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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FRESHMAN STUDENTS
IN THEIR FIRST SEMESTER OF COLLEGE

by

Lisa Marie Burger
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1991
Master of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2002

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements


for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota
August
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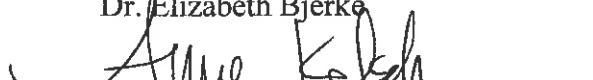
This dissertation, submitted by Lisa Marie Burger in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.


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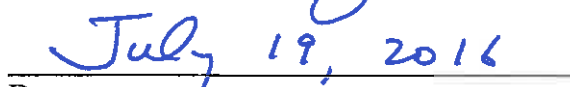

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This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.


Dean of the School of Graduate Studies


Date

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Department Educational Leadership

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Lisa Marie Burger
August 2016

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You are the best!

ABSTRACT

Why do some college students enter, persist, and successfully move through the educational system, while others lose their direction and leave college prior to achieving their academic goals? As students graduate from high school and enter a post-secondary educational environment, some are prepared for the experiences they will encounter, while others struggle through their first semester of enrollment as they attempt to make meaning of their life situations and transitions. This qualitative research study used Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory as well as Baxter Magolda's (2001) concept of self-reflection as a framework for discovery and understanding in an attempt to gain insight into the lived experiences of freshman students as they transitioned through their first semester of college. Individual interviews were conducted at three separate timeframes in the fall semester with freshman students enrolled in aviation and undeclared focused sections of an introduction to university life course. The data that emerged from the interviews revealed that academic experiences, time management, personal independence, as well as relationships and involvement with others make a difference in how students navigate through and make meaning of their first semester of their freshman year in college.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As students graduate from high school and enter the post-secondary educational environment, some are prepared for the experiences they will face while others struggle through their first semester of enrollment as they attempt to make meaning of their life situations. My everyday experiences, as a staff member whose roles and responsibilities focus on fostering college student success and persistence, have led to an interest in exploring student experiences that occur in their first semester of college that shape their transition into the institution. Whether it is due to the social, academic, or situational aspects of the experience, students often find challenges within their first semester transition.

“Susie” (a fictitious name used for illustration) was a student who did not have to study much in high school; academics came easily for her. She was encouraged to pursue medicine based on her interest in math and science. As she prepared for her college exams, she relied on her study techniques that always provided exemplary scores on her high school assignments and tests. After receiving an F on her first college Chemistry exam, she didn’t know what to do. She wondered if she was capable of college level work and would the results of this test compromise her aspirations of becoming a doctor and who Suzie thought she was destined to become in her professional life.

Or there is “Tommy” (a fictitious name used for illustration) who grew up in a small community of 1,500 people. Everyone knew everyone. Tommy attended a college that had an undergraduate enrollment that was five times the size of his home town. In fact, his entire high school population could have fit in the Introduction to Psychology course he took his first semester in college. He wondered how he would ever find his way around the campus, whether he would make friends, and who he would eat with in the dining center.

And “Johnny” (again a fictitious name used to illustrate the example), who was always told by family, high school teachers, and what he saw through television and the movies, that college would be different than high school. But, never did he imagine how difficult it would be to manage his own time as well as recognize the independence that would be expected of him in college. Being able to balance his academic responsibilities with his interest in developing a social life and having fun was challenging and overwhelming at times.

These are examples I have witnessed over the years, of transitional issues undergraduate students encounter as they enter their new environments and are introduced to new experiences. These issues that often become difficult transitional experiences are the focus of the study. This research examines the transitions students experience in an effort to gain insight into their lives within the first semester of college. Based on the experiences they shared, I identified themes and offer recommendations campus leaders, faculty, and staff can use to structure and develop programs and services that enhance student success and persistence of this specific population.

Higher education opportunities lead to varied outcomes for students based on the multitude of experiences that either encourage success or foster reasons for departure (e.g. Light, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1982, 2012). Those experiences involve both personal characteristics and institutional culture that signal whether a student successfully navigates the collegiate environment, or leaves the campus community prior to achieving an intended goal. Over the decades, studies have been conducted and researchers have developed theories and models to assist in the understanding of student success and conversely, student departure (e.g. Light, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1982, 2012). Why do some students enter, persist, and successfully move through the educational system, while others lose their direction and leave college prior to achieving their educational goals? As stated by Mortenson (2005) “freshman to sophomore persistence measurements are important both because of student vulnerability at the beginning of college and because institutions can react quickly with interventions” (p. 37). By gaining a perspective on freshman student transitions, faculty, staff, and administrators at institutions of higher education will be better equipped to create environments and implement interventions that enhance student success and persistence toward graduation. The questions asked within this study examined the lived experiences of freshman students as they described and made meaning of their transitions through their first semester of college. It is by exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of these experiences that recommendations can be made to guide the creation of programs and services on college campuses to influence freshman student success.

The transition into higher education can include a complex set of experiences for freshman students as they explore new environments, expectations, and opportunities within their first semester of college. The freshman year of college has been found to be a critical transition point for students. As stated by Tinto (2012), “on average, the percentage of beginning students who leave their initial institution before graduating, reflects the well-established finding that institutional attrition is generally highest in the first year and declines thereafter” (p. 3). The fictitious student examples illustrate that transitional experiences can range from academic challenges, the development of relationships, to time management and securing independence – signaling the complexities within the first semester of a student’s freshman year in college.

The first chapter of this study explores the focus, purpose, and importance of the student transition inquiry. Chapter two provides an overview of the current literature that explores transitions and persistence as these topics relate to new experiences and life situations. Chapter three moves the reader through the methodology of the study, as framed within the transition theory model and the concept of self-reflection. Chapter four describes the research findings based on the collection of data as obtained from the freshman student population explored. The final chapter brings together a summary of the literature as a backdrop to the findings from the study along with recommendations to inform action aimed at improving student transitions at institutions of higher education. Knowing how important the first year of college can be in shaping a student’s continued success, this study provides value to what has already been examined as an attempt to

gain insight into the lives and experiences of the freshman student population at the University of North Dakota (UND).

Study Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the lived experiences of freshman students as they transitioned through their first semester of college. Described through their own language and voice, the study attempted to capture the experiences of this population of students interviewed, as they moved through their first fall semester. The results of the study provided insight into students' lived experiences, which in turn was used to frame recommendations in order for individuals on a college campus (leaders, faculty, and staff) the opportunity to create programs and services to enhance support systems and structures to foster a positive first semester transition for their freshman population.

Research Questions

In order to explore freshman students in their first semester of college within this study, two research questions were created to examine their lived experiences along with how this population of students made meaning of their experiences. Through these questions, a deeper understanding of the freshman students can be explored. The research questions posed in this study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college?
2. How do students make meaning of their experiences as they move in, through, and out of their first semester of college?

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to contribute to the current literature examining student transitions as well as a means to suggest intervention strategies entire campus communities (institutional leaders, faculty, and staff) could implement to influence freshman retention rates and student persistence toward graduation. Through the participant's own language and voice, the study attempted to capture the experiences of the freshman population at three separate timeframes as the students, who participated in the study, moved through their first semester of enrollment – three weeks, eight weeks, and 13 weeks – and made meaning of their experiences at these points in time. It is through an exploration of the transitions that students experience as they move in, through, and out of the first semester, that the research findings gathered from this study will add to the current retention and persistence literature. The findings will attempt to continue to acknowledge and understand the lived experiences of freshman students at institutions of higher education.

Insight into Experiences

This study provided an opportunity to gain insight into the lived experiences of the freshman population during their first semester of transition into college. Student thoughts and expressions created the basis for the insight obtained throughout the research study. This insight is important in understanding the transitions students experience in their first semester of college and recognize the conditions that hinder a student's ability to successfully transition into the college environment. According to Tinto (1988) “though most students are able to cope with the problems of adjusting to the

social and intellectual life of the college, many find it measurably more difficult” to do so (p. 444). Through the experiences that students shared during the individual interviews, and the themes that emerged from the data, institutional leaders, faculty, and staff will be provided with recommendations to address the complex situations within the transition process. These experiences are important to recognize in order to understand the freshman transition process and create programs and services to help students adjust to their new environment. Tinto emphasizes (1988) “in attempting to make a transition, individuals are likely to encounter difficulties that are as much a reflection of the problems inherent in the shifts of community membership as they are either of the personality of the individual or of the institution in which membership is sought” (p. 442). According to Tinto (1988), many factors are involved as students transition through their first semester of college and by recognizing the issues, campus environments can be created to foster success.

The outcome of this study adds to the current literature as a contribution to the examination of student transitional experiences as well as a means to suggest intervention strategies entire campus communities (institutional leaders, faculty, and staff) could implement to influence freshman retention rates and student persistence toward graduation. Recommendations were made that may be used to create and develop proactive programs and services on college campuses to enhance opportunities for success and progress toward students’ educational achievements. From the student voices throughout the study, the research was able to explore and capture an understanding of the lived experiences of freshman students, providing findings to be used by faculty,

staff, and campus leaders to create opportunities to enhance student retention and persistence toward graduation.

Framework for the Study

Transition Theory

Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory was used as the theoretical framework and platform for discovery, to explore how students understand their environments and transition through their lived experiences within the first semester of college.

Schlossberg's (1981, 1984) work was initially developed to examine the experiences of adults and to provide a framework to assist in their counseling as they dealt and coped with issues such as job loss, divorce, death, and moving to new communities. Since then, Schlossberg's (1989, 2008, 2011) work expands beyond adult issues and offers a broader framework to be used to explore the transitional experiences of students as they navigate their higher education environments. Schlossberg's (2011) work helps to clarify the transitions people experience by identifying the type of transition, the degree to which life is altered, where a person is in the transition process, and the resources that can be applied to provide support as individuals move in, through, and out of the experience.

In addition to Schlossberg's theory, Baxter Magolda's (1992) examination of self-reflection through a constructivist lens offers a layer to the study that provides an exploration of how meaning is made and knowledge constructed as the freshmen move in, through, and out of their first semester of enrollment. Self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Kegan, 1982) and the process of self-reflection, incorporates a cognitive dimension of development that explains how an individual makes meaning of the

knowledge that is gained through their life experiences. Not only were students asked to share their transitional experiences, they were prompted to reflect and make meaning of what was occurring in their lives.

What is a Transition?

In order to understand the lived experiences of students as they move through their first semester of college, it is important to explore the concept of transitions as examined by earlier research. Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transition includes an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions. A transition can be said to occur if an "event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). "The significance of the event or non-event lies in how and to what extent it alters our lives" (Schlossberg, 2008, p. 9). Throughout her work, Schlossberg (2011) states that "dealing with change requires understanding different types of transitions" (p. 159) which she identifies as anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent transitions.

Anticipated transitions are what Schlossberg (2011) describes as "major life events we usually expect" (p. 159). For freshman students, anticipated transitions could include going to college, success in courses, and graduation from college. Unanticipated transitions are the "often disruptive events that occur unexpectedly" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159). Illness, loss of a family member, or failing a first college exam are examples of unanticipated transitions that freshman students may experience within the first semester of college. Non-event transitions are the "expected events that fail to occur"

(Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159). For the freshman student, a major non-event would be an inability to make new friends or being unable to find a group or social network in which to belong. Schlossberg (2011) states that “everyone experiences transitions, whether they are events or nonevents, anticipated or unanticipated” (p. 159). Through these experiences, Schlossberg (2008, 2011) suggests that there are common features to all transition events and nonevents which influence the way in which individuals cope with the situation.

Transition Process

Schlossberg (2008) identifies a transition as a process that incorporates a series of phases over time in which a person moves in, moves through, and moves out of the situation. The moving in occurs at the beginning of the transition and can be considered an introduction to the situation. Individuals in the first phase of a transition (moving in), become “familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new system” (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989, p. 15). Moving through the transition constitutes the majority of the time spent in the transition process. The moving through time is spent on renewal, acceptance, or deterioration of the situation. Based on the work of Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) “learners may need help sustaining their energy and commitment” in coping with and moving through the transition (p. 16). Moving out of the transition process marks the end phase when the transition is nearing completion, integration, or continuous monitoring is determined necessary to adjust to the change. Individuals moving out of a situation can be categorized as “ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next” (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 16).

Throughout the entire transition process, Schlossberg (2008) recognizes that individuals need to establish ways in which to cope and adapt to the situation in order to move in, move through, and move out.

Factors that Influence Coping with the Transition

Schlossberg's study of transition acknowledges that people bring assets and deficits to each situation. According to Schlossberg (2008), "we all have a combination of resources that we bring to each transition . . . to deal with the transition in question" (p. 43). To cope with life's changes, Schlossberg (2008, 2011) and colleagues (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) identified four factors that influence one's ability to cope and adapt to a transition – situation, self, support, and strategies – referred to as the 4 S's. In better understanding how students navigate the 4 S's, faculty, staff, and institutional leaders on college and university campuses will be able to create environments that address the way in which freshman move in, move through, and move out of transitions that influence their ability to adjust and cope with their new experiences (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Keeping in mind the 4 S's that serve as factors in order for individuals to cope with transitions, campus environments can be designed and interventions developed tailored specifically to freshman students as they maneuver through their experiences (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

The first S, of the 4 S's approach to coping with transitions focuses on the situation. What is the "person's situation at the time of transition?" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). For freshman students, college provides opportunities that have never before been experienced. Various circumstances influence the way in which a person might cope with

the situation unique to the individual. Knowing and understanding their situations, offers a starting place for freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college.

Self refers to the “person’s inner strength for coping with the situation” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). Factors important to examining self in the transition process are classified into two categories – personal and demographic characteristics (such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, and ethnicity), as well as psychological resources which focus on outlook, commitment, and resiliency (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Freshman students’ individual characteristics contribute to one’s ability to cope with a situation. Some individuals are better able to cope and deal with the transition period than others. The concept of self, focuses on a need to matter, to feel respected, and to feel noticed (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Tinto’s work (1988) further reinforces the concept of self and a person’s response to the transition process as an important component in student persistence. “The issues associated with both separation and transition are conditions that need not in themselves lead to departure. It is the individual’s response to those conditions that finally determines staying or leaving” (Tinto, 1988, p. 445).

Supports and support networks are important influencers on freshman students in the transition process. Supports are those people and communities that are likely to help or hinder the person going through the transition. The support available at the time of transition is critical to one’s sense of well-being (Schlossberg, 2008, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1995). The amount or type of support needed varies based on the individual, but a certain amount is essential and can make the difference in how individuals cope with

transitions (Schlossberg, 2008, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Freshman student supports often are family units, friends, peers, institutions, and communities (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Through the work of Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007), it was found that family and friends are influential in reinforcing behaviors aimed at academic success and provide a support network for freshman students.

Individuals who work at institutions also play a critical role in providing support to the student experiencing the transition. According to Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989), campus administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals need to provide the support that makes a difference and allows for students to successfully move in, move through, and move out of our colleges and universities. Further reinforced by Tinto (2012) “. . . effective institutions are intentional, structured, and proactive in their pursuit of student success” (p. 103) and in creating environments that foster student retention and persistence.

