” which related to students being concerned about home or someone from home, experiencing problems at home or with someone from home, or receiving bad news about someone from home. Several students who did not return to UK for the spring semester wrote about an illness, injury, or death that affected the student and/or someone from home or bad news associated with home. One student was “very sad” over the death of her great aunt (Student 253) and another discussed mixed emotions of having to put down an ailing family dog. He wrote, “I will miss him but I know it was for the best” (Student 353). A student was “depressed” upon discovering she lost acceptance into a university to which she was transferring. Another student wrote about the mixed emotions of learning she was pregnant:

During the past week, the worst event that has occurred would be finding out I am pregnant. I was at my house when I found out. Since I live with my boyfriend and his family almost everyone was home, including him, his sisters, and his mother. Everyone around me was so happy, estatic [*sic*], and over-joyed [*sic*]. I on the other hand am still in shock and don’t know what to be, happy, sad, upset, cry, laugh, just all around confused was how I felt. (Student 139)

Table 4.26

Summary of non-returning students’ total worst, home themes and sub-themes

Total Events	N = 12	%
Trouble	8	66.7%
Bad news	5	62.5%
Illness, injury, death	3	37.5%
Missing	3	25%
Leaving	1	8.3%
Returning to school	1	100%

Missing. Three worst, home events from non-returning students' narratives were coded as the theme "Missing." These students wrote about being homesick or their inability to see or contact someone from home. One was "sad all weekend" because she couldn't talk to her boyfriend (Student 109). Another student "was really upset" because she couldn't see her family, which resulted in her making herself "upset because (she) was just thinking too much for no reason" (Student 400). She identifies herself as a student athlete from Nova Scotia and homesick when her teammates went off with their families following a home game and she "had no one to go celebrate with" (Student 400).

Leaving. One worst, home event from non-returning students' narratives was coded as the theme "Leaving," which related to students leaving family members or others from home. Specifically, this event was about a student being sad when she said goodbye to her mom upon returning to school after a weekend home (Student 385). The student wrote:

I was sad to leave her to come back to school... she is very emotional. She talked about how much she misses me during the week and she started to tear up, which made it very difficult for me. Her starting to cry was very predictable. My mom and I are best friends and she gets sad every time I leave her. I knew she would cry, but every time it still makes us feel sad. (Student 385)

An additional sub-component of research question three explored how non-returning students' stories evolved over the course of their first and only semester at the University of Kentucky.

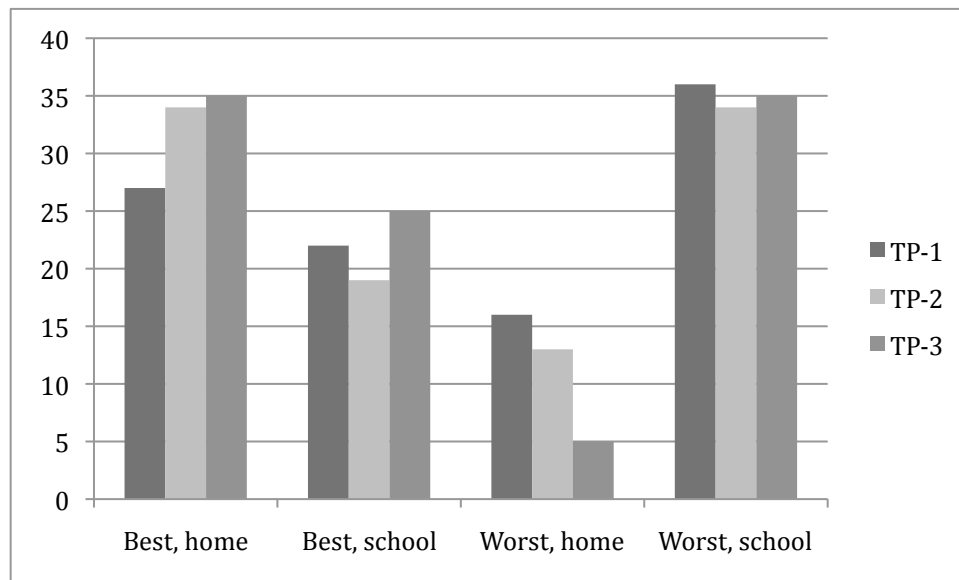
Research Question 3B

To answer RQ3B (How do the stories evolve over time?), narratives and events about each association (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS) were examined over time. Students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester produced 97 events.

Of these, 46.4% (n = 45) of the 97 events produced by non-returning students were from TP-1, 33% (n = 32) from TP-2, and 20.6% (n = 20) from TP-3 (see Figure 4.28 and Table 4.27). TP-1 represented the initial weeks, TP-2 the time around midterm, and TP-3 as the latter part of students' first semester as college students.

Figure 4.28

Non-returning students' stories by association over time



By examining how each association (e.g., BH, BS, WH, WS) was represented during TP-1, TP-2, and TP-3, one may begin to understand how non-returning students' stories about UK and about home evolved over time.

Best, home events. Narratives written by students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester produced 30 best, home events. These events were coded under the themes “Connection,” “Contact,” “Visited,” and “Visiting.”

Connection. Two students who only attended UK for one semester wrote about being able to spend time on campus with friends from their hometowns. One wrote about attending a party during the semester's first few weeks; “It was a fun time, & friends

from (his) hometown joined the party” (Student 339). The other described watching an Ohio State football game at a Lexington restaurant with a friend from home during the latter part of the semester (Student 115). She wrote, “We both were in our jerseys and sat there watching the game, getting crap from everyone sitting around us. J. Doe and I got upset and OSU started playing crappy” (Student 115).

Table 4.27

Summary of non-returning students’ events over time by theme

	TP-1		TP-2		TP-3	
	n = 45	%	n = 32	%	n = 20	%
Best, home events	12	26.7%	11	34.4%	7	35%
Connection	1	8.3%	0	0%	1	14.3%
Contact	5	41.7%	3	27.3%	3	42.9%
Visited	1	8.3%	1	9.1%	2	28.6%
Visiting	5	41.7%	7	63.6%	1	14.3%
Best, school events	10	22.2%	6	18.8%	5	25%
Academic	1	10%	1	16.7%	0	0%
Campus	2	20%	2	33.3%	3	60%
Living	7	70%	3	50%	2	40%
Worst, home events	7	15.6%	4	12.5%	1	5%
Missing	3	42.9%	0	0%	0	0%
Leaving	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%
Trouble	4	57.1%	3	75%	1	100%
Worst, school events	16	35.6%	11	34.4%	7	35%
Academic	2	12.5%	2	18.2%	3	42.9%
Living	10	62.5%	8	72.7%	4	57.1%
Navigation	4	25%	1	9.1%	0	0%

Contact. Non-returning students wrote about their ability to see or do things with and/or hear from individuals from their hometowns during their first and only semester at the University of Kentucky. A phone call from her best friend was important to one student early in the semester and provided a connection to home. She wrote:

He just told me how things were going in my hometown and that he missed me and couldn’t wait to see me over the weekend. This meant so much to me

because he doesn't really express much emotion when it comes to our relationship... I hadn't seen him since I moved to Lexington. So actually hearing his voice meant a lot to me and made my week better. (Student 161)

Eating lunch with her family during the latter part of her first semester resulted in another student thinking toward the upcoming holidays. She wrote:

The best part of spending time with my family is that we don't even have to do much to enjoy our time together, but just the physical presence of the family together puts a smile on my face. It also reminds me of how the holidays—Thanksgiving and Christmas—are right around the corner. (Student 326)

Visited. A visit from one student's boyfriend during the initial weeks of her first and only semester at the University of Kentucky "was just like old times" (Student 400).

During the time around midterm, a student wrote, "It's so good to see (my best friend), because the only way I've gotten to physically see her and hang out was over Skype" (Student 133). Another student's family visited during the latter part of his first semester, and his brother "was so excited to finally see (him) and where (he) goes to school" (Student 120).

Visiting. Visiting home in the initial weeks of her first semester provided one student "a refreshing break from (her) new stressful life at UK" (Student 138). Going home early in her first semester also allowed this student to talk about her new life away from home. She wrote, "My mom and I spent a lot of time in the evenings talking about college. We took the time to figure out why it is that I've yet to make any friends."

When writing about visiting home during TP-1, one student revealed his dislike for the University of Kentucky and discussed a difficult adjustment to life at college and away from home. He wrote:

The best thing that has happened to me this week was that I get to go home. I don't really like UK that much. I mean, yeah it's fun but my classes stink. I miss

my girlfriend and I'm a poor student. So I get to see my friends and family and have just a great weekend. I don't know how well these next few weeks of my life are going to go. I have a huge burden on my shoulders and it's potentially terrible... One good thing is, I am going to have a blast this weekend and it's busy and it will hopefully keep my mind off of the bad things in my life right now. (Student 287)

A visit home around midterm resulted in one student talking with his friends about transferring to a university back home (Student 353). Another student who visited home toward the middle of the semester wrote that the visit allowed her to see family and friends "for the first time in a while;" these individuals "were all so happy to see (her)" and "hug(ged her) and yell(ed) out excitedly" (Student 385).