The fourth S – strategies – is identified as a plan of action to cope with the transition. Strategies could be those that modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem, or help manage the stress felt after the transition has occurred (Schlossberg, 2008, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Creating a caring environment provides students with information, guidance, and encouragement, essential to developing strategies to deal with transitions (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Freshman experiences in the first semester of college result in opportunities for students to move in, through, and out of transitions. The ways in which students develop strategies to cope with their situations, find support to influence their experiences, and

make meaning of what is occurring in their lives, combine to create environments for success or departure. As stated by Tinto (1988) “differences in individual coping skills and in educational goals and commitments have much to do with individual responses to the stresses of separation and transition” (p. 444). Schlossberg’s (1981) Transition Theory provides a framework for understanding and explaining the components and stages to the transitions students experience in their first semester of enrollment on a college campus. Recognizing that transitions are complex, adds dimension to the experiences that students encounter in their first term of enrollment.

In addition, Baxter Magolda’s (2001, 2008) work on self-reflection and self-actualization assists in understanding that not only are there experiences that students encounter through their transitions, but that there is meaning that is made within those experiences. It is based on the students’ transitions, and the meaning and understanding that they make of their experiences that shape their successes at the institution.

How Meaning is Made and Knowledge Constructed

There is much to be gained by examining the lived experiences of freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college. This form of study allows for a deeper understanding of the freshman student population as they move in, through, and out of their first semester transition. But just examining the lived experiences is not enough. Further exploration into how they make meaning of their experiences provides depth to the understanding of their transition. Knowledge construction in the meaning making process is a foundational element to self-reflection and the development of self-authorship. Theories of self-authorship are rooted in a

constructive-developmental tradition (Kegan, 1982), identifying that “humans actively construct their perspectives by interpreting their experiences and that these constructions form meaning-making structures. . .to make sense of their experiences” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 495). Baxter Magolda (2001) identified three core self-authorship assumptions in the meaning making process; “knowledge is complex and socially constructed; self is central to knowledge construction; and authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers” (p. 188).

In her work, Baxter Magolda (2001) outlined four ways of knowing (absolute, transitional, independent, and contextual) as well as an understanding of how one’s knowledge of the situation intersects with the environment to create meaning. To define these further, absolute knowing is an understanding that knowledge exists in an absolute form. Individuals in authority are those who know the answers, whereas learners focus on obtaining the information. Students seek the answers from authority about educational programs, majors, and career direction (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Transitional knowing is not only a shift in acquiring knowledge, but understanding the knowledge once it is gained. Understanding the knowledge requires exploration through learning and interacting with others (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Within independent knowing, it is assumed there is uncertainty and questioning, and authorities are no longer the only source of knowledge. Students begin to think for themselves. (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Contextual knowing suggests that an individual looks at all aspects of a situation or issue, seeks out expert advice, and integrates his or her own as well as the views of others in

deciding what to think in an attempt to understand and make meaning of the experience (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Through a multiple theoretical approach based on the work of Schlossberg (1989) and Baxter Magolda (2001), as a foundation to this study, student experiences were examined in the context of their movement through their first semester of college as they made meaning within their new environment. Figure 1 visually identifies the process as a student moves in, through, and out of a transition, incorporating the concepts of Schlossberg (1989) and Baxter Magolda (2001). Through individual interview questions presented to the students at three time intervals, responses were examined to identify how students moved through their first semester of college and made meaning of their experiences. By exploring and examining the transitions freshmen experience as they move through their first semester of enrollment, individuals within campus communities can use the findings and recommendations provided, to influence and construct programs and services to support this particular student population.

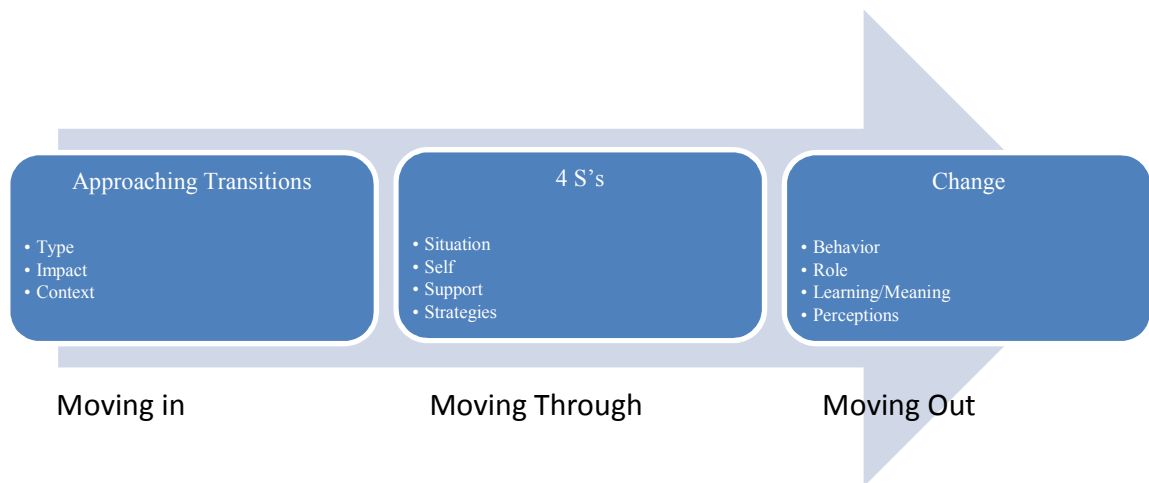


Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework of the Transition Process Using Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) and Baxter Magolda's Concept of Self-Reflection (2001).

Terms and Definitions

The following terms and definitions were used in the study to provide a grounding from which the research was framed and conducted.

College: The term college used throughout the manuscript describes an institution of higher education in the United States that an individual goes to after high school that offers courses leading to a degree (Merriam-Webster, 2015a). For the purposes of this study, college has been used to describe both the in and out-of-the classroom experiences of the students who participated in the study.

Freshman: A freshman is defined as a first-time, full-time student to higher education, admitted to the institution, under the admit type of freshman. These students may have some college credit earned while in high school, but are entering the institution used in the study, directly from high school without any time elapsed between high school and college (University of North Dakota Academic Catalog, 2014-2015a). The definition of freshman students will be used throughout the study as opposed to first-year students. On occasion, first-year student has been used to reference freshman and transfer students to an institution for the first time. It was determined that the word freshman clearly defines the sample population as it references the traditional level of those entering a college or university for the first time (Merriam-Webster, 2015b).

Introduction to university life course: For the purpose of this study, an introduction to university life course is defined as described in the University of North Dakota Academic Catalog (2014-15b) which categorizes the class as a two credit course specifically designed for students in their first semester of college. The course focuses on

the academic and social transitions from high school to college covering topics such as time and stress management, study skills, understanding diversity, health and wellness, and building relationships with others. The course is not a graduation requirement, only an elective course students choose to enroll in to assist in their college transition.

Traditionally aged student: A traditionally aged student is one who earns a high school diploma, enters a college or university directly from high school without any time separation, enrolls full-time, typically depends on others for financial support, and does not work, or works part time during the school year (Choy, 2002). Most often, these students are 18-19 years of age.

Retention: Berger and Lyon (2005) define retention as “the ability of a particular college or university to successfully graduate the students that initially enroll at the institution” (p. 3). Similarly, Tinto (2012) defines retention as “the rate at which an institution retains and graduates students who first enter the institution as freshmen” (p. 127). In both definitions, emphasis is placed on the involvement of the college or university as a factor in student movement through the educational experience. As stated by Reason (2009) “colleges and universities retain students” (p. 660).

Persistence: In this study, persistence is referred to as “the rate at which students who begin higher education, continue in higher education, and complete their degree” (Tinto, 2012, p. 127). Student involvement is the key component to persistence toward goals and graduation. According to Reason (2009) persistence is an “individual phenomenon” in which “students persist to a goal” (p. 660).

Summary

Through the work of Tinto (2012) “student success does not arise by chance. It requires that institutions commit themselves to intentional, structured, and systematic forms of action that involve faculty, student-affairs staff, and administrators” (p. 9). Based on this notion, findings from this study have provided a greater understanding of the freshman student population and their lived experiences that impact persistence and movement through their first semester of enrollment. Institutions of higher education have the capacity to create environments that provide opportunities for student success. As stated by Tinto (2012) “a college or university, once having admitted a student, has an obligation to do what it can to help the student stay and graduate” (p. 6). By gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of freshman students, the findings and recommendations will assist individuals within campus communities to create programs and services to enhance the likelihood that these students will successfully complete their first semester of college. As institutional leaders, faculty, and staff address the transitional situations that arise, better preparing students to cope within their experiences, the outcomes will ultimately lead to improved persistence toward educational goals and college graduation.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many factors involved as students transition through their college experiences. As stated by Hunter (2006) “the transition from being a high school student to being a successful college student does not happen instantaneously” (p. 4). The transition from high school to college is complex and requires an understanding of the lives of those who go through the experience. As past research has found, these factors are represented as findings in quantitative, qualitative, as well as mixed method studies conducted to examine how students transition within their new collegiate environment. The results of an exploration of the current literature point to transition as a natural phenomenon in the life of a traditionally aged college student. Identified in the literature are findings which support the need to continue to explore the topic of student transitions in the educational environment. Based on the type of study conducted and the research questions posed, the research results provide multiple angles in which this topic is examined and understood. The literature explored for this study focused on earlier research findings which examined influences involved in understanding the transition process, identifying ways in which individuals cope with the transition, and recognizing how situations and perceptions impact individuals as they move through their transition.

Negotiating the Transition

In a qualitative research study, Roe Clark (2005) explored the “concept of strategies as a means for gaining a deeper understanding of how students negotiate the transition to college” (p. 296). In her study of the lived experiences of students in their first year of college, Roe Clark (2005) found that “students’ college transition experience includes an active process of strategizing” (p. 299) and navigating challenges both inside and outside the classroom. The study identified students’ perceptions of the connections between their experiences and actions, along with the circumstances that influenced their perceptions and the strategies they used to navigate through their first semester of enrollment (Roe Clark, 2005). What became clear through the research conducted by Roe Clark (2005) was that “by the end of the first year, the transition to college is not something that just happens; it is something that students build . . . largely the result of conscious and intentional efforts to address challenges and pursue goals” (p. 314).

Perceptions of Experiences

Student perceptions of their experiences and their interactions within the college environment have been a focus of research studies over the years. According to a study conducted by Milem and Berger (1997), “as students enter a campus environment, they begin to interact with that environment. In doing so, they encounter new values, attitudes, behaviors, ideas, and norms” (p. 389). Findings from the study suggest that the “incorporation of students into the college environment results from a series of interactions between their behaviors and perceptions. During the transition stage, students begin to engage in a variety of behaviors that represent different forms and types of

involvement . . . with the campus environment . . . [and] leads to the perception of institutional and peer support” (Milem & Berger, 1997, p. 390).

More recently, Beck (2007) explored student perceptions as indicators of self-reflection and self-actualization in their adjustment to college life. In the study, Beck (2007) found that students’ perceptions of the academic environment influenced their success based on six factors: structure dependence, creative expression, reading for pleasure, academic achievement, academic motivation, and mistrust of instructors.

Transitions within Populations

Studies have been conducted to examine transitions within populations of students based on characteristics of the groups in which the students belong. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) examined international students to learn more about how they “negotiate transitions successfully, what type of support is helpful, and what kinds of strengths these students draw upon” (p. 291) as a means to better understand the transitional issues of this student population. The results of their qualitative inquiry identified four overarching themes – connection with others, maintaining a foundation, embracing the process, and discovering strengths from within as important concepts to positive international student transitions upon completion of the first semester of college.

In a study conducted by Bolle, Wessel, and Mulvhill (2007), which examined the transitional issues of first-year college students who were homeschooled, the authors sought to determine how these students made meaning of their new environment. They found key transitional issues that first-year students experience regardless of the environment from which they came. In their research, the authors (Bolle, Wessel, &

Mulvhill, 2007) found these transitional issue themes: leaving home, independence, meeting others with different values and world views, involvement, making friends, and academics.

Another population that has been the topic of research in the retention and persistence literature is the undeclared student. In a study conducted by Lewallen (1993), he explored whether students with this academic status persisted at lower rates than students with declared majors. Lewallen (1993) found that an undeclared student status is “not sufficient information to conclude that the student is at-risk of not persisting” (p. 105). Lewallen’s (1993) findings do not substantiate other studies that had been conducted up to that point, that concluded that being undecided does have a negative impact on persistence (Anderson, 1985; Beal & Noel, 1990; Noel, 1985). Following Lewallen’s (1993) study, additional research (Cuseo, 2005; Graunke, Woosley, & Helms, 2006) has emerged to support the claims that the mere categorization of undeclared status does not negatively influence commitment and persistence in the college environment. Instead, student success, retention, and persistence can be contributed to many factors and situations, and “it is difficult if not dangerous to make generalizations” (Gordon, 1985, p. 117) based only on undeclared status.

In a more recent study which examined unique student populations, Wang (2014) explored student-teacher interactions, student-teacher relationship formation, and development during first generation students’ transitions to college. Through Wang’s (2014) qualitative research study, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory was used to guide her exploration of how first generation students and those with whom they are connected,

“deal with and respond to life changes” (p. 66). The results of the study point to incidents where students successfully or unsuccessfully transitioned through experiences Wang (2014) described as turning points; significant events that shaped the process of transition.

Connections in Transitions

Quantitative research studies have been conducted to assess student transition within the first year of college life. Using the constructs of Tinto’s (1987) Theory of Student Departure as a framework for their study, Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995) sought to estimate the effects of the extent to which college expectations were met and had an influence on student departure decisions. Through his work, Tinto (2012) stated that “student retention and graduation is shaped by . . . clear and consistent expectations about what is required to be successful in college” (p. 10). In their study, Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995) found that student experiences and their expectations of those experiences shaped their desire to establish connections within the institution and remain enrolled, reinforcing the findings within Tinto’s (2012) work.

Further studies have been conducted to examine the concept of connections as influencers on college student retention and persistence. Beck (2000) studied the role of student social structure in the persistence process. The results of Beck’s (2000) study demonstrated the importance of developing relationships with new acquaintances and that greater levels of connectedness foster a sense of belonging among students.

The importance of belonging and connectedness surfaced in a study conducted by Pittman and Richmond (2010), in which participants were asked about their current sense

of connection at the university through an 18-item questionnaire designed to measure psychological belonging. The results of the study found that a “sense of university belonging is linked to students’ positive self-perceptions of social acceptance and scholastic competence” (p. 354) and were influential in the college transition process.

Even Astin’s (1999) research on student involvement in higher education can point to the importance of connections in the transition process leading to higher rates of retention and persistence toward graduation. According to Astin (1999), the “greater the student’s involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development” (p. 528).

In addition, a study conducted by Hu (2011), examined the relationship between student engagement in college activities and student persistence. Through Hu’s (2011) work, it was discovered that academic engagement as well as social engagement are positively related to student persistence in college. The results of Hu’s (2011) study further reinforce the importance of involvement in both the academic and social aspects of college.