Traveling to the University of Illinois around midterm allowed one student to see her two best friends for the first time in almost two months and have "one of the funnest [*sic*] weekends (she's) had." She wrote, "When I walked into their room they both started screaming and J. Doe gave me a huge hug and started crying. I was so excited to see them and be with all my friends" (Student 376). Students who did not return to the University of Kentucky also wrote about positive events that were associated with school.

Best, school events. Narratives written by students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester produced 21 best, school events. These events were coded under the themes, "Academic," "Campus," and "Living."

Academic. Despite leaving UK after one semester, one student wrote during the initial weeks of her first semester about having "great classes, which (was) very important to (her)" (Student 229). Another student wrote about receiving a good speech grade around midterm despite getting herself "worked up over nothing" (Student 326).

Campus. Seven students who did not return for a second semester at the University of Kentucky wrote about participating in various campus activities. Despite joining a sorority being one student's best event during the initial weeks of the semester, she found the experience trying as well. She wrote:

The best thing that has happened to me at the University of Kentucky was when I was asked to join the Chi Omega sorority. Rush week was very long and stressful, especially since I did not know anyone from UK... Running back to the Chi Omega house to greet all of my new sisters was thrilling and definitely a moment I will never forget. (Student 280)

Living. Twelve best, school events from students who only attended the University of Kentucky for one semester were coded as the theme "Living." Two students wrote about meeting friends during the initial weeks of their only semester on campus, and one wrote about meeting a girl around midterm who he'd been hoping to meet (Student 396). Two non-returning students wrote about doing something alone during TP-1, one during TP-2, and one during TP-3. Doing so allowed one student to "meet some amazing people" (Student 157). Another student wrote about attending a party with her new friends during the first few weeks of the semester, which allowed her and her companions to have "a good time getting to know each other more" (Student 287).

Worst, home events. Narratives written by students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester produced 12 worst, home events. These events were coded under the themes "Missing," "Leaving," and "Trouble."

Missing. One student was upset in the initial weeks of her first and only semester as a UK student because she was unable to talk to her boyfriend and another because she

wouldn't see her mother when home. An early season victory by her UK soccer team resulted in a Canadian student being homesick. She explained:

I, of course, being from Canada had no one to celebrate with as my family and friends are in Nova Scotia. I was really upset even though we won the game. I just made myself upset because I was just thinking too much for no reason.
(Student 400)

Leaving. One non-returning student wrote about saying goodbye to her mom after a visit home around midterm of the student's first and only semester as a University of Kentucky student. Her mother's emotions "made it very difficult" on the young woman (Student 385).

Trouble. During the latter part of her only semester at the University of Kentucky, one student wrote about how The Ohio State University took away her acceptance. She did not submit her transcript and ACT scores, which resulted in her not being able to enroll in the school to which she was transferring until the spring quarter (Student 115). Students who did not return for their spring semester at the University of Kentucky wrote about negative events they encountered during their one semester on campus that related to school.

Worst, school events. Narratives written by students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester produced 34 worst, school events. These events were coded under the themes "Academic," "Living," and "Navigation."

Academic. During the initial weeks of the fall semester, one student who did not return to UK for a second semester became frustrated over homework (Student 121) and another struggled to understand philosophy lectures (Student 385). Around midterm, a student wrote about being nervous for a speech assignment (Student 339) and another cried due to stress (Student 259). One student became stressed and "had a little bit of a

breakdown” during the latter part of his only semester at UK (Student 353). One student not only contacted home and felt terrible as a result of receiving a bad grade but also was forced to make an important decision:

I had been struggling in my Chemistry 103 class the entire semester... I studied for hours extremely hard for days in preparation for this exam... I’ve never worked so hard towards something and then for it to just slap me in the face... I called my dad crying, talked to my adviser, talked to my teacher and we decided dropping the class was the best option for me. I have never felt so dumb in my life. I hate bad grades. I am now a part-time student. (Student 280)

Another student wrote, “I’m just so ready for a break since we haven’t really had any time off. I definitely can’t wait for Thanksgiving” (Student 133).

Living. Three non-returning students dealt with roommate issues during the initial weeks of the school year. One wrote:

My roommate is inconsiderate by waking me up @ 3 am [*sic*] when she comes home, kicking me out of the room and not cleaning up after herself... (She is) always singing and playing the piano when I try to study. I told her that she needs to be considerate when people are trying to sleep @ 11:30 pm [*sic*]. I also, told her to keep her side of the room cleaned. She looked at me in disgust and put the blame on me for waking her up every morning with my 8 am [*sic*] class. Needless to say... We hate each other. (Student 115)

Another student wrote during the time around midterm that she has “one roommate who gets harder to live with everyday” (Student 133). She continued:

We can’t have people come over hardly ever, her parents come pretty much 2-3 times a week, and she constantly complains. Even my best friend (who is a mutual friend) commented on how strict she is. I guess next year, me and my other room mate [*sic*] just need to find someone more laid back.

Navigation. During the first few weeks of their only semester on the University of Kentucky campus, one student wrote about each of the following: (a) locating classes (Student 326); (b) missing class (Student 287); (c) being stuck in traffic (Student 259);

and (d) receiving a parking ticket (Student 339). The student who became lost on her way to early semester classes wrote:

A challenging task was finding all of my classes around campus and the classroom I was supposed to be in. There are 4,100 freshman [*sic*] and this number overwhelmed me a little, but I am going to try to reduce this number mentally when I get involved. I feel like I have a group of friends rather than 4,100 individuals to meet. I do have a large group of friends here that I came with from high school, but I would like to extend that number. (Student 326)

Another student wrote about missing two classes around midterm:

It completely stressed me out. Most students would probably put this under the best thing that happen to them this week, but I hate missing class... I love teachers that are so understanding. I hope that I never have to miss class again! It puts you so far behind and it is tough to make that kind of stuff up. It's not like high school at all... I will try my hardest to not miss class again! (Student 280)

Research Question 3 Summary

Students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester most frequently wrote about worst, school events, most of which were about living on a college campus followed by students' academic lives and their inability to navigate a college campus. The second most frequent type of events that emerged from non-returning students' stories were of the best, home association, most of which were about going home or visiting someone from home followed by having contact with someone from home, being visited on campus, and connecting with students from one's hometown on campus. The third most frequent type of events were of the best, school association, most of which were about living on a college campus, followed by campus involvement and academic enjoyment. Non-returning students wrote about worst, home events the least often, most of these events were related to trouble at home followed by missing home and leaving home. They also wrote about: (a) best, home events less over each

time period; (b) best, school events most frequently during TP-3; (c) worst, home events less over each time period; and (d) worst, school events most often during TP-1.

Comparative Summary of Stories

Most stories from all 264 participants were about worst, school events followed by: (a) best, school events; (b) best, home events; (c) and worst, home events. This differs slightly from the stories of students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester. They most frequently wrote about worst, school events, followed by: (a) best, home events; (b) best, school events; and (c) worst, home events. However, non-returning students more frequently wrote about: (a) best, home events (30.9%) than all students (18.9%); and (b) worst, home events (12.4%) than all students (6.9%). Also, non-returning students less frequently wrote about: (a) best, school events (21.6%) than all students (31.9%); and (b) worst, school events (35.1%) than all students (42.3%). More specifically, non-returning students wrote the following themes less frequently than did all students: (a) Living (BS); (b) Campus (BS); and (c) Academic (BS). Also, they wrote about the following themes more frequently than all students: (a) Visiting (BH); (b) Contact (BH); (c) Trouble (WH); (d) Navigation (WS); (e) Missing (WH); (f) Connection (BS);

Stories from all of 264 participants about best, school events decreased over each time period, but they wrote about best, home events increasingly more over each time period. Stories about worst, school events from all students peaked during the weeks around midterm. They wrote about worst, home events evenly across each time period. Non-returning students wrote about: (a) best, home events increasingly more over each

time period; (b) best, school events most frequently during TP-3; (c) worst, home events decreasingly less over time; and (d) worst, school events most often during TP-1.

Summary

This chapter presented the results from the present study's three research questions. Chapter five will offer a discussion of these results, including conclusions for each of the study's three research questions, implications, limitations, and suggestions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Chapter five provides conclusions, implications, and suggestions based on the present study. First, conclusions are provided for each of the study's three research questions. Second, implications are offered regarding what might be done in the future to assist first-year college students in transition and to boost retention rates. Third, limitations associated with the present study are discussed; and finally, suggestions for future research are explored.

Conclusions

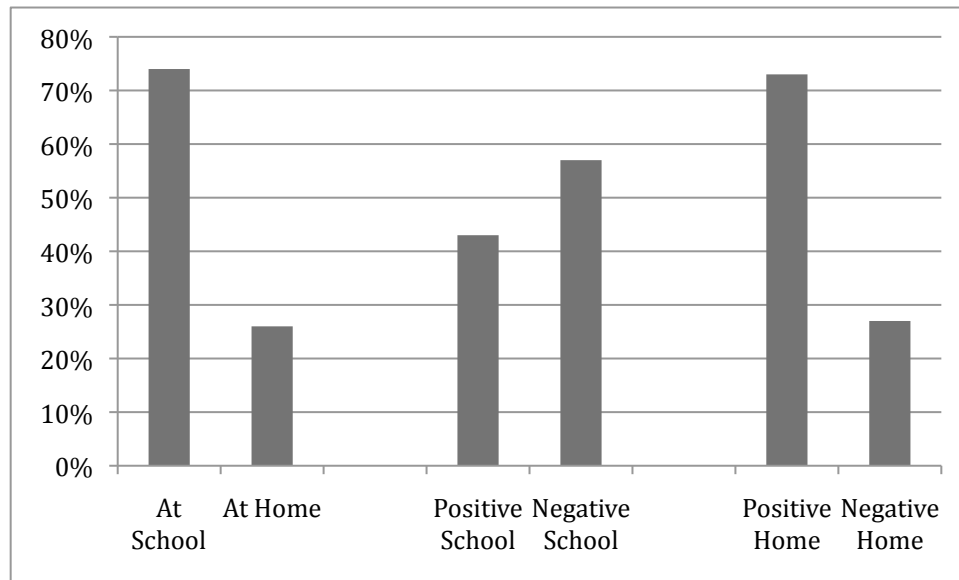
This study sought and provided answers to three research questions. Specifically, answers to the first two questions provide insight into how students interpreted their first-semester experience as college students and how these stories evolved over time. Answering a third question provides insight into the first-semester experience for students who did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester.

Research Question 1

RQ1 asked, "What are students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home during their first semester?" Overall, students wrote more stories about events associated with school than those associated with home (see Figure 5.1). This is not surprising given that students spent far more time at school than at home during their first semester as UK students. More interesting, however, is the fact that of the 994 stories told about events at school, 567 (57%) focused on negative experiences compared to 427 (43%) that discussed positive experiences. Conversely, of the 346 stories told about events at home, 253 (73%) focused on positive events compared to 93 (27%) that described negative events.

Figure 5.1

Summary of students' stories



It appears that students at UK experience what Kim (1988, 2001) describes as the “stress” phase in cross-cultural adaptation. For college students, their cross-cultural adaptation to university culture, which includes the surrounding community, is a gradual process that begins as feeling like strangers and then takes place over the duration of their college careers. Regardless of how willing and prepared students are for the transition from high school to college, “the cross-cultural journey is seldom smooth. Life in an unfamiliar milieu entails some of the most stressful experiences (they) may ever face” (Kim, 2011, p. 227), which may explain why students most frequently wrote about negative events at school. Students who provided stories about their first-semester at the University of Kentucky may have been experiencing the initial phase of the adaptation process, during which adaptive stress is most intense. During this initial phase, individuals are, according to Kim, classified as strangers, which is how one may view first-semester college students transitioning from high school to college.

Individuals encountering cross-cultural adaptation appear to be beginning the process as strangers. “Encounters with a new culture bring many surprises, large and small. Some of the surprises may awaken or shake strangers’ previously taken-for-granted self-concepts and collective ethnic identity and bring the anxiety of temporary rootlessness” (Kim, 2001, p. 50). The “self-concepts and collective ethnic identity” of first-year college students is rooted in their high school and hometown cultures but is altered with increased and prolonged exposure to their host culture, which may be the case for first-year University of Kentucky students is the UK campus and Lexington community. These first-year students must confront “situations in which their mental and behavioral habits are called into question, and they are forced to suspend or even abandon their identification with the cultural patterns that have symbolized who they are and what they are” (p. 50). Cross-cultural adaptation is experienced by individuals who relocate more or less permanently or for the short-term (Kim, 1988, 2001).

These first-semester college students may be experiencing what Kim (1988, 2001) considers short-term adaptation, making them temporary sojourners. These sojourners, unlike long-term immigrants, “tend to limit their contacts with their host cultures to peripheral areas—they have cross cultures primarily to pursue a vacation, obtain a degree, or enhance their prestige in the eyes of the folks at home” (Kim, 2001, p. 4). Kim considers sojourners’ visits to be transitory, or restricted to the length of an assignment, which in the case of college students is the time spent pursuing a degree. While some students could become long-term settlers in Lexington or on the University of Kentucky campus, most UK students will be members of this culture a short time. Both long-term immigrants and short-term sojourners “appear to develop an increased understanding of

similarities between the host culture and the home culture as well as an expanded behavioral capacity to manage themselves, function effectively, and experience less feeling of alienation in relation to the host society” (p. 61). Students’ stories about UK and about home also relate to existing research on the high school to college transition and college student retention, which are discussed in relation this study’s emergent themes.

Best, school events. Students wrote fewer stories about best, school events (n = 427) than they did about worst, school events (n = 567). These best, school events were most often associated with living on a college campus away from home and becoming involved on campus. More specifically, students most frequently wrote about their social lives and participating in campus activities, events, and organizations.

When writing about their social lives as first-year college students, students discussed the importance of establishing bonds with individuals with whom they shared interests, values, and beliefs and how doing things with these individuals increased students’ overall first-semester experience. Increased social support from friends has been shown to predict improved adjustment from the fall to winter semester (Friedlander et al., 2007). More specifically, students who have supportive and understanding friends adjust better socially and possess more attachment to their institution during their adjustment to college (Swenson et al., 2008).

The importance of creating and expanding friendships for this group of students relates to Bean’s (2005) “Social Factors” theme of college student retention. “It is important for institutional officials to recognize that social connectedness is important for retention. Programming that fosters such connections is important for retention. There

are abundant examples of such programs in the literature” (p. 229). The ability to become part of such programming at the University of Kentucky was also important for students who participated in this study.

Students wrote extensively about establishing deeper connections on campus by participating in campus activities and events and becoming engaged with the University of Kentucky Greek system and other campus organizations. Incoming students are encouraged to learn about student clubs, publications, and government, Greek life, and other activities of interest because they can help first-year students not only meet people but establish short- and long-term friendships (Wood, 2000). Students who engage in activities more intensely are less lonely, possess better friendship quality, and have lower social dissatisfaction (Bohnert, Akins, & Edidin, 2007).

Student narratives that included details about students’ participation in college activities, events, and organizations relate to Bean’s (2005) “Social Factors” and “Institutional Fit and Commitment” themes of college student retention. Students who share social, academic, activities, and any other area of interest with other students are likely to fit in (Bean). “The important thing is that the student *feels* that he or she belongs at the college or university” (p. 219). Additional students’ stories about the University of Kentucky during their first semester as college students were related to negative events.

Worst, school events. Students’ free-writes produced more stories about worst, school events (n = 567) than they did about best, school events (n = 427). These worst, school events were most often associated with students’ living away from home on a college campus and their academic lives. More specifically, students wrote about physical and residence issues and adjusting to their college academic workloads.

Some students considered the perceived root of their physical issues as being related to stress and/or the lack of sleep that resulted during their transition to life as college students. “The stresses of college life certainly do contribute to headaches, colds, flu, and the like” (Zaleski, Levey-Thors, & Schiaffino, 1998), and stress-related illnesses are associated with the newfound freedom associated with one’s first year of college (“College freedom can trigger illness,” 1996). As a result of being on their own, many first-year college students “have no structure in their lives. They have fatigue. They may not be eating right because they’re skipping dorm meals. They’re living close to other students. Some are homesick. They need structure in their lives” (p. 6).

Stories about students’ physical issues (e.g., becoming ill, suffering injuries, encountering sleep trouble) do not fit within one of Bean’s (2005) existing themes of college student retention. Therefore, based on the results of this study, an additional theme associated with students’ physical and mental well-being may need to be considered. Another area in which this study’s participants faced difficulty during their transition to college was related to living in close proximity to other students.

Residence issues included learning to deal with and manage roommates, neighbors, and life in college dormitories and off-campus housing. Students worry about liking roommates before heading off to college and face a variety of roommate and residence hall hassles upon their arrival on campus (Shanlen and Johnston, 2007). Roommate situations may result in a significant area of dissatisfaction for transitioning students (Keup, 2007). “Students expected that roommates could serve as an important support system to them during their transition to college. However, in reality, roommates

turned out to be one of the more challenging aspects of their first-year adjustment” (p. 20).

While one could argue students’ struggles with roommates and living on a college campus relate to Bean’s (2005) theme “Social Factors,” neither this theme nor any of the others directly address such issues. Thus, the results of this study may be used to expand this particular theme or merit the creation of an additional theme. Students also found their academic workloads to be a challenging aspect of their adaptation to life as college students.