Support from Others

Not only are connections and engagement with the college experience important to positively influence student persistence, so too are the support and relationships students maintain with friends and family back home. Elkins, Braxton, and James (2000) found that support from parents, other family members, and friends from previous communities provide encouragement and reinforce the student’s persistence or departure decisions. “If a student fails to receive support for college attendance from friends and

family members, then early departure from college is likely” (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000, p. 253). In research conducted by Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007), results again point to the importance of one’s family and friends in shaping aspirations and reinforcing behaviors that promote academic achievement.

Academic Transitions

Motivation toward learning in the academic environment has been shown to influence transitions and the student’s ability to successfully persist at the institution. Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra (2007) recently studied student motivation toward the learning process. According to their work (Hsieh et al., 2007), when students are faced with academic demands, the way in which they respond and approach the academic tasks, view themselves, and set academic goals significantly influenced their educational success. Furthermore, “motivation is reinforced when students believe that they are capable or feel that they can be successful” (Hsieh et al., 2007, p. 457).

Friedman and Mandel (2011) studied the extent to which motivation improves the prediction of performance and retention. In their research, they found that students who are motivated to achieve and improve upon their past performance, do better academically than their peers who reported less motivation to perform well (Friedman & Mandel, 2011). The results of this study reinforce the influence of motivation as students transition through their college experiences.

Research has recently been conducted that explores how multiple factors contribute to successful transitions in an attempt to understand student persistence. Copeland and Levesque-Bristol (2010) examined how attributes such as external

influences, expectations, and teachers' influences along with motivation can lead to enhanced student success. Copeland and Levesque-Bristol (2010) found that if students "enjoy their university experience, are challenged [academically], and connected with those around them" (p. 467) they are more likely to consider their experiences fulfilling and transition successfully within the collegiate environment.

Complexities of Transitions

What is evident, based on the literature review, is that there is not one identifying factor that contributes to whether students successfully transition through their collegiate experience or depart prior to successful completion. In fact, there are multiple and often complex reasons, and depending upon the research conducted and the population of students sampled, the results will vary. And in some cases, the results from one study may contradict past and present studies of a similar nature. What can be found throughout the literature, are broad factors that contribute to understanding student transitions and persistence toward graduation. Academics, relationships, involvement, and social experiences are the broad categories that transcend the studies and can be identified as factors to consider when researching and exploring student transitional experiences and their rates of retention and persistence toward goal attainment.

The factors that surfaced through this literature review point to the importance of connections and forming relationships with others (both past and present) and with the institution, involvement as a key to establishing connections, motivation as a contributor to academic success, social and academic experiences influential to persistence, the value in self-actualization and meaning-making of experiences, as well as developing strategies

to positively influence the transitional process. As stated in the literature, college students are generally concerned about academics, identifying strategies to cope with challenges, making connections, getting involved, and examining perceptions they have of the collegiate environment that shape their transitional experiences. Despite the population examined and the study conducted, there was a consistent pattern in the literature which uncovered these broad themes that support the notion that student experiences influence their transition through college.

The research findings in this study extend and support the current literature that explores student transitions, by examining how freshmen made meaning of their first semester of college as they moved in, through, and out of their lived experiences. Through the themes that emerged from the data collected, the study findings pointed to academics, relationships and involvement with others, time management, and personal independence as key factors to the student transition process. These findings mirror much of the existing research that explores college student transitions. What this study adds to the current student transition literature are recommendations to inform university leaders, faculty, and staff as they design and implement programs and services to enhance undergraduate student experiences within the first semester of college.

Summary

The transition into higher education can be a set of complex experiences for freshman students as they explore new environments, expectations, and opportunities. Much has been written and researched over the years examining the intersection between institutions of higher education and the students who attend them (Astin, 1999; Astin &

Oseguera, 2005; Barefoot et al., 2005; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Shouping, 2011; Tinto, 1982; Tinto, 1988; Tinto, 2012; Yasedijan, Towes, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008;). It is through an understanding of students' transitional experiences, that individuals on college campuses can learn more about their students and develop proactive programs and services to enhance success, retention, and persistence toward educational achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the lived experiences of freshman students as they transitioned through their first semester of college. As described through their own language and voice, the research attempted to capture the experiences of this population as they moved through the fall semester. As defined by Maxwell (2013), the study was focused on understanding a phenomenon and “gaining insight into what is going on” within a situation (p.28). Phenomenology provides a basis for gaining an understanding and insight into the lived experiences of first semester, freshman students.

Through the Lens of Phenomenology

It is from a phenomenological perspective that the study was conceptualized. In this exploration of transitions and how students perceive their first semester of enrollment, phenomenology can be defined as the study of structures and the lived experiences of people. Overall, a phenomenological approach explores the experience from the perspective of the individual (Lester, 1999). This definition is further reinforced through prior research and literature from those who introduced phenomenology as a means by which situations and experiences of the individual can be examined.

Edmund Husserl is often considered the researcher who advanced phenomenology in the twentieth century (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl rejected the belief that objects in the external world exist independently. He argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to their consciousness (Eagleton, 1983; Fouche, 1993). To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are then treated as pure “phenomena” and the only absolute data from where to begin. Husserl named his philosophical method “phenomenology”, the science of pure “phenomena” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 55). The aim of phenomenology is the return to the concrete, captured by the notion “Back to the things themselves!” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56). Pure phenomenological research seeks to describe the phenomenon rather than explain what is occurring (Lester, 1999). Husserl defines the “lived-world” as “reality actually organized and experienced by an individual” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 59). Phenomenology, as described by Husserl, is a return to a world of lived experiences (Lester, 1999).

Other researchers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, expanded the influence of Husserl as phenomenology became a way in which to study and research lived situations and experiences. The aim of the individual using phenomenology as a component to a research design is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, as presented by those who live the experience (Lester, 1999). Further reinforced by Welman and Kruger, (1999) “phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological

phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved” (p. 189). According to Giorgi (1985), phenomenology starts by describing a situation experienced in daily life.

The objective of phenomenology is to describe an experience lived, or what that experience meant to those who lived it. Since phenomenology is focused on understanding a phenomenon rather than explaining it (Sadala & Adorno, 2001), and providing the “point of view” or “perspective” of the subject (Crotty, 1998, p. 83), this design approach allowed me, as the researcher, the opportunity to gain insight into the lives of freshman students as they transitioned through their first semester of college.

Phenomenology is the foundation in which to study and research lived situations and experiences. Phenomenology shaped this study and naturally helped to explore the research question of how lived experiences influence the transitional issues among freshman college students. The study focused on understanding a phenomenon and gaining insight into a situation (Maxwell, 2013). In this study, the phenomenon was the lived experiences of the freshman students as they transitioned through their first semester of college. Student voices were important to this study, capturing their lived experiences as articulated through their own perspective and language. Through this research study, freshman students were asked to describe their lived experiences and reflect upon what their experiences meant to them. It was the lived experiences from the perspective of the freshman students from which the study was formed.

Constructivist Perspective

The questions raised through this research study can be examined through a constructivist perspective. According to Crotty (1998), it is through constructivism that

we manage our knowledge and meaning that is not discovered, but constructed. Since constructivism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998), this concept can be applied to the study and questions to be explored. Based on Crotty's work (1998), these practices are constructed in and out of interactions between human beings within a particular social situation.

This very claim supports and reinforces the use of constructivism as a guiding component in the design of the study. It is through the construction of meaning and the interaction of experiences that shape the way in which students move through their collegiate environment. Freshman students construct their experiences as they interact with others around them and the situations in which they live. Researching how these experiences are constructed and the ways in which students engage with their experiences provides an opportunity to respond and give guidance to assist them in their transition process. Constructivism, as an approach to the study, helped to understand the topic of student transitions through the first year of enrollment by examining how this population of students interacted and engaged with their new environment – college. It is through their transition that students interpret the world around them and construct their experiences through the first semester of enrollment.

Research Design

To carry out the research, which identified the students' transitional experiences within their first semester of college, the following method and design was implemented. The research examined the lived experiences of freshman students as they transitioned

through their first semester of enrollment within the college environment.

Phenomenology, constructivism, Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1989), and Baxter Magolda's (2001) self-reflection model – all interconnected – provided context to explore how students made meaning of their constructed reality, as they moved through transitions within their new environment. Based on the lived experiences of the freshman population, insight was gained into the transitions these students experienced in their first semester of college and recommendations were formulated to suggest how leaders, faculty, and staff might design programs and services on college campuses to support student needs.

Using a phenomenological, constructivist lens provided context and an understanding to explore the lived experiences of the freshman population as they constructed those experiences throughout their first semester of college. The work of Schlossberg (1989) and Baxter Magolda (2001) added a dimension that provided an understanding of how a person moves in, through, and out of a transition and makes meaning of his or her experiences.

With the lived experiences of students as the focal point of the study, the questions posed to the students in individual interviews explored their transitions at various intersections in their first term of enrollment – three weeks, eight weeks, and 13 weeks in the fall semester – as well as how they made meaning of their experiences. The points in the semester in which the students were interviewed, were chosen to coincide with key transitional events which trigger experiences that students often face in their new environment – beginning college (three weeks), mid-term exams and getting used to

college expectations (eight weeks), and preparing for final exams and movement to the spring semester (13 weeks). These timeframes were chosen based on personal experiences observed through the years as a professional in higher education, as well as prior research that states, “the first semester, especially the first six weeks, can be most difficult” (Tinto, 1982, p. 9) for students as they enter college and transition through the semester. The remaining interview timeframes were determined based on a mid-point follow-up and the third as a final check point as the freshman students were moving out of their first semester of enrollment. It was anticipated that all three points would be triggers for experiences occurring in the semester. Based on my professional observations over the years, within the first three weeks, students tend to be adjusting and learning to navigate their new environment; mid-term brings academic challenges; and the end of the term creates a sense of anxiety over final exams, completion, fulfillment, and movement to the second semester.

Site Selection

This study examined the first semester transitions of freshman students entering the University of North Dakota (UND), a four-year public institution in the upper-Midwest with an undergraduate population of approximately 12,000 and an entering freshman class of about 2,000. As a comprehensive, liberal arts institution, offering undergraduate and graduate programs of study, myriad of majors and courses are granted through the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business and Public Administration, College of Engineering and Mines, College of Education and Human Development, College of Nursing and Professional Disciplines, John D. Odegard School of Aerospace

Sciences, School of Medicine and Health Sciences, School of Graduate Studies, and School of Law (University of North Dakota Academic Catalog, 2014-15b).

The University of North Dakota was chosen as a research site as it provided the appropriate access to the freshman population in which the study was structured. UND offered an introduction to university life course naturally creating populations of students from which to draw as research participants. In addition, knowing there would be several interviews conducted to gather the data over the fall semester, it was beneficial to choose students on the campus in which I was familiar. Finally, it was believed the outcomes of the study would provide greater relevance to the creation of programs and services specific to UND based on the lived experiences of the students on the campus.

Participants

The freshman students who participated in the research study were those enrolled in focused sections of an introduction to university life class at UND in the fall of 2015. The focused sections of the course comprised of students who were either pursuing an aerospace major within the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, or were undeclared and served through the Student Success Center, within the Division of Student Affairs. These populations brought similarities and differences to the study, providing a breadth of lived experiences from those already having declared a major, focused on a clear career path, and others in an undeclared status, still finding their way.

The aviation students were intentionally housed in living-learning community clusters within the residence halls that are positioned on the UND campus closest to the buildings in which the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences is located. Their

residence hall assignments naturally provided opportunities to interact with others with similar majors, academic, career, and social interests. Not only were their living arrangements structured, the aviation student curriculum required that they enroll in a course that orientated them to their major, taken often within their first year of study. Aviation focused sections of an introduction to university life course were offered in the fall of 2015 as an option from which the students were able to choose in place of the orientation to the major course. They were required to either take the orientation to the major course, or enroll in one of the focused sections of an introduction to university life class as part of their overall program of study. Along with the introductory course, aerospace students often are enrolled in classes their first semester that connect them with their major. These courses include flight classes and atmospheric science classes – giving them hands-on exposure to their major and one-on-one interaction with faculty members within their discipline.

The student population in the undeclared focused sections of the introduction to university life course who participated in the study had different college opportunities than those available to the aviation students. The undeclared focused sections of introduction to university life in which they were enrolled were not structured around a particular academic area. In fact, the purpose of the undeclared focused sections was to provide opportunities for students to explore their interests and aptitudes with the goal of major declaration by the end of the fall semester. The undeclared students who chose to enroll in an introduction to university life section were not required to do so; however, they choose the course as an elective to the other classes in which they were enrolled.

Another notable difference for the undeclared population was that there weren't common courses in which they were enrolled as they were encouraged to explore options based on their individual interests. The faculty members of their courses were from departments across campus and many different disciplines.

The undeclared students' living arrangements were different than the aviation student population as well. With a residence hall live-on requirement at the University of North Dakota, the undeclared students were housed in the residence halls just as aviation students were; however, there was not an intentional clustering of this population in one residence hall area. The undeclared students were assigned to residence halls throughout campus based on their own living preferences. Despite these differences, both of the populations studied provided an opportunity to gain insight into the lived experiences of freshman students in a collegiate setting.

All traditionally aged freshman students in their first semester at the University of North Dakota, enrolled in undeclared and aviation sections of an introduction to university life course, were invited as research participants in the study. The introduction to university life course was identified as a class from which the subjects would be drawn based on the purpose and function of the course. The 16-week introduction to university life course content is designed to provide incoming freshman students with a foundation for their educational experiences as a way to prepare for their college life both in and out-of-classroom and covers topics such as study skills, time and stress management, involvement, understanding diversity, health and wellness, and building relationships with others.

In the fall of 2015, there were 15 sections of an introduction to university life course taught at the University of North Dakota. Of those 15 sections, six were structured as focused on particular populations of students – four aviation sections and two undeclared. Those who were enrolled in these focused sections represented students categorized as undeclared or pursuing a major within the aviation department at the University of North Dakota.

Aviation student enrolled through the John D. Odegard School for Aerospace Sciences choose one of seven majors – commercial aviation, flight education, air traffic control, unmanned aerial systems, aviation technology management, airport management, and aviation management. A total of 1,449 undergraduate students were enrolled in one of these seven majors at the beginning of the fall of 2015 (University of North Dakota Office of Institutional Research, 2015). Several programs, services, and initiatives have been designed and implemented by faculty and staff through the John D. Odegard School for Aerospace Sciences to assist students in their college transition.

As the semester begins, faculty members from the John D. Odegard School for Aerospace Sciences assist their new freshmen during move-in weekend as another way in which to form connections with their students. Mandatory academic advising is built into the freshman year for all aviation students. They are required to meet one-on-one with their academic advisor to prepare for course selection each semester and discuss future career development. Living-learning community environments have been designed for students to provide living arrangements based on a concentrated grouping of aerospace majors in the residence halls. Faculty members meet regularly with the aerospace

students in the living-learning community environment to offer academic and career guidance, as well as social activities, further forming connections with the new students. Enrollment in a mandatory introductory aviation course or the aviation focused section of introduction to university life, provides an opportunity for these students to engage in their program of study within their first semester of enrollment. And intentional faculty and staff interventions when students are failing their flight courses provide a proactive response to students struggling academically (E. Bjerke, personal communication, April, 19, 2016).