Stories about students’ difficulties adjusting to their college academic workloads included details about the intensity of studying for college classes and students’ struggles with exams, quizzes, and assignments. These struggles often resulted in poor grades, and managing the demands of collegiate academics became stressful and overwhelming at times. First-year college students often question whether they are intelligent enough to earn grades in college similar to those they received in high school (Shanlen & Johnston, 2007). Students who do not properly address their academic transition to college may not only experience negative effects related to their academic performance but also their psychological well-being (Morosanu, Handley, & O’Donovan, 2010).

Students’ struggles with adapting to the requirements of their college workloads relate to Bean’s (2005) theme of college student retention “Grades and Academic Performance,” which he summarizes as:

A student enters college with a record of academic performance and cultural capital, interacts with faculty members, advisors, and other students in formal and informal academic settings, forms the attitudes that their education is of practical value for getting work, develops a sense of academic self-efficacy, approaches academic work, develops an internal locus of control related to academic

achievement, gets good grades, feels loyal to the school, and chooses to continue enrollment there. (p. 277)

The effects of academic performance are important to college student retention, and they should not be under- or overestimates (Bean). Additional students' stories during their first semester as college students were about home.

Best, home events. Students' free-writes produced more stories about best, home events (n = 253) than they did about worst, school events (n = 93). These best, home events were most often associated with students' ability to physically see their families throughout the students' first semester of college. More specifically, students wrote about going home, being visited on campus by someone from home, and seeing individuals from home at locations other than their hometowns on the on UK campus.

Opportunities to have physical contact with one's family and friends from home may be considered a form of social support, especially in instances where positive communication climates exist and confirming messages are provided. "Social support facilitates the mobilization of interpersonal resources to help students cope with the stress of adjusting to college" (Lidy & Kahn, 2006, p. 124). This makes it important not only to the first-year experience but college student retention as well.

Bean (2005) discusses the role of social support under his "Social Factors" theme of college student retention. "Few would deny that the social lives of students in college and their exchanges with others inside and outside the institution are important in retention decisions" (p. 227). He continues, "social support before and during college from important people inside and outside the institution is important for retention" (p. 228). While social support was discussed through students' stories about visiting home as well as being visited by and having contact with people from home, students perceived

many other positives from these experiences. Therefore, a student's ability to have contact with home, beyond acquiring social support, does not clearly fall under one of Bean's nine themes of student retention, which may merit the possible creation of an additional theme or the extension of the "Social Factors" theme. These stories about having contact with home seem most closely related to Bean's (2005) "The External Environment" theme of college student retention, which is relevant to students' stories about negative home events. Additional students' stories about home during their first semester of college related to negative events.

Worst, home events. Students wrote fewer stories about worst, home events ($n = 93$) than they did about best, home events ($n = 253$). These worst, home events were most often associated with trouble at home. More specifically, students wrote about being concerned about or having issues with someone from home and receiving bad news from or sharing it with someone from home. These events relate to Bean's (2005) "The External Environment" theme of college students retention. "Students can be pulled out of school by forces beyond their control and beyond the control of the institution... Institutions can do little to retain a student if these factors come into play" (p. 232). By examining how students' stories about transitioning to college evolve over time, one may better understand how cross-cultural theory (Kim 1988, 2001) relates to the longitudinal first-semester college transition experience.

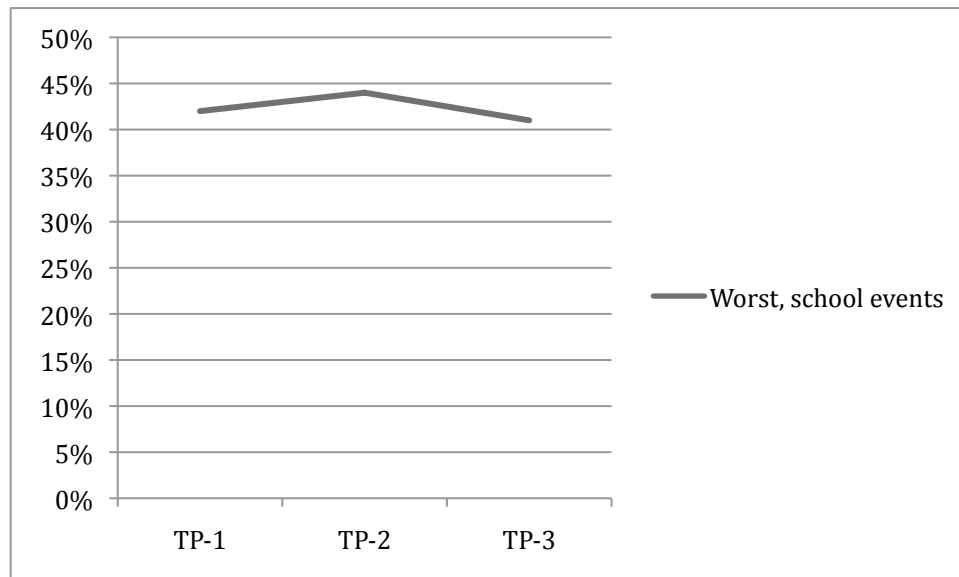
Research Question 2

RQ2 asked, "How do students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home change over the course of their first semester?" The majority of stories students shared over the course of the semester focused on negative experiences

occurring at school. Interestingly, students did not write about such events less over the course of their first semester (TP-1: 41.9%; TP-2: 43.5%; TP-3: 41.3%), which may indicate that they struggled during their cross-cultural adaptation to college life (see Figure 5.2). This conclusion appears to contradict Kim’s (1988, 2001) suggestion that individuals experiencing cross-cultural will gradually experience assimilation, which is “the process by which strangers gradually acquire a new cultural system while losing some of their original cultural habits... Complete assimilation is a lifelong goal, and individuals vary in the level of overall adaptation achieved” (Kim, 2001, p. 53-54). It appears that these students were still experiencing the “stress” phase in Kim’s stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. This seems to suggest that the acculturation process for first-year students may take longer than one semester.

Figure 5.2

Worst, school events over time



Over the course of their first semester, students increasingly wrote about more negative experiences related to their academics (TP-1: 17%; TP-2: 38%; TP-3: 43%).

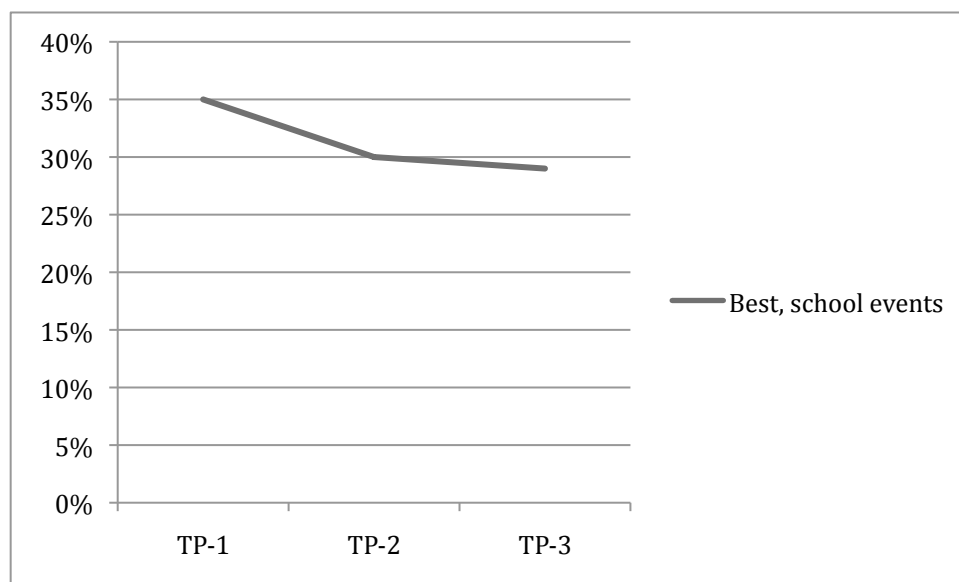
More specifically, students demonstrated an inability to achieve higher levels of acculturation and deculturation in two key areas academic areas. First, students increasingly wrote stories about receiving poor grades (TP-1: 5%; TP-2: 26%; TP-3: 29%). Students likely did not have as many opportunities to receive poor grades during the initial weeks (i.e., TP-1) as they did toward midterm (i.e., TP-2) of their first semester. Regardless, if they were gradually assimilating into their collegiate academic careers, one would expect a decrease in stories about poor grades in the weeks associated with the latter part of their first semester. Also, the frequency of students' stories about being stressed and overwhelmed over their coursework increased over time (TP-1: 13%; TP-2: 15%; TP-3: 18%). This seems to indicate that students struggled to acclimate to the academic challenges of their first-semester. Students did, however, demonstrate higher degrees of acculturation and deculturation in other areas over time (e.g., handling situations related to their living arrangements, managing their academic workloads, finding their way around campus).

Students' stories about positive experiences at school decreased over time (TP-1: 35.3%; TP-2: 30.1%; TP-3: 28.6%) (see Figure 5.3). This also seems to suggest that students at UK were not assimilating as Kim (1988, 2001) might suggest they would. "Life in a new culture presents situations that deviate from the familiar and assumed, and the newcomer is faced with things that do not follow his or her unconscious cultural 'script'" (Kim, 2001, p. 50). Students' stories about being involved on campus peaked in the initial weeks of their first semester and gradually decreased (TP-1: 38%; TP-2: 35%; TP-3: 30%). This may be due to the fact that the University of Kentucky offered 257 opportunities to engage in campus-hosted events during the first two weeks of the

semester and then very few such events during the rest of the term. The host environment (i.e., the University of Kentucky campus and surrounding community for UK students) plays a fundamental role in the adaptive experience (Kim). Still, had students experienced higher levels of acculturation and deculturation, they probably would have engaged with their host environment more frequently.

Figure 5.3

Best, school events over time

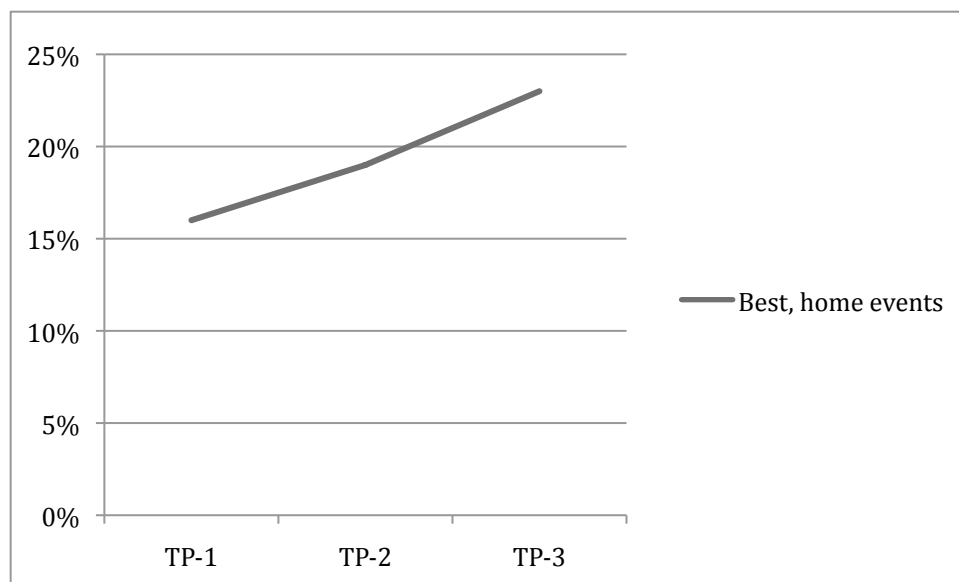


Stories about positive experiences at home went up over the course of the semester (TP-1: 15.9%; TP-2: 19%; TP-3: 23.4%) (see Figure 5.4). Again, this does not suggest successful acculturation and seems to suggest just the opposite. For first semester college students and others engaged in cross-cultural adaptation their “familiar culture is the ‘home culture,’ which is associated closely with family or ‘significant others’” (Kim, 2001, p. 46). This is the culture from which first year students come and where they often turn in times of stress and need. Students’ stories about being visited on campus by someone from home increased over time (TP-1: 17%; TP-2: 25%;

TP-3: 41%), and their stories about going home and visiting people from home peaked during the middle of the semester (TP-1: 32%; TP-2: 43%; TP-3: 31%). This seems to indicate that students were not turning to resources and relationships on campus (i.e., from their host culture) over time. The evolution of students' stories over time reflects other ways they experienced cross-cultural adaptation during their first semester as college students, including ways in which they exhibited increased levels of acculturation and deculturation.

Figure 5.4

Best, home events over time



Several ways in which this study's participants dissociated themselves with their high school lives and hometown culture were evident through the evolution of their stories over time. Students wrote about being visited by friends and girl/boyfriends less over time (TP-1: 87%; TP-2: 43%; TP-3: 14%). This was also true regarding stories about connecting with friends from home on the UK campus (TP-1: 19%; TP-2: 5%; TP-3: 1%). High school friends are influential in how successfully some new students

transition to college (Terenzini et al., 1994). These relationships with friends from home are beneficial during the initial weeks of one's transition to college, but close relationships with new college friends provide more benefits later in their first semester (Swenson et al., 2008). It is important for new college students to make friends in their new learning environment, and students are less likely to become socialized into their new college or university if they have stronger attachment to "outsiders" (Bean, 1985, p. 39). Stories about students' ability to connect with students from their hometowns on the UK campus relate to Bean's (2005) "Social factors" theme of college student retention. "Besides support for attending college, friendships with other members of the institution are an important part of social integration" (p. 228).

The cross-cultural adaptation process becomes less stressful for individuals when they engage in interpersonal communication with and absorb communication from people in their host environment (i.e., from campus relationships for University of Kentucky first-year students in transition) (Kim 1988, 2001). Students wrote more stories about their social lives and social networks on campus over time (TP-1: 59%; TP-2: 65%; TP-3: 74%), which seems to indicate they were increasing their interpersonal communication with people from their host environment. Also, students wrote increasingly more stories about participating in UK athletics over time (TP-1: 16%; TP-2: 45%; TP-3: 67%) indicating engagement with the host environment. Students also progressed in their abilities to manage stress, adapt, and grow throughout their first semester, which not only demonstrates how they moved through the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic but also their increased functional fitness.

The cross-cultural adaptation process is a stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, a process that is filled with conflicting ideas and internal conflict between an allegiance to one's native cultural identity and the need to embrace a new identity as defined by the host environment (Kim, 1988, 2001). The three components of this dynamic are interrelated and never occur in isolation yet occur because of the others (Kim). Students' stories demonstrated that through stressful experiences they not only adapted to their new environments but grew as a result. This became evident over time in various areas of their new collegiate lives, including in their living situations, classroom activities, and social lives. More specifically, issues with roommates and in students' dorm or off-campus housing units allowed them to adapt to life away from home and resulted in them not only growing as first-year college students but young adults, as well. As students became stressed over their school workloads and frustrated over bad grades, they leaned to adapt to the demands of one's college workload, and grew intellectually. When students allowed their social lives to interfere with their schoolwork and sleep, they realized they needed balance in their lives and grew into more responsible college students.

When the processes of acculturation and deculturation come together in harmony while moving toward assimilation, individual strangers succumb to internal changes and intercultural transformation (Kim, 1988, 2001). The processes of internal change and intercultural transformation are dependent on, among other things, increased functional fitness (Kim). Functional fitness relates to transitioning individuals' ability to communicate according to local cultural norms (Kim). Students learned to communicate with: (a) the classroom cultural setting, as evidenced by an increase in positive stories

about classroom success and a decrease in stories about struggling with one's academic workload across each time period; (b) the University athletic culture, as evidenced by the increase in positive stories about UK athletics across each time period; and (c) the collegiate social culture, as evidenced by an increase in positive stories about one's social life and social network across each time period.

Functional fitness also relates to how transitioning individuals navigate daily transitions (Kim, 1988, 2001). Students demonstrated increased functional fitness in this regard through decreases in their stories about: (a) parking, driving, and walking issues; (b) getting lost; and (c) being late to or waking up late for class across each time period. Collectively, these students entered the University of Kentucky with much of their identity rooted in their high school and hometown cultures but gradually began to emerge as UK Wildcats and Lexingtonians throughout their first semester as college students. However, not all students experienced a smooth transition to college and certainly most traversed rocky times at least periodically. For some students, their first-semester experience and/or other factors resulted in them not returning for a second semester.

Research Question 3

RQ3 asked, "What are students' stories about the University of Kentucky and about home who do not return to UK for a second semester?" Specifically, the study examined the stories' overall themes and how these stories evolved over time. Only 22 (8.3%) of the 264 students examined in this study did not return to the University of Kentucky for a second semester. Of the 22 non-returners, 18 (81.8%) were female and four were male. Given the fact that only 50.4% of the entire sample consisted of females makes this percentage of female non-returners (81.8%) particularly notable. Although

some research suggests that females are more likely to persist in college once enrolled and earn degrees in a more timely manner than males (Buchmann, 2009), retention results from the present study seem to support Enochs and Roland's (2006) finding that females maintain lower adjustment levels to college regardless of living condition when compared to males.

While a definitive conclusion about why these students, both male and female, left the University of Kentucky may not be derived, based on these data, one may speculate as to why some did not return for a second semester. A non-returning student wrote about becoming pregnant during her first semester (Student 139), and one wrote about experiencing pain from a nerve condition (Student 253). Another wrote about her son in two narratives and about a negative situation with her job in another (Student 252). Two other students wrote about work in their narratives (Students 339, 396), and two wrote about transferring to another institution (Students 115, 352). Each of these factors relates to Bean's (2005) "The External Environment" theme of college student retention. "Students can be attracted to other roles as students, employees, or significant others which require that they leave their current institution. The external environment contains significant others, opportunities to transfer, opportunities to work, and family responsibilities (Bean, 2005, p. 232).