Undeclared majors at the University of North Dakota are supported academically through the College of Arts and Sciences; however, served by staff in the Student Success Center who are equipped to provide guidance and direction for this specific population. In the fall of 2015, there were 498 students enrolled at the University of North Dakota as undeclared (University of North Dakota Office of Institutional Research, 2015). Student Success Center staff members have created programs and services to specifically target the undeclared population and encourage movement to a degree granting major. Examples of these services consist of intentional communication through the major declaration process, integration of academic advising with career exploration, and retention initiatives designed to encourage retention and persistence to the second year of enrollment. Focus is placed on assisting the undeclared population in exploring academic options and encouraging movement toward major declaration.

It was determined that by targeting these two groups of students through the focused sections of an introduction to university life class, it was possible to narrow the

eligible participants from the larger freshman population at the University of North Dakota. Furthermore, students who fall into these two categories often represent students who are struggling to determine a major (undeclared) or enter the institution predominantly from areas outside the state in which the study was conducted (aviation students). These populations may experience more transitional issues than students who have declared a major or are attending the institution from communities in state, or at least in closer proximity to the campus. The students enrolled in the undeclared and aviation sections of the introduction to university life course, met the criteria for the sample population for which the study was focused.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the recruitment of research participants and before collecting any data from them. The Office of Institutional Research at the University of North Dakota provided the student profile information through a request for data output. The data included in the student profile information provides an overview of the backgrounds of the student populations studied in comparison to the profiles of the overall freshman undeclared and aviation students enrolled at UND. This is important information to include, as it shows that the students enrolled in the focused sections of an introduction to university life course who were eligible to participate in the study were similar in representation to the overall freshman undeclared and aviation student populations. Table 1 represents student profile data depicting the students who were enrolled in one of the four aviation focused sections of an introduction to university life course compared to the overall aviation freshman population.

Table 1. Official Data at 4th Week of Fall 2015 – Aviation Freshman Student Profile.

| University of North Dakota Student Profile of Aviation Freshmen – Fall 2015 | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--|---------|---|---------|
| | | Enrolled in Aviation University Life Course | | Other Enrolled New Aviation Freshmen | |
| | | Total | Percent | Total | Percent |
| Total in Population | | 93 | 100% | 228 | 100% |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| | Part-time | 1 | 1.1% | 3 | 1.3% |
| | Full-time | 92 | 98.9% | 225 | 98.7% |
| Gender | | | | | |
| | Men | 86 | 92.5% | 202 | 88.6% |
| | Women | 7 | 7.5% | 26 | 11.4% |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | | |
| | Two or More Races | 0 | 0.0% | 4 | 1.8% |
| | American Indian | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 0.4% |
| | Asian | 2 | 2.2% | 7 | 3.1% |
| | Black | 2 | 2.2% | 2 | 0.9% |
| | Hispanic | 5 | 5.4% | 11 | 4.8% |
| | Not Specified | 1 | 1.1% | 4 | 1.8% |
| | Non-Resident Alien | 4 | 4.3% | 13 | 5.7% |
| White | 79 | 84.9% | 186 | 81.6% | |
| Average High School GPA | | 3.33 | | 3.34 | |
| Average ACT | | 23.3 | | 24 | |
| Average Number of Credits Enroll in First Semester | | 14.98 | | 15.04 | |
| Residency* | | | | | |
| | North Dakota | 6 | 6.5% | 15 | 6.6% |
| | North Dakota military | 3 | 3.2% | 16 | 7.0% |
| | Minnesota | 43 | 46.2% | 88 | 38.6% |
| | Contiguous states/provinces | 3 | 3.2% | 3 | 1.3% |
| | WUE/WICHE | 14 | 15.1% | 38 | 16.7% |
| | Non-resident | 10 | 10.8% | 33 | 14.5% |
| | MHEC states | 14 | 15.1% | 0 | 0.0% |
| | ND graduate/Alumni | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 0.9% |

*References "Residency Code" field on Student Data System

WUE/WICHE: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, Saskatchewan, Manitoba

MHEC States: Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Wisconsin

Note: University of North Dakota Office of Institutional Research, 2015.

Of particular note are the data points that identify gender, race, high school grade point average, and residency status among the aviation student populations. The aviation students in the focused sections of an introduction to university life course were primarily male (92.5%) as were the general freshman aviation population (88.6%). The aviation students in both populations identified predominantly as white; 84.9% in the focused sections and 81.6% in the general aviation population. Both groups had a similar incoming high school grade point average; 3.33 for those in the focused aviation sections compared to 3.34 for the general aviation population (on a 4.00 scale). And the majority of the aviation students in both aviation groups claimed their state of residency outside of North Dakota; 90.3% in the focused section and 86.4% in the overall freshman aviation population.

Similarities also existed for the undeclared students enrolled in the focused sections of an introduction to university life course in comparison to the general new freshman undeclared population who began at UND in the fall of 2015. Table 2 represents profile information of the students enrolled in the undeclared sections of an introduction to university life course in the 2015 fall semester compared to the student data of all who entered the University of North Dakota as an undeclared student. When examining gender, the majority of the students were female; 60.5% in the focused sections and 53.7% in the general undeclared freshman population. The majority of the individuals in both groups identified as white; 93% in the introduction to university life course sections as compared to 88.6% overall. Both groups had similar incoming high school grade point averages; 3.26 for the students in the focused sections and 3.32 for the

overall undeclared population (on a 4.00 scale). And more of these students reported to claim residency in the state of North Dakota or Minnesota (97.7% who were enrolled in the focused sections and 89.8% who were in the general undeclared population) than from locations outside the immediate geographic area.

Table 2. Official Data at 4th Week of Fall 2015 – Undeclared Freshman Student Profile.

| University of North Dakota Student Profile of Undeclared Students – Fall 2015 | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---------|---|---------|
| | | Enrolled in Undeclared University Life Course | | Other Enrolled Undeclared New Freshmen | |
| | | Total | Percent | Total | Percent |
| Total in Population | | 43 | 100% | 175 | 100% |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| Part-time | | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Full-time | | 43 | 100.0% | 175 | 100.0% |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Men | | 17 | 39.5% | 81 | 46.3% |
| Women | | 26 | 60.5% | 94 | 53.7% |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | | |
| Two or More Races | | 2 | 4.7% | 3 | 1.7% |
| American Indian | | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 1.7% |
| Asian | | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 0.6% |
| Black | | 0 | 0.0% | 5 | 2.9% |
| Hispanic | | 1 | 2.3% | 6 | 3.4% |
| Not Specified | | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Non-Resident Alien | | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 1.1% |
| White | | 40 | 93.0% | 155 | 88.6% |
| Average High School GPA | | 3.26 | | 3.32 | |
| Average ACT | | 23.6 | | 23.5 | |
| Average Number of Credits Enroll in First Semester | | 15.32 | | 15.29 | |
| Residency* | | | | | |
| North Dakota | | 17 | 39.5% | 71 | 40.6% |
| North Dakota Military | | 2 | 4.7% | 4 | 2.3% |
| Minnesota | | 23 | 53.5% | 82 | 46.9% |
| Contiguous states/provinces | | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 1.1% |
| WUE/WICHE | | 1 | 2.3% | 6 | 3.4% |
| Non-resident | | 0 | 0.0% | 7 | 4.0% |

Table 2. cont.

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|---|------|---|------|
| | MHEC states | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 1.7% |
| | ND graduate/Alumni | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |

*References "Residency Code" field on Student Data System
WUE/WICHE: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada,
New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming; Saskatchewan, Manitoba
MHEC States: Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Wisconsin

Note: University of North Dakota, Office of Institutional Research, 2015.

Recruitment of Participants

Prior to the fall 2015 semester beginning, approval was secured from the course instructors to visit their introduction to university life classes and recruit students for the study. Phone calls and follow-up emails were sent to the course instructors to obtain permission to enter their classrooms and recruit student participation. The two undeclared focused sections and the four aviation focused sections of an introduction to university life course were identified and visits arranged with the instructors. These six sections represented all of the focused sections for undeclared and aviation student populations that were taught in the fall 2015 semester at the University of North Dakota.

Within the first three weeks of the fall term (September 9 through September 15), visits were made to the targeted classrooms to recruit research participants. The goal was to recruit a minimum of 15 students from each of the focused populations – 15 undeclared students and 15 aviation students. The classroom outreach provided students with an overview of the study (Appendix A), a copy of the research consent form (Appendix B), and an invitation to sign-up to participate in the interviews scheduled to take place at the third week timeframe. A sign-up sheet was circulated throughout the classrooms after the study overview presentation was made. Students were given the option to select to participate in the study. If students indicated an interest in

participating, they provided their name, phone number, email address, and location in which they preferred the interview to take place. No further recruitment was done beyond the initial outreach that took place during the classroom visits.

Participants for the second and third interviews that occurred at eight and 13 weeks were obtained at the conclusion of the prior interview points. At the end of the third week interviews, the participants were invited to participate in the eight week interview process; at the end of the eight week interviews, the participants were invited to participate in the 13 week interview process. Sign-up sheets were provided at each of the subsequent interview timeframes giving the students the option to participate and identify their optimal day, time, and location of the eight and 13 week interviews. Again, the student's name, phone number, email address, and preferred location were documented by the student on the sign-up sheets. Students were asked to indicate their preference of communication, which was then used in the follow-up reminder messages. Follow-up emails or text messages were made the day prior to the scheduled interviews as a reminder to the participants.

Student Participation

From the initial classroom visits, 15 undeclared students and 24 aviation students agreed to participate in the research project. At the time of the first set of interviews, all 15 undeclared students and 22 of the aviation students participated, for a total of 37 participants. One follow-up email or text message was sent to the two students who did not appear for their scheduled interview. No response from the students was used to determine their lack of interest in participating in the study.

Of the 15 undeclared students who agreed to participate in the study and interviewed at the three week timeframe, 12 were female and three male. Within the aviation group who participated in the first interview, 19 were male and three female.

The students who participated in the study chose psuedonyms at the beginning of the first interview to ensure their anonymity throughout the research process. Some students chose a first name only, while others identified themselves with a first and last name. Only first names were used in this final document, unless there were multiple students who chose the same first name, at which time, a last name initial was used to differentiate the students. Of note, some of the psuedonyms were changed to reflect the professional nature of the study. For example, Fluffy was the psuedonym chosen by the student, but changed to Floyd in the written manuscript. Table 3 provides the psuedonyms for each of the participants in the two student populations studied along with a notation of the timeframes in which the students participated. An X in the furthest three columns to the right in Table 3, represents student participation at the specified timeframes.

Table 3. Student Psuedonyms and Interview Participation.

| Student Psuedonyms and Interview Participation – Fall 2015 | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Student Population | Student Psuedonyms | 3 Week Interview | 8 Week Interview | 13 Week Interview |
| Aviation | Raumel | X | X | X |
| | Dan | X | X | X |
| | John | X | X | X |
| | Jim | X | X | |
| | Matthew | X | X | X |
| | Mike | X | X | X |
| | Jon | X | X | X |
| | Joey | X | X | X |
| | Oliver | X | X | X |
| | Taylor | X | X | X |

Table 3. cont.

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------|----|----|----|
| | | | | |
| | Kat | X | X | X |
| | Paul | X | X | X |
| | Floyd | X | X | X |
| | Allen | X | X | X |
| | George | X | | |
| | Dean | X | | |
| | Hailey | X | X | X |
| | Mike T. | X | X | |
| | Jessie | X | X | X |
| | Michael | X | X | X |
| | Earl | X | X | X |
| | Hayden | X | X | X |
| Total Aviation | | 22 | 20 | 18 |
| | | | | |
| Undeclared | Sandy | X | X | X |
| | Curtis | X | X | X |
| | Kerquernie | X | X | |
| | Lynn | X | X | X |
| | Sam | X | X | X |
| | Marie | X | X | X |
| | Jimmy | X | | |
| | Nina | X | X | X |
| | Joe | X | X | X |
| | Riley | X | | |
| | Jill | X | X | X |
| | Katy | X | X | X |
| | Brian | X | X | X |
| | Gunner | X | X | X |
| | Ashley | X | | |
| Total Undeclared | | 15 | 12 | 11 |
| | | | | |
| Total Both Groups | | 37 | 32 | 29 |

Of the students who participated in the first set of interviews, all 37 agreed to an interview at the eight week timeframe. Thirty-two interviews were conducted at the eight week timeframe. Five students dropped out prior to the second interview – three undeclared students (Jimmy, Riley, and Ashley) and two aviation students (George and Dean). Again, a follow-up message was sent to these five students. A lack of response

from the students signaled that they were no longer interested in participating in the study. Of the 32 students interviewed at eight weeks, they all agreed to participate in the final interview at the 13 week timeframe.

At 13 weeks, 29 interviews were conducted with 11 undeclared and 18 aviation students. Of those who dropped from the study at this point, one was undeclared (Kerquernie) and two were aviation students (Jim and Mike T.). One attempt was made through email or text message to reach these students to invite them to participate. No response from the students signaled that they were no longer interested in participating in the final interview.

When students dropped from the study throughout the semester, an email message was sent as an invitation to participate in subsequent interviews since scheduling a follow-up interview at the conclusion of a prior interview was not possible. Of the students who chose not to participate at the three interview points, none of them returned email messages to re-enter the study.

The goal was to have at least 15 undeclared and 15 aviation students as participants in the initial interview stage, with the anticipation through attrition that there would be between 8-10 in each of the focused groups by the thirteenth week interview. Based on the high interest to participate in the study from the beginning, participation held strong throughout the semester, and more than the appropriate number of student interviews occurred to obtain adequate data to support the research outcomes and in staying consistent with the use of a phenomenological methodology. Even though more

students responded to the invitation to participate in the study than was necessary, all responses were considered as active data and used in the analysis.

Participation Incentives

Knowing that incentives would be instrumental to encourage participating in the study, several options were considered which included money, gift cards, and bookstore credit. The gift card option to local merchants and eating establishments was chosen based on feedback obtained from current UND students who indicated their preference for incentives if they were asked to participate in a research study such as this.

At the end of each individual interview process, student names were entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of two \$25.00 gift cards to a local eating establishment or retail merchant. The choice of gift card was purchased based on the student's request. A total of six gift cards were drawn from the student names of those who participated in the interview process. Students who participated in more than one interview had the chance to have their names drawn more than one time.

At the conclusion of the third interview a \$100.00 gift card to an eating establishment or a retail merchant was drawn in addition to the two \$25.00 gift cards for the final interview. The names of students from all of the data collection points were included in the final \$100.00 drawing. Again, students could have had their names in the drawing more than one time based on the number of interviews in which they participated.

Students were notified (through email) of their names being drawn, at which time they were asked of their gift card preference. The gift cards drawn following the first and

second interviews were hand delivered to the recipients at the second and third interview timeframes. The final two \$25.00 and \$100.00 gift cards were mailed to the address provided by the student. All incentives awarded throughout the process were funded by the principal investigator of the study.