The stories provided by this group of students suggests that returning to the University of Kentucky may, in fact, not be the best decision for all students. To clarify, most of the research about retention approaches the topic with an institutional bias. That is, there exists an underlying assumption that choosing not to return to that college or university for a second semester (or a second year) at that time is bad. The present study

suggests instead that institutions should listen to students and honor the decision not to return as a good one for some students.

Four (18.2%) students identified themselves as racial minorities. This compares to 36 (13.6%) of the original sample. While these data cannot determine for certain their reasons for leaving, previous research indicates non-white students “often perceive themselves as less worthy than other students and can be the victims of stereotyping” (Jalomo & Rendon, 2004, p. 44). These students often falsely assume that all college faculty and staff members are familiar with what they are experiencing; as a result, they may succumb to “mistakes that are typical of a college dropout. They take a heavy course load, do not interact with faculty, fail to use campus services and resources, work long hours off campus, and become disconnected from college life” (p. 44).

Half (n = 11) of the non-returning students reported that the highest degree earned by their primary caregiver was completed some college, graduated high school, or finished some high school. This compares to 46 (17.4%) of the original sample. This relates to Bean’s (2005) “The Student’s Background” theme of college student retention. He describes this theme as:

A general way of looking at a traditional-aged college student’s background is to understand the social capital (networks and connections a student has which often have to do with who one’s parents are) and the human capital (personal abilities, capabilities, and skills) a student brings to college. The more practical way of looking at students’ backgrounds has been in terms of educational goals, high school grades, class rank, standardized test scores, success in a college preparatory curriculum, and parents’ education. (p. 233)

Not only are first-generation college students likely to have unrealistic expectations about college (Brooks-Terry, 1998) and a lack of awareness about the university system (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991), they also face a greater risk of experiencing a difficult high

school to college transition (e.g., London, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ishitani, 2006).

Ten (44.5%) of the 22 non-returning students were from Kentucky. This compares to 68.6% ($n = 181$) of the original sample. Of these ten non-returners, only three students self-identified their hometowns as being more than 100 miles from the University of Kentucky. This suggests that distance from home might not be as important a factor as some of the existing research suggests. For instance, Tognoli (2003) reported that individuals who attend college the farthest from home report more homesickness and visit home more often than students whose hometowns are closer. Moreover, students whose hometowns were further away were apprehensive about making friends at college during their adjustment to college, yearned for their family and friends, missed their own houses and hometowns, and maintained lower self-esteem, ego identity, and internal locus of control.

Overall, themes offered by the non-returners tended to focus more on negative experiences (34 of 55 = 62%) than positive experiences (21 of 55 = 38%) at school and more on positive experiences (30 of 42 = 71%) than negative experiences (12 of 42 = 29%) about home. Although the 62% figure is only slightly higher than it was for the entire sample (57%) with regard to negative experiences at school, the non-returners described far fewer positive experiences at school (38%) than did the entire sample (43%). This suggests that these students may be assimilating into the University of Kentucky culture at a slower pace than students who returned and that non-returners may not have engaged in enough interpersonal communication or absorbed enough communication from members of their host culture. Also, non-returners' woes may have

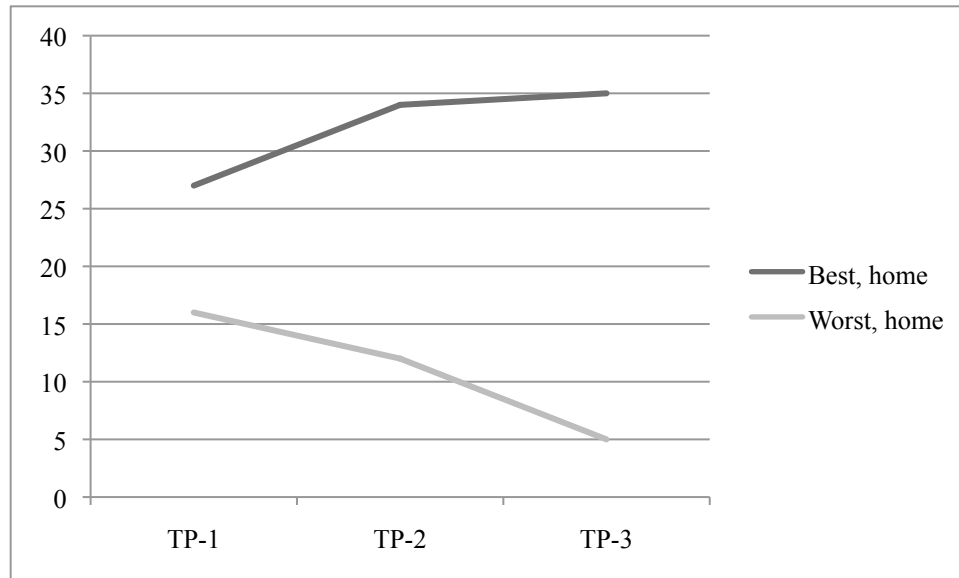
been related to Bean's (2005) "Social Factors" theme of college student retention. More specifically, non-returning students may not have located the "social support and close friendships [that] form the core components of social integration" (p. 228).

Non-returning students wrote about worst, home events (12.4%) more frequently than did the entire sample (6.9%), and non-returners wrote more stories about best, home events (30.9%) than did entire sample (18.9%). More specifically, non-returners wrote more stories about visiting home (43.4%) and having contact with home (36.7%) than did the entire sample (35.6% and 28.9%, respectively). Again, this may indicate that non-returners were over-reliant on home during their first semester and may have underutilized their host environment.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion regarding the non-returners has to deal with the fact that the percentage of stories about positive experiences occurring at home rose over the course of the semester (TP-1: 26.7%; TP-2: 34.4%; TP-3: 35%) and negative experiences occurring at home fell (TP: 15.6%; TP-2: 12.4%; TP-3: 5%) (see Figure 5.5). This may indicate that students' saw home more favorably over the course of their first and only semester on the University of Kentucky campus. While the University can do little to combat these forces that Bean (2005) considers part of "The External Environment" theme of college student retention, results for this study may be utilized by various parties with a vested interest in improving the first-year experience and increasing college student retention.

Figure 5.5

Non-returning students' stories about home over time



Implications

The present study collected data in a unique way that could not only benefit communication scholars but potentially many others, as well, with vested interests in assisting students' adaptation to the new and challenging college environment. These stakeholders include college and high school instructors, advisors, and administrators, parents of future and transitioning college students, and—perhaps most importantly—the students themselves. Moreover, results from this study could be used to create programs and information for universities, high schools, parents, and students. Members of the communication discipline might be able to assist throughout this process.

First, universities could learn from this study's results and possibly use them to improve the first-year student experience and, in doing so, increase student retention. Universities should consider extending orientation events and activities beyond the initial weeks of the new academic year. This would allow incoming students opportunities to

further connect with university culture and fellow students throughout their first semester and perhaps across their first year of college. In addition to expanding orientation programs, universities might consider requiring students to participate in a first-year experience program, even if it is only for a few weeks of a students' first semester. These programs could not only teach students about college life but about the particular institution they attend and the community of which it is a part. Students might benefit from receiving information from administrators, faculty, and staff but also could be presented opportunities to interact with and learn from fellow transitioning students while engaging with the university culture and local community. Furthermore, additional seminars and other opportunities for students to acquire information, build skills, and work with one another could continue throughout the entire first year. Topics might include increasing social networks, creating and maintaining peer relationships, improving communication skills, enhancing study and research skills, and balancing one's social and academic lives.

Colleges and universities might consider making retention research and data available across their disciplines, which could in turn be made available outside the specific institution. More specifically, institutions may want to consider collaborating with one another to engage in retention-based research similar to the present study that explores the student experience from students' perspectives. By sharing data and ideas nationally, those who work in higher education might potentially equip themselves to address student attrition more appropriately.

Members of the communication discipline may potentially assist in the implementation of research programs and initiatives aimed at studying and improving the

first year-experience. Communication scholars might consider designing and helping implement messages and campaigns aimed at making first-year orientation programs and first-year seminars more engaging and effective. Also, other communication related topics (e.g., attachment, relationships, conflict, effective listening skills) might be appropriate for examining the college transition and the first-year experience.

College transition programs might be most effective if they began in high school. This could allow students more time to establish and develop skills necessary to succeed in college, especially through their adaptation to college. These skills include those aimed at increasing students' ability to: (a) study effectively; (b) manage time; (c) build relationships; (d) become engaged on campus; (e) handle living with others; and (f) make connections at department, college, university and community level, including with key members of a university (e.g., faculty members, librarians, technology personnel, various support staff). Personnel from colleges and universities could partner with high schools to create these programs, and communication scholars may potentially lead the way.

Results from this study could be used to create messages geared toward parents of students making or preparing to make the transition from high school to college. Parents may need to be informed about things that matter to their first-year college students, including being visited and receiving packages. Also, parents might need to understand that their actions, particularly those seen as overbearing, overly emotional, or unwilling to let their children venture off on their own, may potentially influence students' transition to and likelihood of remaining in college. Communication scholars could not only assist in the creation of such messages and campaigns, but also in delivering

presentations to parents on high school and university campuses before and after parents send their children off to college.

Perhaps, too, by doing more transition work with students and families while potential college students are still in high school, students will become better able to make best the decision about whether or not to attend college or where to attend college in the first place. Such decisions could be better for both the students and for the colleges or universities they ultimately do not enroll in and then withdraw from after their first semester or first year.

Retention is most often conceptualized as an educational issue but also has significant economic and societal ramifications. Thus, more funding from government agencies and the business community could be provided to institutions, organizations, and research teams that attempt to increase student retention, including improving the first-year experience. The sharing of data between the private and public sector would potential allow greater collaboration and might result in a stronger higher education system that may result in increases in economic competitiveness.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, institutions ought to reconceptualize their retention goals from 100% to, possibly, 90%, which would honor the fact that remaining at their institution may not be the best decision for all students. Although working more closely with high school students about which institutions of higher learning are the best fit might improve retention figures because students might make more appropriate choices in the first place, it is highly unlikely that remaining at a particular school will be best for every student who chooses to enroll at it.

Limitations

Several limitations became apparent throughout the process of conducting the present study. First, the mode of data collection utilized produced a one-way dynamic between the researcher and participants. Thus, follow-up questions could not be asked nor additional details solicited from participants based on their stories about positive and negative experiences over the course of their first semester as college students. Also, by not being able to follow-up with students who did not return for a second semester, further details beyond their narratives that related to their departure could not be captured. A second limitation of the present study relates to the amount of data available across each of the data collection time periods.

The number of available free-writes for each time period was inconsistent. This resulted from students dropping the course through which data was collected and from instructors not submitting student free-writes after the end of the semester. This was particularly the case for TP-3, which produced 200 less coded events than TP-1 and 102 less than TP-2. While ample data was still available for each time period, fewer student voices were represented over time. This was particularly problematic when attempting to draw conclusions about students who did not return for their second semesters. Non-returning students only produced 45 events during TP-1 and a mere 20 for TP-3, which resulted in some themes and sub-themes only having one event for examination. Another limitation of the present study relates to the placement of TP-3.

The third and final free-write collection dates were November 4-8. This resulted in TP-3 being associated with the latter part of students' first semester as college students as opposed to its final weeks (i.e., the end or conclusion of their first semester). The

November 4-8 collection dates did not allow this study to grasp students' feelings about their first experience with final exams and other aspects associated with the end of one's first semester as a college student. Had TP-3 been positioned in early December, data would have been more representative of students' entire first semester at the University of Kentucky. Also, students have been shown to adapt better during their second semester as college students. Therefore, had data been collected longitudinally over the students' entire first year of college as opposed to only their first semester, one could better assess their cross-cultural adaptation. Additional limitations relate to data collection and variations in free-write design.

Several students expressed frustration with having to do free-writes in class. One commented, "I am so done with these free-writes. They are completely pointless and so annoying." Part of students' opposition to free-writes may be associated with the fact that they were asked to submit additional free-writes related to other topics throughout the semester as a requirement of their enrollment in Composition and Communication I. Future studies could benefit from only asking students to write one free-write every four to five weeks. These sentiments of disinclination and other factors led to inconsistencies in terms of the length and amount of details provided in students' narratives. Some students simply wrote bulleted lists that did not provide any insight into the positive and negative experiences about which they were writing. Other students wrote extended narratives that included extensive details, personal reflections, and, at times, character dialogue. In some instances, students wrote about a positive or a negative experience, but not both. This may have resulted from students being given more or less time in some

classes to compose their free-writes compared to others. In future studies, all students could be given a specific and consistent amount of time for which to record narratives.

Some students wrote their free-writes on notebook paper while others attempted to cram lengthy stories onto one side of a piece of paper distributed by their instructor. This often resulted in narratives running together, which, at times, made it difficult to differentiate positive and negative events. Having students write about their best event on one side of a piece of notebook paper or free-write prompt and the worst event on the back would not only facilitate cleaner data collection but could result in students providing lengthier narratives for each type of event.

A final limitation revealed from this study rests with how appropriate a theory of acculturation is for examining college student retention. First, acculturation theories, including Kim's (1988, 2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory, assume that assimilation is the goal and anything else is failure. Such theories do not acknowledge that failure to assimilate to the college environment may not be deemed a failure for some students. Such theories also do not account for the fact that college students need not deculturate from home to be successful. Perhaps a theory that focuses on successfully navigating one's identity as a member of multiple cultures simultaneously would be more appropriate for studying college student retention.

Suggestions for Future Research

Conclusions drawn from the present study also give rise to several suggestions for future research. More specifically, additional research ought to be conducted related to both the first-year college student experience and its relationship to student retention and

either cross-cultural adaptation theory or some theory that accounts for adapting to a new culture while continuing to identify with one's home culture.

First, additional research should be conducted that considers first-year student acculturation based on various demographics, including sex, race, caregivers' education, and proximity to home. Exit interviews and focus groups with returning and non-returning students could potentially shed additional light onto the reasons students decide to stay at the University of Kentucky or not. Similarly, surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted with primary caregivers of both returning and non-returning students could yield further insight into the relationship between students' positive and negative stories about school, as well as about home and their decision to re-enroll for a second semester.

Second, given that the present study focused solely on stories collected during students' first semester at UK, it seems plausible to collect data over the course of two semesters to discover whether successful acculturation might actually eventually occur, but merely take longer than one semester to achieve. Certainly, the first-semester experience is important to the acculturation process, but such data ought to be collected and explored throughout the first year to better understand the issue of first-year student retention.

Additional research might also focus on survey data collected from the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1984, 1989), which students also completed twice during the fall 2010 semester. Examination of this data could provide additional insight into the adaptation experience of this group of students. In future semesters, other survey instruments could be used to collect additional information

regarding the first-year student experience as it relates to retention. Some such instruments include the: (a) College Adjustment Scale (Anton & Reed, 1991); (b) College Student Experience Questionnaire (Pace & Kuh, 1998); (c) College Student Inventory (Stratel, 1988); and (d) Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (Kohn, Lafreniere, & Gurevich, 1990).

Cross-cultural adaptation is an important phenomenon that warrants further investigation in additional contexts, as well. For example, how does the cross-cultural adaptation experience of United States college students studying abroad occur? Also, a study examining recent college graduate's adaptation into the workforce might yield insight that could benefit employers, employees, and future graduates.

The free-write data collection method might be utilized to explore other facets of university and college experiences beyond that of first-year college students. For example, the method could be used to explore stories and perceptions about advising, residence life, student athletics, and teacher effectiveness. Collecting data through free-writes allowed students' voices to be represented in an anonymous and non-threatening way. This method could not only be replicated as a longitudinal study of the first semester but also across the entire academic year. The point here is that much could be learned by hearing from the students themselves while they are attending school to make more informed decisions about improving the experience for them, as well as determining an appropriate retention percentage goal.

Similar data also could be collected at other institutions. Scholars from the University of Kentucky could collaborate with other state, regional, and national institutions to do so. Such research projects could provide a representative data set from

which universities nationwide could benefit. Through such partnerships, the United States higher education system could begin to more fully understand the first-year college student experience as it relates to retention rates.

Appendix A

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Assessment of Composition and Communication Courses

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about first semester students enrolled in the University of Kentucky's Composition and Communication classes. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are currently enrolled in one of these classes. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 400 people to do so this semester.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The people in charge of this study are Dr. Deanna Sellnow, a professor in the Department of Communication, and Dr. Roxanne Mountford, a professor in the Department of English; both researchers are at the University of Kentucky. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn what students are learning in the Composition and Communication courses and how we can improve these courses. We also hope to learn about how first year students at the University of Kentucky transition from high school to college.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You should not take part in this study if you are under the age of 18.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted on assignments you complete as part of class after they have been graded and your grade and name have been removed.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be granting permission for the researchers to examine the work that you complete this semester in your Composition and Communication class. If you give permission for us to use your work, we will ask

your instructor to provide copies of student work and we will remove your name from all of your work before we begin examining it.

During this semester, your instructor will not know whether or not you have chosen to participate. Your participation in the project will in no way affect your grade in this course, nor will it affect the instruction you receive in this class, nor will it require any additional work from you beyond what is expected to earn your grade.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to participate in this study. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

Your name will be removed from all of your work and once this step has been completed, there will be no record that can match your work to you.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact one of the investigators: Dr. Deanna Sellnow at 859-257-2886 or Dr. Roxanne Mountford at 859-257-6985. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent

Date

Appendix B

Consent Form for Composition and Communication I Students

This survey asks you a series of questions about your experiences here at UK.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate and in your 1st semester as a student at the University of Kentucky. At the end of the survey you will be asked to provide the code you were assigned on the first day of class. This information will be stored in a separate file and is collected in order to provide the instructor your name so that you can receive credit. Your responses to the items on this survey will remain confidential with the researchers and will not be provided to your instructor.