Interview Process

The individual interviews were conducted in a public location convenient for the research participants. Individual interview locations ranged from common areas in residence halls to campus coffee shops and academic buildings. The third week interviews began on September 10 and spilled over into the fourth week of the semester, ending on September 20. Week eight interviews began on October 12 and concluded at the end of the ninth week of the semester – October 23. The final 13 week interviews took place between November 16 and November 24, ending right before the Thanksgiving holiday.

At the beginning of each interview, the students were greeted and thanked for participating in the research project. A copy of the consent form was provided prior to the first interview and the students were asked to complete the document. The consent form presented to the students described the study along with the components that are necessary to convey in order for an individual to make an informed decision whether or not to participate in a research project. The students then signed the consent form signaling agreement to participate in the interview process. The pseudonyms chosen by the students were used throughout the study in place of the real name of each participant. The students were addressed by their pseudonym at the beginning of each interview.

It was anticipated that each individual interview would last approximately 30 minutes. When conducted, the interviews ranged in length from about 10 to almost 60 minutes. The interviews were audio-taped using an electronic recorder and transcribed verbatim by the principal investigator of the study. Written notes were also taken during the individual interviews to assist when transcribing the audio tapes and in order to keep accurate records throughout the study. No personal descriptions were used on the audio recordings to identify those interviewed, only the pseudonym chosen by the student. The written notes contained the student's real name, pseudonym, date and time of the interview, as well as interview location. This amount of detail was helpful to keep organized and maintain an accurate account of the interviews conducted.

At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were again thanked and invited to participate in the next interview at the subsequent timeframe. A sign-up sheet was provided to the students to indicate their interest in participating in a follow-up interview by documenting their name, phone number, email address, and preferred interview location. Upon obtaining contact information following each interview, the subject and principal investigator ended their time together.

Data Confidentiality

The audio recorded interviews, written notes taken during the interview process, the verbatim transcriptions, as well as the consent forms completed by each research participant will be kept in the home of the principal investigator for three years following the study. Once the study is complete and the three years have lapsed, the data and corresponding documents will be destroyed. Quotes from the individual interviews, used

in the final manuscript, do not include identifying information to maintain respondent confidentiality ensuring anonymity to the data collected and providing protection to those who participated in the study.

Data Sources and Collection Processes

Data collected were from individual interviews conducted with the research participants. In addition to the interview questions, student profile information was obtained from the Office of Institutional Research to gather demographic data to further define the populations studied in comparison to the larger general UND populations of aviation and undeclared students.

The questions that were used in the interview processes were framed based on the research conducted by Baxter Magolda (2007, 2008) in her work to assess self-reflection and meaning-making. Broad open questions which asked participants to describe and reflect upon their experiences, identify factors that influenced the experiences, and examine how the learner was affected were developed specifically for this study.

Interview Questions

Individual interviews conducted at the three time periods within the semester, were used as the primary means in which to gather insight into student experiences. The questions created for this study asked students to think about their lived experiences as they made meaning of those experiences at three points in the fall semester. Current undergraduate students, at the University of North Dakota, were involved in the creation of the interview questions. The insight from those who have already experienced their

freshman year, provided assistance in the framing of the questions to which the entering students were asked to respond in the individual interview process. These current undergraduates who assisted in the initial brainstorming of the types of questions that would be asked, represented upperclass students at UND. These individuals were chosen from a group of student leaders who were available and accessible to the principal investigator based on their employment as a Summer Orientation Leader. The supervisor of these students was approached by the principal investigator and asked if they could assist in the initial construction of topics which ultimately helped shape the questions that were used in the study. The brainstorming session that took place occurred on one occasion prior to the work day for the Summer Orientation Leaders.

The questions were designed based on the common experiences students faced at the identified trigger points in the first semester of college. The grouping of questions focused on the experiences as a student moved in, through, and out of these timeframes. The participants were prompted at each of the three data collection points to answer the series of questions based on their experiences at that timeframe. The individual interview process allowed students the opportunity to express (in their own words), their thoughts based on their unique situations as they were lived, understood, and experienced.

At the three week timeframe, as the students moved into the semester, the individual interviews prompted the participants to share their university experiences at that point in the fall semester. The respondents were asked to think about their first few weeks of the fall semester and their experiences as a college student. The questions used during the third week interview were as follows:

1. What did you expect college to be like?
2. Tell me about your UND experiences and whether or not they have been what you expected them to be.
3. Tell me about the people you have met at UND. Who are they? How have you gotten to know them?
4. Tell me about the interactions you have had with the people you have met at UND.
5. Let's talk about your family and your connections to home. Tell me about those connections.
6. Describe what it's been like as you establish new connections with people at UND.
7. Tell me about the classes you are taking. What has been your first impression of your classes?
8. What did you expect college classes to be like?
9. Tell me about whether your classes have been what you expected them to be like.
10. What one to two things have you learned in the first few weeks that would have been helpful to have known even before you started college?
11. Overall, what has your transition to college and your experiences at UND been like so far?

At the eight week time frame, the questions asked of the participants provided an opportunity for the students to share their experiences as they moved through the fall semester. The students were again asked to talk about their experiences at the university

as they reached the mid-point of the term. They were asked to think about and make meaning of their lived experiences based on the following questions:

1. What were your expectations of college at this point in the semester?
2. How have your expectations met your real experiences?
3. Describe your experiences in your classes. How do you know how you are doing academically? What are academic expectations like at this point in the semester?
4. Describe your social experiences. How have you gotten involved in college?
5. Describe how you are managing the academic and social aspects of college?
6. Describe your experiences with people you have met at UND. Describe your relationships with the people you have gotten to know.
7. What challenges are you experiencing at this point in the semester? Academic challenges. Social challenges.
8. What changes have you made based on your experiences within the first eight weeks of the semester?
9. Overall, describe your experiences at this point (eight weeks) in the semester.

The final series of questions were prompted at 13 weeks, to examine how students moved out of their first semester. The students were asked to think about their college experiences as the semester drew to a close. The questions asked at the 13 week timeframe were as follows:

1. What did you think college would be like at this point in the semester?
2. How have your expectations met your real experiences?

3. When you think about your first semester, what have you enjoyed about college?
Academic. Social.
4. What are some challenges you are experiencing at this point in the semester (13 weeks)? Academic. Social.
5. Describe your relationships with the people you have gotten to know at UND.
6. Describe your relationships with your family and friends from home.
7. Talk about what it feels like to be getting to the end of your first semester in college.
8. Describe what changes you have made or experienced. Personal. Academic.
9. Now that you are ending your first semester and have experienced college, what advice would you give a new entering freshman student?
10. What would have helped to make your experiences and your transition to college even better?
11. What are your academic plans for next semester? In your circle of friends, what are their academic plans for next semester?
12. Describe how you are preparing for final exams and wrapping up the end of the semester.
13. Looking back over the semester, describe your UND experiences and your transition to college.

Through the responses to these questions, an attempt was made to gain an understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of freshman students throughout their first semester of enrollment within the university environment. In addition to the

responses to the questions used in the interview process, the student profile data from the Office of Institutional Research provided even more context to the information collected. The responses to the questions at each data collection point, the student profile information, and any other data gathered in the interview process were the basis from which an analysis was made.

Data Analysis

The technique used to explore the data collected followed the process of thematic analysis. Once the information was gathered, and the raw data were transcribed and prepared, the analysis steps began. The critical first step in the analysis stage of the study was to thoroughly read all the data collected. After the information was read through multiple times, the process began to reduce the data by identifying significant statements – the chunking of the data into smaller, more manageable parts without losing the meaning of what was provided by the participants (Creswell, 2014). From the significant statements, patterns in the data were identified and codes were attached to the emerging concepts (Roulston, 2010). The codes that were chosen further defined the significant statements.

From the coding stage, categories were identified to capture an interpretation or meaning of the codes. Through the categories, patterns signaled how often items within the data occurred, and provided a means to organize the codes to better understand and interpret the information (Roulston, 2010). The codes were then arranged within the categories to move to the next stage in the analysis – identification of themes (Creswell, 2014; Roulston, 2010).

During the stage in which themes were identified, it was important to consider relationships between the data. Based on the earlier coding process and arranging the data into categories, relationships emerged to signal how categories began to relate to one another. Once established, the themes lead to the last step in examining the data – the final assertions; an argument of what was happening in the data (Roulston, 2010). Starting with the raw data, moving to the codes, then the categories, themes, and finally the assertions, the process provided an opportunity to make meaning of the data and signal what was occurring out of the information collected.

Based on the interview question that asked students to talk about their connections back home with family and friends at the three week timeframe, responses were examined using the thematic analysis process. The following data emerged at the various stages of analysis as an example of the process. The example is based on the aviation student population studied.

The following are examples of significant statements that emerged through the analysis of the data.

- Have become closer to parents being further away from family.
- It's not a challenge to stay connected because of technology.
- As normal as ever.

After the significant statements were gathered in this example, the following codes were generated.

- Support from back home.
- Phone calls, text, and social media.

- Connections throughout week.

Next, categories were assigned to interpret and make meaning of the data. In this example, connections to family and friends were used to categorize the data. The next step began the process of recognizing relationships between the data. The following themes emerged.

- Connections to family and friends are strong and provide support to aviation students from afar.
- Connections to family and friends are not difficult with various forms of technology, but different than in person.
- Connections throughout the week help ease the separation from home.

Based on the themes, a final assertion was made. The assertion attached to this set of data obtained at the third week interview timeframe was that aviation students make connections to family and friends through technology to ease the separation from home.

To further define the thematic analysis process, all data obtained from the 37 interviews conducted at the three week timeframe were analyzed as described in the example. From each interview, which was transcribed verbatim, significant statements were identified, followed by the assigning of codes, categories, themes, and finally the determination of assertions.

The eight and 13 week interviews were analyzed similarly. One difference was that a random sample of the interviews was chosen to represent one third of the data at each collection point – eight and 13 weeks. The data from the randomly selected interviews at these two timeframes were analyzed using the thematic analysis process.

The remaining data at these two timeframes were scanned to look for the categories and themes found in the more in-depth analysis of the interviews selected from the random sample. Appendices C through H provides documentation from the student populations at each interview timeframe detailing the process involved from the identification of codes, categories, themes, and assertions. All of the data analyzed at each of the three collection points was used as the basis for determining the results and discussion.

Trustworthiness

As in any qualitative study, trustworthiness of the data can be measured through the analytic process (member checking), data generation (verbatim transcriptions), and the final presentation of the data (an audit trail) (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Each of these steps was important and provided a means to give the research conducted trustworthiness based on the data collected and the analysis of the findings.

When interviews were conducted, (generating the research data) verbatim transcriptions provided an accurate account of the information shared by the participants in the study. Care was taken to accurately audio record the conversations with the participants and transcribe their words exactly as recorded. In addition to the recordings, written notes assisted in capturing the non-verbal references of the study participants. These written notes were used to help shape the transcriptions based on information that could not be obtained from the audio tape.

Respondent validation, also referred to as member checking, provided a means to verify that the data collected were an accurate account of the participant responses to the interview questions (Maxwell, 2013). Member checking was incorporated into the

validation process to reinforce the reliability of the data by providing participants with a copy of their own transcribed interview(s) to verify their responses to the questions asked. The interview(s) were sent to the students through email to the account they provided when they agreed to participate in the study. The participants were given an opportunity to respond to the principal investigator with any feedback or comments based on the data collected from their own individual interview(s). There was no response from any of the students requesting corrections to the transcribed interview(s).

The final component that was embedded into the trustworthiness check, was the creation of an audit trail, which allows others to track the data throughout the research study process. The interviews, transcriptions, and the multiple steps involved in the data analysis provided a means to document the stages which allows others an opportunity to follow how the final assertions were determined. Interviews, audio recordings, transcribed notes, and the data analysis process provides the path for the audit trail to be created in this study. Appendices C through H provides an audit trail for the data generated from the individual interviews conducted for the study. To further verify the trustworthiness of the data, a colleague of the principal investigator agreed to take the information through the audit trail process to affirm all steps were conducted appropriately. The individual was able to follow the path from the establishment of the codes and categories, could identify with the themes that emerged, as well as recognize the final assertions from the data.

Researcher Bias

In all of the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness in the research findings of any study, it is essential to consider how the researcher can influence the data collected and the process involved while collecting the data. Despite the fact that qualitative research focuses on the subject matter of the study and the knowledge gained from the process, “qualitative research inevitably includes and expresses the orientation, methods, values, traditions, and personal qualities of the researcher” (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 84). The researcher inherently becomes a tool in the research process, thus has the propensity to sway or bias the steps of the study. This particular research study is of interest to me because of the employment responsibilities I have at the institution in which the data are collected. Everyday, I am faced with issues and situations that students face as they try to navigate the collegiate environment. I believe successful students make connections with people at the institution, enjoy their academic pursuits, and get involved in college.

Prior to the beginning of the study, I anticipated I would find that students experience struggles with time management, have difficulty balancing their social life with the academic expectations, encounter challenges as they separate from their family and friends from back home, and wrestle with drugs and alcohol. Despite the current interactions I have with students and my assumptions going into the study, I was interested in understanding more fully the experiences of the freshman population as they transition into college and make meaning of their new life and environment. Anecdotes are helpful, but the empirical data collected in this study provided a means to identify true

experiences as they were lived and understood by the freshman students who were studied.

It is through the data collected in this the study that I gained insight into the lived experiences of the freshman population. This knowledge obtained through the exploration was used to offer recommendations to suggest the creation of programs and services to potentially assist students in the future as they navigate their first semester college experiences. As additional emphasis is placed on persistence, retention, and graduation in a timely manner, it has become increasingly more critical to provide students with opportunities, strategies, and experiences targeted toward successful academic completion. The results of this study offer suggested areas in which programs and services can be developed to further enhance student success. By acknowledging researcher reflexivity and incorporating the validity checks throughout the research study, my persuasion and influence within the process was lessened.

Limitations

Limitations to a study are those factors that are challenging and often difficult to control. An obvious limitation in this study is that the research occurred in a natural setting, making it more difficult to replicate the exact study in the future. My own researcher bias should be considered as a limitation to this study. It can be challenging to separate my general and professional knowledge and the influence that knowledge could have had on the study conducted. Not wanting to restrict the students who were eligible to participate in the study, an additional limitation was that some students had already earned college credit while in high school. Recognizing this, those included to participate

were freshman students, as defined upon admission, (University of North Dakota Academic Catalog, 2014-15a) at the University of North Dakota, who were enrolled in the undeclared and aviation focused sections of an introduction to university life course. This leads to another limitation; the sample of students who selected to participate in the study. It can be speculated that students who selected to participate in this study felt comfortable with their new environment, are outgoing individuals, and more inclined to volunteer. In addition, it is important to note that the lived experiences of those students who chose to enroll in introduction to university life may have been influenced by the course content and material presented in the class throughout the semester.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the exclusionary or inclusionary decisions that are made by the principal investigator throughout the design and execution of the study. An evident delimitation of this study was the decision to focus on the population or student sample which included undeclared and aviation freshman students at one four-year, public research institution. In addition to the choice of participants, the choice of questions becomes a delimitation. It was ultimately determined by me, what questions would be asked to begin to gain insight into the lived experiences of the freshman student population. Questions were not the exact same at each data collection point; however, similar types of questions were asked to determine how the students were moving through the semester based on their experiences with topics such as academics, relationships, and involvement.