Many of the questions on the survey are answered using rating scales provided to you. For these questions, simply click on the answer choices that best reflect your feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. We are simply interested in your feelings. You may skip any question and exit the survey at any time.

Recall this is a two part survey and you will be emailed a reminder to complete the second part of the survey in November.

The survey should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please contact Deanna Sellnow at Deanna.sellnow@uky.edu.

You may also direct your questions, concerns, or suggestions to the Office of Research Integrity. To reach the ORI Research Compliance Officer, please use this toll-free phone number, 1-866-400-9428.

Clicking on the link below implies consent for the data you provide to be used for research purposes.

Select "I Agree" when you have fully read the above consent.

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire for Students

Basic Demographics

1. What is your sex?

€ Male

€ Female

2. What is your date of birth?

Month/Day/Year _____

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

€ American Indian or Alaska Native

€ Asian

€ Black or African American

€ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

€ Hispanic or Latino

€ White

€ Other _____

School

4. When did you graduate high school?

Month/Year _____

If you did not graduate high school, when did you receive your GED?

Month/Year _____

5. How many semesters have you been at the University of Kentucky?

€ This is my first semester.

€ I have attended UK before, but did not complete a semester.

€ I have completed one semester.

€ I have completed more than one semester. How many?

6. Have you attended another college or university? Yes No

7. What type of institution did you attend?

8. For how long did you attend?

9. In regard to your major:

€ I am undecided.

€ My intended major is _____.

€ My major is _____.

10. What is your living situation while at UK?

€ I live in a dorm.

€ I live in a Greek house.

€ I live in an apartment or rental house.

€ I own my own house.

€ I live with one or more of my parents.

Which parent(s) do you live with?

€ I live with another family member or family members.

What is the relationship to you?

€ Other _____

11. Where is your town from which you graduated high school?

City _____ State _____

County _____

12. How long did you live in this town?

13. Did you live in a different town between finishing high school and coming to UK? Yes No

If so, for how long?

What town was this? City _____ State _____

County _____

14. How many miles away from home is UK? _____

15. Where do your parents currently live? City _____ State
_____ County _____

16. What is the highest level of education that the first primary caregiver you identified completed?

- Some high school
- Graduated high school
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree

17. What is the highest level of education that the second primary caregiver you identified completed?

- Some high school
- Graduated high school
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree

18. Do you have any close friends from home attending UK? Yes No

How many? _____

Romantic Status

19. Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship? Yes No

20. How would you define your relationship?

- We are married
- We are engaged
- We are currently cohabitating
- We were cohabitating prior to move to UK
- We are in a serious/committed/exclusive relationship
- I am seeing/dating someone, but it's not serious.

21. How long have you been involved in that relationship? (in months/years)

22. Does this romantic partner attend UK?	Yes	No
Does this romantic partner live in Lexington?	Yes	No

Appendix D

Writing Prompts for Narrative Theory

The following prompt will be administered three times during the Fall 2010 semester: (1) the week of August 30-September 3; (2) the week of October 4-8; and (3) the week of November 8-12.

Students will be asked to do an in-class free writing assignment for the first 10-15 minutes of class answering the following question. (**Narrative theory: We make sense of the world around us when we compose and communicate via storytelling.**)

PROMPT:

Describe at least one best AND worst *event* that happened to you during the past week or so. An *event* can be an activity (something you did alone or with others ... such as going to a movie or studying in your room) or a state (a condition ... such as elated because I won the lottery or tired because my neighbors have loud parties all night long). Answer these questions about each event.

1. What occurred or happened and where?
2. Who were the *characters* involved? Be sure to describe them with as much detail as possible.
3. What did each *character* do or say and was what they did or said predictable?

Appendix E

TP-1 Best Events Sample Page

Code	Event	Character(s)	Association	Comments
103	Hunt in MS	Dad and grandparents	BH	
103	Opening weekend for college football	None cited	BS	
104	Going to gym	Friends	BS	Connection: "I like going with my friends because it gives us time together and gives us something to do."
106	Tutoring session	Assistant teacher	BS	Had larger impact (and relates to making connections and adjusting): "This may seem little to someone else, but it was so reassuring to understand the complicated processes of cells and tissues. It completely calmed my fears and stress of not understanding.
107	Meeting new people	New friends	BS	Off campus living situation but positive connection made: "The scary part was that I went by myself, but people were so open and welcomed me in and I left with great new friends and plans for the weekend, which is a first for me here at UK."
108	Going home	Family	BH	
109	Parents turned cell phone back on	Parents	BH	

Appendix F

TP-2 Best Events Sample Page

Code	Event	Character(s)	Association	Comments
123	Cousin's bday party	Cousins, mom, sis, aunt	BH	
124	Friend's bday	Friend, her b.f.	BS	
126	Convinced dad to buy sis dog	Sis, dad	BH	
129	Skyped w g.f.	g.f.	BH	"I'd been working all night, and it was nice to see her after such a day."
131	Going home	Family	BH	"It was just great being around my family because I don't get to see them often."
133	Best friend came to visit	Best friend, roommate, sor sis's	BH	Connection to home
134	G.f. came to visit	g.f.	BH	Connection to home
135	Went to football game	Friends	BS	Campus event
136	Celebrating bday	b.f.	BS	
137	Going home	Friends, family	BH	"All my friends were going on fall break this past weekend and they were coming home. UK doesn't have a fall break so I wanted to go home for the weekend so I could see everybody. At first I didn't have a ride home because everyone's car was full but at the last minute my friend Vanna told me that she would take me."

Appendix G

TP-3 Best Events Sample Page

Code	Event	Character(s)	Association	Comments
106	Good grade	None Cited	BS	
107	Interview for class	Classmate, interviewee	BS	
108	Bball tics at lottery	Friend	BS	Found out friends got tics too, happy didn't have to go to game alone
111	Fam visited	Fam	BH	Connection to home
113	Went home	Best friend, bros	BH	Saw best friend
114	Saw movie	Friends	BS	
115	Watching Ohio St game	Friend from home	BH	Connection to home
118	Good grade	Teacher	BS	
120	Family visited	Fam	BH	Connection to home, "They tried to do something special for us...My brother was so excited to finally see me and where I go to school."
121	Went home	Fam, b.f., friends	BH	
123	Credit for canceled meeting	UK staff	BS	
124	Went home	Fam	BH	"My mom wishes I would come home more."
125	Won bet	Friend	BS	
126	Watching friends perform	Friends	BS	
129	G.f. visited	g.f	BH	Connection to home

Appendix H

TP-1 Worst Events Sample Page

Code	Event	Character(s)	Association	Comments
103	Kidney stone	Dr., dad & grandparents	WS	Comfort of home regarding care (dad and grandparents)
104	Trying to do homework	Boyfriend	WS	
106	Forgot something for class/Late to class	None cited	WS	
107	Stressed over first exam	Roommates	WS	“The thought of the first exam as freshmen is frightening... so I know once the first one is over, I will be in the clear, and feel more confident for the next.”
108	Noisy dorm	Girl across the hall	WS	
108	Stressed over work	None cited	WS	Evolved to stress. "two big readings one day in a row... I was in the basement of the dorm and it really stressed me out."
109	Couldn't talk to boyfriend	Boyfriend	WH	
109	Sick	None cited	WS	
110	Being late for classes	Roommate	WS	
113	Going to court with mom bc parents divorcing	Parents and brothers	WH	

Appendix I

TP-2 Worst Events Sample Page

Code	Event	Character(s)	Association	Comments
123	Carrying lots of clothes to room	Friend	WS	
124	Argument with mom	Mom	WH	“She wanted me to come home next weekend and I told her I couldn’t because one of my friends were (sic) coming up and I told her I would go home the following weekend.”
126	Car towed	None cited	WS	
129	Got behind in school	None cited	WS	
130	No sleep for 48 hours	Friends	WS	Learned to sleep daily
131	Friend terminated pregnancy	Best friend	WH	
132	Friend robbed and beat up	Friend	WS	
133	Roommate issue	Roommate, her parents, best friend	WS	
134	Friend got sick	Friend	WS	

Appendix J

TP-3 Worst Events Sample Page

Code	Event	Character(s)	Association	Comments
106	Bad grade	Mom	WS	Connection to home, "I was heart broken because everything I had put so much effort into was gone. I feel really bad about myself. I called my mom and she was very supportive for me. My mom assured me everything would be okay."
108	Last day UK 101	Classmates	WS	Campus connection: "I know I should be happy because it's one less class that I have to worry about, but I just know that I will probably never hang out with the friends I met in UK 101 because we won't see each other much."
111	Bad grade	None Cited	WS	"went through all the profanities I could possibly [think of]"
113	Stressed over school	Bros	WS	
114	Bad grade	Teacher	WS	
115	Ohio State took away acceptance	OSU admissions staff	WH	Looking to transfer
118	Had to study, could hang out	Friends	WS	"They both tried to persuade me at first but I would not give in because studying for my test was more important, but after saying no a few times they understood."
120	Got sick	Roommate	WS	

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