Themes in the Data

The data collected through the interview process as outlined in Appendices C through H signaled five overarching themes that carried throughout the semester. The themes that emerged were based on academic experiences, relationships and involvement with others in their new environment, relationships with family and friends from home, time management, and adjustments to developing their own personal independence. The interviews conducted at each of the timeframes captured the students' experiences and how they made meaning of their lives to support the themes that emerged.

Academic Experiences

From the beginning of the semester through the last interview at 13 weeks, the students expressed that they were challenged by the academic experiences at a college level. Overall, they did not feel that they eased into the academic expectations of college, but that the challenges began soon after the semester started. The amount of outside work required of the students was surprising and often overwhelming. The students preferred smaller classes which provided one-on-one opportunities for engagement and hands on interaction within the classroom and with the course content as opposed to larger lecture environments. As the semester progressed, the students reported that courses were becoming even more challenging, requiring additional focus, motivation, and attention to developing stronger study habits as well as using campus resources to meet the academic expectations. By the end of the semester, the students recognized that motivation and focus were key factors and settling into a routine was necessary in achieving academic success.

New Relationships and Involvement with Others

Another theme that surfaced throughout the data collection process was an emphasis on the new relationships that were formed with others on campus and the opportunities that those connections provided. The students stated that they met many people early in the semester that they considered acquaintances; stronger relationships did not form until later in the term when smaller friend groups solidified. Intentional residence halls connections, interactions within the classroom environment, athletic experiences, along with involvement in clubs and organizations were important factors in the lives of the freshman students as they met new people and got involved. Not only did the students speak of the relationships they formed with other students, they also commented on the importance of relationships with faculty in their overall connection to college. Students formed these relationships with faculty members through interactions in and out-of-the classroom.

Relationships with Family and Friends from Home

Technology and social media were identified as the lifeline that kept relationships with family and friends from home strong throughout the semester for the new freshman students. At the beginning of the semester, the students did not report a feeling of separation from family and friends from home. The use of social media and technology assisted in easing their separation. As the semester progressed, more comments were shared about being away from home and the challenges they were experiencing with their separation from family and friends. By the end of the semester, technology and social media were still important connectors between the freshmen and their family and friends

from home. At this point in the term, the students were ready to return home and see their family and friends again. This was especially true for those students who had not yet gone home during the semester.

Management of Time

From the beginning of the semester, the students expressed how difficult it was to manage their time. Balancing their academic and social experiences was a challenge from the first interview timeframe all the way through the 13 weeks. Even though they recognized the need to focus on their academic expectations above their social life, they were having difficulty balancing their time. The lack of structure and amount of time available as a college student were challenges that were difficult to manage for the freshman students.

Personal Independence

Another theme that emerged focused on gaining personal independence as the semester progressed. Being away from home and on-their-own helped to establish feelings of personal independence for the freshman students. They expressed the importance of taking responsibility for themselves and their own decision making. Though difficult at first, the students identified their experiences within the semester as examples of ways in which they had grown independently and learned to make decisions on-their-own.

These five themes, as well as a glimpse into their overall transitional experience, are outlined in more detail through the quotes that emerged from the student interviews conducted within this research study. The data collected formed the identification of the

themes as a means to understand the lived experiences of the freshman population and the ways in which they made meaning of their lives within the fall semester.

Summary

There is much to be gained from the exploration of the transitional experiences of freshman students within their first semester at the college level. This study provided insight into the lives of the freshman population and the transitional experiences they faced as they moved in, through, and out of their first semester of college. Captured through their own voices, the information gathered allowed for a stronger understanding of this population leading to recommendations from which programs and services could be created. In addition, the results of the study provided evidence to reinforce existing student opportunities to further enhance an environment on college campuses to foster success and persistence toward graduation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As students graduate from high school and enter the post-secondary educational environment, some are prepared for the experiences while others struggle through their first semester of enrollment as they attempt to make meaning of their life situations. Why do some undergraduate students enter, persist, and successfully move through the educational system, while others lose their direction and leave college prior to achieving their educational goals? The questions asked within this study examined the lived experiences of freshman students as they described and made meaning of their transitions through their first semester of college.

The data collected from the individual interviews of students enrolled in the undeclared and aviation focused sections of an introduction to university life course at the University of North Dakota provided insight into the lived experiences of these populations as they transitioned through their first semester of college. What emerged in the data were that academic experiences, time management and personal independence, as well as relationships and involvement with others were influential in how students navigated through and made meaning of their first semester of their freshman year in college.

The data are presented by the five themes with an overview of each including a table to depict the students' experiences throughout the semester. Within each theme, the

student populations are acknowledged either separately or in some cases together to recognize similarities in their experiences at a given point in the semester. Within each of the themes, the aviation student quotes are presented first followed by the undeclared population. In addition, each grouping of quotes within the themes starts with week three, moves to week eight, and ends with week 13. Quotes are provided to express the students' voices within each of the themes. The student's pseudonym was used to identify the individual from which the quote was derived and is labeled accordingly. A brief summary is provided for each population at the interview timeframes to capture the individual experiences based on the group. The themes are not presented in order of importance, only as a representation of key data elements that emerged through the interviews conducted.

Themes in the Data

Five themes emerged from the data collected in the fall 2015 semester while exploring the lived experiences of freshman students as they transitioned through their first term of enrollment and made meaning of their college experiences. The themes identified from the data focused on academic experiences, new relationships and involvement with others, relationships with family and friends from home, time management, and personal independence. Each theme is illustrated based on the quotes generated from the participants in the study as obtained through individual interviews that took place at the three timeframes within the semester.

Academic Experiences

When asked about their classroom experiences and the types of courses they were taking, the students in the study identified the importance of academics in shaping their lives. The first theme explores the academic experiences of the students throughout the fall semester and the changes in the expectations that took place as the semester progressed. Table 4 provides a summary of the academic experiences as described by the study participants at the three, eight, and 13 week timeframes. The table illustrates the unique aviation student experiences, undeclared student experiences, and the experiences that were common among both groups. An empty block in the table represents no common experiences were found between both student groups.

Table 4. Freshman Academic Experiences Throughout the Fall 2015 Semester.

| Academic Experiences Theme Summary | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | Week Three | Week Eight | Week Thirteen |
| Aviation Student Experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Faster paced than high school ➤ More independent learning ➤ Preferred smaller hands-on classes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Major courses were becoming more demanding ➤ More effort and motivation required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Realized a need to change study habits for next semester ➤ Overall satisfied with academic achievements |
| Undeclared Student Experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Felt academic experiences were challenging ➤ Provided opportunities to explore major options | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Academic workload and professor expectations more difficult ➤ Study habits improved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Settled into a routine which helped to adjust to academic expectations |
| Similar Experiences for Both Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More out-of-class work required than anticipated | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Motivation and focus were necessary for academic success |

Responses to questions that pertained to the academic experiences of the two student populations as they moved in, through, and out of their first semester of college depicted feelings of challenge, enhanced workload, the need to establish a routine, and

the importance of focus and staying academically motivated. The following quotes further define the lived academic experiences of the freshman students throughout the fall 2015 semester.

Faster paced: Aviation students at three weeks. Academic experiences for the aviation students at three weeks were faster paced than high school, with more independent learning, and out-of-class work required. The aviation students had this to share about the pace of their college academic experiences and the expectations placed upon them.

“I’ve had to study a lot more in a week than I would have in probably a month in high school. So faster paced, really thrown in on the first day.” – Jessie

“You’re kind of thrown into it and not told exactly what to do. It kind of caught me off guard a little bit in the beginning. It’s more exploring it on your own. With the aviation, you have to hit the ground running.” – Matthew

“You have to do more stuff on your own. There’s a reason why they call them a professor instead of a teacher, because they guide you instead of teach you.” – John

These statements clearly indicate that aviation students were not ready for the required academic expectations at the beginning of the semester. The level of academic expectation was something that these students were not yet prepared to address.

In addition to the faced paced academic expectations, at three weeks, aviation students voiced their preference of hands-on learning environments. These environments

created opportunities for students to engage with the class as well as enhanced their interest in academic learning.

“I don’t mind waking up for my 8 A.M. class every day, just because my instructor makes it fun. We’re making paper airplanes.” – Mike T.

“I’m loving my intro to air traffic control class. I like controlling the planes and telling them where to go.” – Earl

“We get to start on our major pretty early compared to other majors. The aviation classes at least are not boring, that’s why I came here. Those are fun.” – Jon

Creating hands-on-learning environments in which students are able to apply their academic knowledge were recognized by the aviation students as being beneficial to their educational experiences. In addition, learning in such a way provided the aviation students with an opportunity to engage with the material and enjoy their academic experiences as they focused on their program of study.

Opportunities to explore: Undeclared students at three weeks. The undeclared students, at three weeks, felt their academic experiences were challenging, required more out-of-classroom work than anticipated, and provided opportunities to explore options for possible major declaration. The undeclared students had this to say about what they perceived as challenging academic experiences at three weeks.

“You have to study a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot.” – Marie

“It’s a lot more outside of class work that you process on your own. You are never done. You always have stuff to do.” – Lynn

The college academic expectations were more than what the undeclared students were used to in high school, thus they entered the institution underprepared for the challenges they would experience. As these students stated, the expectations were somewhat overwhelming and changed the way in which they recognized and approached the academic challenges.

In addition to their academic challenges, the undeclared students identified their coursework as a means to explore options for future major declaration. Through the courses in which they were enrolled, the undeclared students considered these classes valuable in helping them establish future academic direction.

“Right now I’m undeclared. I don’t know what I want to do with my life, so I’m taking one class to try and help me figure it out hopefully; just to see what direction I might want to go.” – Sandy

“My university life class is definitely going to help me figure out what I want to do with my education.” – Joe

Often considered a vulnerable population and without direction, these undeclared students embraced the opportunity to explore their options and take courses to help them find an academic career path. They didn’t feel anxious or concerned about their undeclared status; however, recognized the need to explore their options to help in the decision making process.

Higher out-of-class expectations: Both groups at three weeks. As the semester began, students in both of the populations recognized the out-of-class expectations were necessary to stay academically focused. Different from high school, the amount of time

spent on academic activities beyond the classroom was more than what these students anticipated.

“Classes have very high expectations. And every class requires study time out of class.” – Hailey

“There’s a lot more work outside of class that you have to do and learn on your own because you don’t have classes that much during the week.” – Brian

Out-of-class expectations based on new class structures were noted as academic challenges for the freshman students. Not only did the students recognize the need to devote study time out of class to prepare for the academic expectations, the new class structure created challenges to negotiate as a new freshman.

More demanding: Aviation students at eight weeks. The aviation students reported that their major was becoming increasingly more demanding, and required more effort and motivation to stay ahead of the expectations to meet the academic challenges. The following quotes address the academic challenges aviation students were facing at the eight week interview timeframe.

“[Classes are] more difficult and more involved than the beginning. It’s just a lot of work; a lot more studying.” – Jon

“I figured that classes would be getting harder and that’s what’s been happening. They’ve definitely stepped up their game, which has made me step up mine for sure.” – Jessie

“You start getting into more material every week, and some classes definitely expect you to be over the high school phase.” – Allen

By mid-semester, the academic lives of the aviation students were becoming increasingly more challenging. Higher academic expectations required a more intentional focus in order to meet the growing challenges.

Expectations more difficult: Undeclared students at eight weeks. The undeclared students reported that their academic workload as well as professor expectations had gotten more difficult; however, improved study habits helped them to stay focused and adjust. This is what the undeclared students in the study had to say about their academic life at eight weeks into the semester.

“It’s expected that I’m putting in several hours for each class, whether it’s homework, studying, or just reviewing the lesson from the day.” – Gunner

“Your professors don’t remind you of things. They expect you to know what’s due by checking [student information system] or your emails constantly to make sure you’re not forgetting anything.” – Nina

Undeclared students recognized the need to make adjustments to their study habits in order to meet the academic expectations they were experiencing. In addition, the use of campus resources became a necessity to stay informed of the academic expectations.

Study habits needed to change: Aviation students at 13 weeks. The aviation students had realized by this time in the semester that motivation and focus were necessary for academic success. Their academic challenges and the expectations placed on them had altered their first semester outcomes and many of them realized that adjustments needed to be made for the next semester. At this time in the semester, the

aviation students had adjusted to their major courses and were overall satisfied with their academic achievements. The aviation students in the study had this to say about their academic experiences at 13 weeks into the fall semester.

“This is probably the first time in my life that I’m enjoying learning. Now I’m interested, and I’m challenged by the material. It’s making learning fun now, whereas before it was just something I had to do.” – Dan

“It seems like there’s way more papers and tests that are just more frequent. I am making sure that I’m getting all that I can out of what they are; not just doing the assignment just to do the assignment, but like trying to realize the purpose of it.”
– Paul

The aviation students recognized that academic success required hard work and dedication, but at this point in the semester they were embracing the challenges, and appreciated the learning that was taking place. Their academic experiences lead to an increased interest and joy of learning. They were beginning to understand the purpose to their academic experiences.

Settled into a routine: Undeclared students at 13 weeks. The undeclared students recognized at 13 weeks that they needed to stay focused to address the academic expectations. According to the undeclared students, academic challenges could be overcome once they had settled into a routine, and were focused more on study habits and their overall academic progress and performance. The following quotes identify the academic lives of the undeclared population at 13 weeks into the semester.

“Starting to get the hang of things. Starting to get the feel for college and how to make the adjustments. I [now] know what teachers expect.” – Brian

“Study habits have changed. Homework and studying are more important than going out most of the time. If you put it off and end up getting a bad grade on the test or the assignment that you didn’t do, it will hurt you.” – Marie

By the thirteenth week of the semester, the undeclared students had established routines and knew what the academic expectations were. They recognized the importance of studying and had made adjustments to their study habits in order to meet the academic expectations.

Academic Experiences Summary

Right from the beginning of the term, the students in the study voiced that they were challenged and stretched by their collegiate academic experiences. A faster paced academic environment than high school added to the challenges they experienced. The amount of work outside the classroom was also something that was new to these students. Preference was given to hands-on courses that engaged them in their learning. Developing strong study habits, as well as using campus resources and establishing a routine were necessary to excel academically. Throughout the semester, both groups realized that focus and motivation were essential to their overall academic success and progressively adjusted to the increased expectations throughout the semester.

New Relationships and Involvement with Others

The second theme evolved through questions about getting to know others on campus, and explored new relationships that were established over the fall semester and

involvement with others as influences on the freshman students' experiences. The questions throughout the study that asked the students to talk about their experiences with others and the types of activities they participated in within these interactions formed the basis for recognizing that new relationships and involvement opportunities helped to shape their lives.

Table 5 provides a summary of how new relationships and involvement with others provided support to the freshman students in the transition process. As outlined in the table, the experiences with others changed as the semester progressed – beginning with surface interactions with many acquaintances and moving to deeper connections with select individuals by the thirteenth week. The table illustrates the unique aviation student experiences, undeclared student experiences, and the experiences that were common among both groups at week three, eight, and 13. An empty block in the table indicates that unique experiences for the student groups were not evident.

Table 5. New Relationships and Involvement with Others Throughout the Fall 2015 Semester.

| New Relationships and Involvement Theme Summary | | | |
|--|--|--|----------------------|
| | Week Three | Week Eight | Week Thirteen |
| Aviation Student Experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Valued relationships and connections based on common interests ➤ Aviation living-learning community helped form connections ➤ Upper-class connections were important | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Residence hall living created opportunities to form bonds ➤ Friend groups had formed | |
| Undeclared Student Experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Connections with others through classroom experiences ➤ Residence hall living created | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ New relationships influenced experiences ➤ Relationships formed with select individuals | |

Table 5. cont.

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> opportunities to connect ➤ Campus activities important for creating relationships | | |
| Similar Experiences for Both Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenging to establish relationships at the beginning of the semester ➤ Relationships with faculty were important | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Campus involvement and participation in clubs and organizations were important to relationship building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deeper relationships formed with smaller groups of people ➤ Connections with others and new relationships had solidified by this time |

Common interests: Aviation students at three weeks. Though challenging to establish at first, at three weeks, the aviation students valued the relationships and connections that were formed with others through common academic and social interests through residence hall living. The following quotes from the aviation students who participated in the study focused initially on similar interests and passions lead the students to form connections with one another.

“Everybody’s trying to make friends. The first couple of days was a little weird trying to meet people and make friends. I’ve met a lot of people in my dorm through sports, video games, and hobbies that we have in common.” – George

“Everyone on the aviation community share the same passions. We’re all there for each other. You’re never truly lonely, because there’s always going to be somebody around.” – Matthew

“I’m in the hall which is all aviation students, so it’s all people who take the same classes together. We do stuff on the weekends, study, push each other when we’re

slacking off. I've met a lot of cool people, and they're people I share a passion with, so it's been fun." – Dean

For the aviation students, focus around similar interests and passions was instrumental in the connections they formed and the new relationships they established with others on campus. The aviation living-learning community structure in the residence halls helped to further create an environment in which connections were possible based on similar academic and social interests. Intentionally designated space in the residence halls for students with particular majors, programs and activities can be beneficial for these students to focus on the interests and passions they naturally share. Research over the years on the positive impact living-learning community environments can have on student success and persistence (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Grills, Fingerhut, Thadani, & Machon, 2012; Kuh, 2008; Pike, 1999; Pike, Schroeder, & Berry, 1997; Stassen, 2003; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010; Wilson, Bjerke, & Martin, 2015) was further reinforced through the experiences of the students in this study.

At three weeks, the aviation students made connections and formed relationships with upper-class students who were influential in their transition into the campus community. The aviation freshmen recognized the value of these connections with others who had already experienced college, and from whom they could learn.

"It's nice to meet people who have the same major as me that are a year or two ahead of me to ask them questions. Like I have a guy in my hall who will come over and help me out. It's nice to know people." – Jim

“The freshmen are all in the same boat I am – really as clueless. Like we all don’t know at the same time, but there’s upperclassmen in the residence hall who’ve been here a while, so they helped big time.” – Hailey

These quotes are examples the aviation students shared to illustrate how connections with upper-class students can influence their experiences and provide support and guidance in navigating their new environment. The connections between freshmen and upper-class students are influential in creating an environment in which the new students feel more comfortable and appreciative of the insight gained from others who had already lived through experiences they were now just encountering.

Connections through activities: Undeclared students at three weeks. At the beginning of the semester, the undeclared students had made connections with others through classroom experiences, residence hall living, activities and involvement opportunities, and similar interests they shared with one another. Despite the opportunities, those connections were difficult at first for the undeclared students. The quotes that follow depict the undeclared students’ experiences in the residence halls, through the classroom, and in various activities as they developed relationships and became involved in college. The residence halls were recognized by the undeclared students as a natural place to meet people as voiced through the following student experiences.

“We just hang out in the lounge instead of hiding in our dorm rooms. I made one of my friends because she wanted to go to [residence hall dining center] and get

To Go, and I'm like, 'I'm hungry, I'll go' and then I ended up making a really good friend." – Sandy

In addition to the residence hall environment as a place where connections were made, the undeclared students spoke about the connections they had made through activities and involvement with others.

"The people I've met here are great. We connect on any level, just to go get food or homework, or go play volleyball or ping pong. We can do anything and have fun. The connections are great." – Marie

Classroom interactions were identified as a means to make connections and form relationships with others. The classroom environment served as the vehicle in which students interacted and relationships formed. This is what the undeclared students had to say about their classroom experiences.

"Interactions with people are mostly in class, but sometimes I will see them out of class. It is really fun to see what they're like outside of class when we're not talking about academic things." – Katy

"Everybody's open to making new friends. I've gotten to know people from my classes. We do our homework together and just hang out." – Jimmy

"One hour you could be at one corner of the class and at the other end of the hour you could be at the other end. The chairs are really mobile, so when the teacher says get into groups, you're ready to go. It really helps with communication." – Curtis

For the undeclared population at three weeks, new relationships and involvement with others were shaped by their experiences in the residence halls, in the classroom, and through activities that brought them together. These examples provide evidence of the power of classroom interactions in aiding in their successful transition into the college environment.

Awkward to form: Both groups at three weeks. For both the aviation and undeclared student populations, despite the structures in place, and intentional living communities created, getting to know people at the beginning of the semester was challenging. The following quotes illustrate the challenges the students felt at the beginning of the fall semester.

“I’m still trying to get to know people, whereas back home, my friends were my friends since eighth grade. So, it’s strange having friends that I don’t know everything about.” – Dan

“It’s a little bit harder making friends. In high school you just know everyone already. [In college] it’s a lot of acquaintances, but not a lot of close friends that you actually hang out with outside of class.” – Sam

The quotes signal the importance of providing avenues in which students interact and get to know one another because of the challenges they felt in the relationship making process at the beginning of their first semester of college. Relationship building was not as easy as they thought it was going to be.

Important connections: Relationships with professors both groups at three weeks. For both groups right from the beginning, not only did they focus on the

relationships and involvement they had with other students, they also spoke about their first impression of professors and how important they felt those connections were at three weeks. The following quotes represent the experiences the aviation and undeclared student populations had with their faculty members within their first semester of college that were important to their transition into their freshman year.

“Aviation [course number], I have a great teacher. He’s funny and keeps you involved in the classroom discussion. Everyone in that class is in it for each other. We have a Facebook page that the entire class joined, so if someone needs help on an assignment, another guy comments on it; it helps you out.” – Jim

“I really enjoy my professors. They break it down and make it easier to learn. They want us to know everyone in class so that you can get different opinions and different interpretations.” – Mike T.

“Teachers are pretty good at making you interested in what’s going on. They’re good motivators to go to class.” – Sandy

“I like being able to have my professor know me, or have that connection. And have them know that if I’m not there, they’ll notice.” – Nina

These student experiences identified the importance they felt in their interactions and connections with faculty members. In addition, the students provided examples of learning and engagement techniques the faculty was using, such as technology and open dialogue, which created opportunities that further encouraged connections among the new freshman and faculty members.

Bonds formed: Aviation students at eight weeks. Residence hall living as well as involvement opportunities allowed aviation students to form bonds with those who had similar interests. The aviation students recognized that relationships had changed, and stronger friend groups were forming. The following quotes identify the importance of the residence halls and how getting involved based on interests and similarities can have a positive influence as students formed stronger relationships and connected with one another. This is what the aviation students had to say at the eighth week as an example of how friend groups had begun to solidify.

“At first, I met a lot of people. As time goes on, you kinda start hanging out with a few of them that have the same interests and develop better friends than others.”

– Oliver

“Friend groups are formed now and split up. You tend to hang out with the same group of people, so you study together and find different ways to get involved.” –

Jon

At eight weeks, the aviation students pointed to the variety of involvement opportunities that had begun to shape their relationships and interactions with others. These examples range from formal student organization involvement, to attending activities as a group as a means for the freshmen to form connections and experience college.

“I joined a fraternity, and brotherhood has been awesome.” – Mike T.

“We’ve been going to football games, volleyball games. The first hockey game was absolutely awesome.” – Earl

The quotes emphasize the importance of helping students connect through clubs and organizations as well as offering various activities in which freshman can participate and get involved. As evidenced in these experiences, both formal and informal opportunities highlight the importance of student connections with others, formed through involvement in activities in which they participated together.

Individual connections: Undeclared students at eight weeks. For the undeclared students at eight weeks, their involvement with others on an individual basis as well as in clubs and organizations helped them form relationships. As undeclared students continued to meet people, deeper friendships were beginning to form. The quotes that follow showcase how friend groups had now formed and provided opportunities for stronger connections.

“My friend group has whittled down more. By now you figure out who your favorites are and you kinda make your cliques. They’re not like mean high school cliques, but groups have formed. They are some of the best friends I’ve ever had. They are friends based on hobbies and interests, not social status.” – Sandy

“I’ve made some good friends here that I can go to lunch with and study with. I have different groups for stuff. And now my sorority sisters, I’ve made some good friends with them. I definitely have found a better niche.” – Nina

The undeclared students valued the connections they had made and the relationships that had formed by the middle of the fall semester. Through these connections, strong relationships were established based on choice and common interests.

Relationships solidified: Both groups at 13 weeks. By the end of the semester, the aviation and undeclared students had formed stronger relationships with smaller groups of people whom they had gotten to know well. They had identified those relationships with others that they felt were the group to which they were most connected. The quotes that follow identify their relationships as growing stronger with those they considered close friends.

“I’m friends with a lot of people, but there’s a select few that you get to know better and better over time. Some of my best friend groups kinda formed. I’m starting to develop those friends that I’m gonna know next year and the year after that.” – Mike

“I don’t have as many friends up here, but the friends I do have, I have a stronger friendship with.” – Floyd

“You know who your closest friends are. Now you know where you belong.” – Hailey

“The friends that I’m friends with I’m really really close to. They know my deep dark secrets.” – Sandy

“I feel like I am just as good of friends with them as some of my friends from high school, which I’ve known for 18 years. Your relationships just grow stronger and closer faster.” – Jill

As illustrated through their voices, the aviation and undeclared students had come to appreciate their relationships with a select group of people which had grown deeper

and stronger throughout the semester. It was these deeper relationships that students valued in their transition process and through their involvement with others.

New Relationships and Involvement with Others Summary

Intentional connections between students in the residence halls, classroom environments, and through clubs and organizations provided opportunities for freshmen to meet others and feel involved was an important part of college. These connections with others allowed for interactions with many from which deeper relationships were established. Friend groups formed by mid-semester and continued to strengthen as the term progressed. Relationships with professors were also identified as important influencers in their academic success and the connections that were formed.

Relationships with Family and Friends from Home

This third theme, relationships with family and friends, emerged through questions that asked the students to describe their connections with family and friends from back home, and how the experiences evolved over their first semester of college. Table 6 illustrates the relationships with family and friends from home for the aviation and undeclared populations. The table identifies the unique aviation and undeclared student experiences as well as the common experiences between the two groups. A blank block in the table indicates there were no unique differences for each of the groups; rather the groups shared similar experiences, except at eight weeks where unique experiences defined the student populations.

Table 6. Relationships with Family and Friends Throughout the Fall 2015 Semester.

| Relationships with Family and Friends Theme Summary | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| | Week Three | Week Eight | Week Thirteen |
| Aviation Student | | ➤ More focus on | |

Table 6. cont.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| Experiences | | meeting new people than on their relationships with family and friends from home | |
| Undeclared Student Experiences | | ➤ Struggled with separation from home | |
| Similar Experiences for Both Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Connections strong with family and friends ➤ Technology and social media aided in keeping connections | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong relationships maintained with family and friends from home ➤ Use of technology and social media continued to ease the separation ➤ Ready to go home and see their family and friends again |

Strong connections: Both groups at three weeks. The aviation students as well as the undeclared population stayed connected with family and core friends from home at the three week mark of the semester. In many instances, the connections were described as if they never had left home. Technology and social media aided in keeping those strong connections to ease the separation from home. These interactions for both groups, included connections with family and friends several times a day through text messages, Snapchat, Skype, and Facetime, to phone calls home every Sunday. The following comments express the connections that students kept and intentionally made with family and friends from back home as they moved into their first semester of college.

“I’m still pretty strong with my family. I just talked to my mom for an hour last night. We’re still as normal as ever. I’m just the college kid that moved away.” –

Mike

“There’s a really strong connection [to family and friends back home].

Technology is really helpful. It’s made the transition a lot easier being away from home.” – Dean

“I Snapchat my best friend [from home] all the time. We’re on a 60-day streak of just talking continuously back and forth.” – Sandy

“I’ve Facetimed my mom three or four times a day, just because she’s like ‘oh, what are you doing?’” – Riley

These quotes provide examples of how students managed their separation from family and friends from home. Through their third week experiences, there was not a sense of homesickness or anxiety as the students moved into their first semester, perhaps because of the various forms of technology these students used were seen as normal avenues to stay connected with their family and friends from home.

Focused on meeting new people: Aviation students at eight weeks. The aviation students didn’t focus on their relationships with family and friends from home at this point in the semester. There was more focus on moving away from home and meeting new people. Captured in the following quotes are examples of how aviation students were experiencing their separation from their family and friends from home at the eighth week of the semester and the new connections they were making.

“The people on my floor, we’re kinda like a family. And the fraternity, I consider them my brothers.” – Mike T.

“[Residence hall and floor number] we’re really close on our floor. We’re always together. I think it will be a lifelong thing.” – Kat

These experiences cited by the aviation students emphasized the new connections they were forming with others on campus as opposed to the connections they were maintaining with family and friends from back home. This switch in focus captured the lives of the aviation students as they were experiencing their new environment and coping with their separation from family and friends.

Separation struggles: Undeclared students at eight weeks. The undeclared students struggled with their separation from home as expressed through their lived experiences at eight weeks into the fall semester. The quotes that follow identify the challenges the undeclared students were experiencing being separated from their family and friends from back home.

“Getting more used to being away from home, meeting more people. But it’s still kind of hard sometimes when you know there are things going on at home [that you are missing out on].” – Sam

“I’m starting to miss my friends from back home a little more. Because I wasn’t homesick the first month, I really didn’t think that I would. But it’s gotten a little harder.” – Lynn, undeclared student

The separation from family and friends became a focus once the undeclared population realized they were no longer a part of the everyday lives of those back home. At eight weeks, the undeclared students began to show signs of stress in dealing with the separation from family and friends.

Technology maintains connections: Both groups at 13 weeks. The aviation students as well as the undeclared population had maintained strong relationships with

family and closest friends through the use of social media and technology. Despite the ability to use technology to stay connected, the students reported being ready to go home and see their family and friends again. The following quotes identify how the groups were coping with their separation from home and their anticipation of going home at the end of the semester.

“I don’t have a problem being away from home. My closer friends, we’ll Skype and game together. Catch up and just talk.” – Raamel

“Everyone I’ve talked to who’s older than me was like ‘oh yeah, by Thanksgiving you’ll be ready to go home.’ So late August I was like, ‘ah, sure, I don’t know’, but now I’m definitely ready to go home and see everyone again.” – Jessie

“The distance, it just makes things more fun to connect when we do.” – Joe

Despite the ways in which the students negotiated their connections with family and friends from back home, distance did not seem to be a barrier until the semester progressed and they were looking forward to returning home. The use of technology and social media had positively influenced the connections that students had with their family and friends from home and should not be discounted in easing the separation and maintaining relationships from afar.

Relationships with Family and Friends Summary

The freshman students remained connected to family and friends throughout the semester primarily through the use of technology and social media. At the beginning of the semester, there were more references to how often and the way in which the students maintained those connections. Skype, text messages, Snapchat, Facetime, and phone calls

were cited as the common forms of technology and social media used to communicate and stay connected with family and friends from home. At mid-semester, more emphasis was placed on acclimating to college than being away from family and friends. At 13 weeks, the students once again focused on their connections with family and friends, as well as their anticipation to return home at the end of the fall semester. As depicted through their lived experiences, there was a change from high levels of connection at the beginning of the term, a small dip at mid-term time, with a rebound at the end of the semester as the students began to look forward to returning home.

Management of Time

The fourth theme that emerged throughout the individual interviews was the student’s management of time. Based on the questions that asked the students to identify the challenges in their lives, their responses uncovered the time management difficulties they were experiencing. Table 7 outlines the challenges the students were experiencing at each of the three timeframes within the fall 2015 semester. The table provides an overview of the experiences unique to the two student populations as well as the experiences that were shared by both groups. Empty blocks in the table indicate there were no unique experiences for the groups, only those they had in common.

Table 7. Freshman Management of Time Throughout the Fall 2015 Semester.

| Management of Time Theme Summary | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|----------------------|
| | Week Three | Week Eight | Week Thirteen |
| Aviation Student Experiences | | ➤ Tension existed between academic and social experiences | |
| Undeclared Student Experiences | | ➤ Identified and incorporated ways | |

Table 7. cont.

| | | in which to manage their time | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Similar Experiences for Both Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognized their involvement in managing their own time ➤ Created structure and routine to balance social and academic expectations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognized that there needed to be a balance between academic and social experiences with more focus on academics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continued to have difficulties in establishing a balance between increased academic expectations and wanting to participate in social experiences |

Reliance on self: Both groups at three weeks. Early in the semester, the aviation and undeclared student populations understood the importance of taking responsibility for managing their time, creating structure and a routine, and balancing social and academic expectations. In the following quotes, both student groups recognized how life had changed and that they needed to manage their own time to prepare for their anticipated future adjustments to college.

In the first set of quotes, the students recognized their own involvement in managing their time, and changes they had already made to adjust to their new experiences and challenges.

“There’s a lot, a lot more time management because you actually have to study now.” – Taylor

“My biggest struggle so far is making sure I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing, because it’s so easy to do whatever you want. No one is managing your time except for yourself.” – Nina

At three weeks, students recognized the need to create structure and routine to balance social and academic expectations. The following quotes illustrate the changes students had made early in the semester to address their time management challenges.

“I’ve learned to really set up a schedule and plan out every day. But it definitely took me a week or two into school to figure that out.” – Mike T.

“I’ve taken out things that I used to do in my day that aren’t very important, like Netflix or video games that I don’t really have time for anymore.” – Michael

“It’s a lot less structured [than high school]. I’ve got three hours’ worth of class a day, eat at different times, do homework at different times. I’m really starting to manage my time more between sleep, socializing, and studying.” – Curtis

There was not much of a gap that lapsed at the beginning of the fall semester before both groups of students recognized the need to manage their own time. Not only did they recognize the importance of time management to college success, but they realized their actions had a direct impact on their time management challenges.

Tensions: Aviation students at eight weeks. By the eighth week, the aviation students had begun to focus on balancing academic and social life, but recognized that academics needed to come before social activities. They expressed a tension between both the academic and social aspects of their lives. The following quotes illustrate the tension the aviation students experienced as they were challenged to manage their time and focus on their academic expectations.

“I turn down fun to focus on school. That’s a struggle. I’m trying really hard to manage my time.” – Hailey

“You have to challenge yourself to do it [academics]; the social life is always more popular, but you have to train yourself. You’re here in college. This is what you’re studying for. You paid for this. This is your future.” – Joey

Tensions to choose to focus on academics before social experiences were a challenge that surfaced in the time management quotes that the aviation students expressed. Despite the challenges, it was clear that the aviation students identified the need to focus more on academics than social experiences as they looked toward the future and their lives beyond college.

Techniques: Undeclared students at eight weeks. The undeclared students recognized that there needed to be a balance between academic and social experiences, with more of a focus on academics, and had identified ways in which to manage their time. The following quotes exemplify the time management issues the undeclared students were facing at mid-semester and how they had implemented strategies to adjust to the challenges.

“I live off of sticky notes. I take so many notes all the time, so that helps me stay on track and keep organized to make sure everything’s done before I go out on the weekends.” – Nina

“When I get all my homework done, I reward myself with a little fun.” – Kerquernie

The undeclared students identified strategies they had incorporated into their lives to adjust to the challenges of managing time. Rewards as well as organizational

techniques were strategies that the undeclared students began to implement at mid-semester to address their time management issues.

Struggles: Both groups at eight weeks. Establishing a balance between their academic and social aspects of their lives created challenges to the way in which both student groups managed their time at eight weeks into the semester. The following quotes illustrate how the students were trying to manage their time and find a balance that they recognized was necessary for academic success.

“There’s a certain balance between your social life and studying all the time. You do homework and then when you have time you do other stuff.” – Jim

“I think my priorities are a little messed up right now. I feel like I’m doing a little too much [social] and not enough for school. And school’s the reason why I came here, not the [social].” – Allen

“You really have to budget your time that’s for sure. I kinda try to do my homework first, so that way I don’t have a feeling on my chest. You do have to sacrifice stuff sometimes. But you can have a social life [too].” – Curtis

“You want to hang out with your friends, you also want to get good grades, and you also want to sleep, and you can’t have all of them. It’s hard.” – Sandy

Even at mid-point in the semester, these examples suggest that both the aviation and undeclared student populations were struggling with managing their time in a way that they felt was necessary to achieve academic success. They wanted to balance their academic and social lives, but were struggling to do so.

Difficulty balancing: Both groups at 13 weeks. At the end of the semester, the aviation students and the undeclared population continued to face difficulties in establishing a balance between social experiences and academic expectations based on more demands academically as well as socially. These demands required more time management skills to address their increased academic challenges. The following quotes give examples of the struggles both groups continued to experience as they tried to manage their time as college students.

“Obviously classes are important, and I put that first, but the college experience isn’t just studying. It’s also everything else that you get involved in and learn about.” – Paul

“Time management is one of the bigger things that I’ve had to come to terms with and change. Just recognizing where I have time to spend and where I don’t have time to spend.” – Mike

“Time management is a challenge. I have to be responsible for my own time, which I’m getting better at doing, but there’s been a couple times where I’m like ‘wow, I should have planned this whole thing out better’.” – Gunner

“Time management is still a huge problem for me. Nothing is really structured at all. You are completely on your own schedule.” – Lynn

Struggles with management of time didn’t change much by the end of the semester for either the aviation or undeclared student populations. Both groups continued to battle with the lack of structure in a college environment and the amount of pressure

placed on them to manage and adjust to the expectations required of their time to achieve academic success.

Management of Time Summary

Time management was challenging for both the aviation and undeclared populations from the beginning of the semester through the last interview at 13 weeks of the fall term. At eight weeks, students began to feel some relief and had developed strategies to better manage their time; however, they still expressed how challenging it was to develop time management skills despite the changes they had made. Their growing academic demands throughout the semester, balanced with their social and involvement activities, continued to cause the students to struggle.

Personal Independence

The fifth and final theme that emerged through the analysis of the data gathered throughout the fall semester was that of growth, development, and recognition of personal independence. Table 8 provides an overview of the unique experiences of the aviation students, undeclared students, and those experiences shared by both groups. Right from the beginning the students in the study recognized that their college experiences provided opportunities for gaining personal independence. As the semester progressed, the students began to gain more independence and were enjoying the freedom that college offered. The students went from more dependence on others at the beginning of the semester to a stronger sense of freedom and independence as their fall 2015 experiences came to a close. The blank blocks in the table are indicators that there were

no personal independence experiences unique to the groups identified, nor were there similarities among the groups at eight and 13 weeks.

Table 8. Freshman Personal Independence Throughout the Fall 2015 Semester.

| Personal Independence Theme Summary | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| | Week Three | Week Eight | Week Thirteen |
| Aviation Student Experiences | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Struggled with the demands of independence while enjoying the freedom | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognized that college experiences required independent decision making; a skill developed over time |
| Undeclared Student Experiences | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Had gained more independence, individual growth, and personal development through their college experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enjoyed the freedom and independence of college life and taking responsibility for themselves |
| Similar Experiences for Both Groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recognized the college experience as a time of personal growth and independence ➤ Understood they needed to take responsibility for themselves and their decisions | | |

Time of growth: Both groups at three weeks. As the semester began, the aviation students as well as those who were undeclared recognized the college experience as a time of growth and independence, but understood that they also needed to take responsibility for themselves and their own decisions. They expressed how they were enjoying the personal freedom of college life, away from parental control and oversight. The following quotes illustrate the personal independence the students were experiencing at the beginning of the fall semester.

“You dictate what time you get up, what time you go to bed, what time you study, what other things need to be done. That’s pretty nice actually.” – Matthew

“It’s not on mom or dad anymore. Everything’s on you to do to succeed.” – Jim

“It’s been nice to be on my own. I was home for 12 years. I’m still not alone now, but I was never really on my own before. I kind of enjoy it to be honest.” – Curtis

“Being away from home has been kinda nice. I love my home life, but coming here being able to have my own schedule and go off and do my own things is nice.” – Ashley

With personal independence came a sense of responsibility and accountability for their own decision making and actions. Both groups found the personal independence to be welcoming as they navigated their first weeks of their freshman year.

Independence demands: Aviation students at eight weeks. By mid-semester, the aviation students were struggling with the demands of becoming more independent while enjoying what that freedom meant to them. As evidenced in the following quotes, the aviation students voiced the challenges and opportunities they were facing as they experienced more independence as a college student.

“It’s nice to be in control of so much now. I can go whenever I want to eat, go hang out with friends, study.” – Jessie

“College is all self-motivated. They [faculty] care how well you do, but they’re not gonna tell you how to do it.” – Taylor

At eight weeks, the aviation students had begun to embrace their personal independence, enjoyed the freedom that college offered, and recognized the need to

establish self-motivation. Decision making or lack thereof, was now a part of their lives with limited direction from others.

Growth and development: Undeclared students at eight weeks. The undeclared students reported that they had gained even more independence, growth, and development through their college experiences as the semester progressed. The following quotes are examples of the comments from the undeclared students as they were experiencing how their personal independence was shaping them as an individual.

“My experiences have already changed me as a person for the better, and I feel like they will continue to change me for the better.” – Marie

“It’s [first semester] a good stepping stone for the rest of my experiences in college.” – Kerquernie

“College is definitely a learning experience. It’s been different than what I’ve ever done before. It’s been lots of stress and worrying, but fun and exciting.” – Katy

For the undeclared students at eight weeks, college experiences were beginning to shape them as individuals. They were learning from their lived experiences and had begun to appreciate the personal independence they had achieved.

Skill developed: Aviation students at 13 weeks. By the end of the semester, the aviation students recognized that college experiences required independent decision making and that those skills were developed over time to inform good choices. The following quotes provide an overview of the experiences the aviation students were facing as they continued to manage their emerging personal independence.

“I’ve enjoyed the independence more than I thought I would. It’s a new dynamic. You learn what characteristics show up in you at this point. I’ve enjoyed discovering that.” – Paul

“I’ve really enjoyed just being an individual and living on my own. It’s a lot of defining yourself at this time. You’re making your own decisions, which is different from a cut and dried lifestyle you lived the last four years of your life.” – Mike

“I have enjoyed setting my own schedule. I feel that I have a lot more control over my time and what I want to do with it. It’s me deciding. I’ve really enjoyed the freedom.” – Matthew

For the aviation students at 13 weeks, they were enjoying the personal independence that their college experiences provided and were pleased with their ability to make their own decisions. They were embracing their freedom as college students.

Enjoying freedom: Undeclared students at 13 weeks. By the end of the semester, the undeclared students had adjusted to and were beginning to enjoy the freedom and independence of college and were taking responsibility for themselves. As exemplified in the following quotes, the undeclared students had begun to recognize how their independence shaped their experiences at this point in the semester.

“I’ve enjoyed all the freedom that I have. The responsibility is really nice. You know, being responsible for myself; not having my parents be responsible for me.” – Gunner

“We’re not in high school anymore. This is real. It’s weird how grown up we are all of a sudden.” – Lynn

“Realizing that I can be on my own has been kind of a proud thing for me. I was really nervous about going to college. I’ve gotten a lot more independent and can figure things out on my own. I can do this. I don’t have to call my mom every day.” – Katy

The undeclared students at the end of their first semester showed signs of being less dependent upon their families to help them navigate their college experiences. Through their lived experiences, they recognized that they could function and succeed under their own decision making skills and personal independence.

Personal Independence Summary

As the semester progressed, the students in the study experienced a feeling of more personal independence and acknowledged their ability to take responsibility for their own decisions. Their separation from family and friends from home and the life they had previously only known were factors that prompted their development and feelings of personal independence and growth as they transitioned through their first semester of college.

Overall Transitional Experiences

In addition to the themes that emerged from the data collected, the students were asked to reflect upon their overall transitional experiences throughout the study. The students shared their perceptions of their transitional experiences at each interview point as they moved through their first semester of college. Overall, the students in the study

felt they were transitioning through their first semester of college with few obstacles to report. They recognized that they were in a new environment and the changes that meant in their lives, but were pleased and satisfied with their experiences as a college student.

Table 9 provides an overview of the data collected at each of the timeframes to reflect the overall transitional experiences for each of the focus groups. The blank blocks in the table indicate there were no experiences that both groups shared, rather at the three interview points, each of the populations had their own unique experiences.

Table 9. Overall Freshman Transitional Experiences Throughout the Fall 2015 Semester.

| Overall Transitional Experiences Summary | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| | Week Three | Week Eight | Week Thirteen |
| Aviation Student Experiences | ➤ Considered college as an opportunity for positive change in their lives as well as new beginnings | ➤ Focus, determination, and routine provided motivation to manage the challenges and opportunities of college | ➤ Realized college was built on challenges and adjustments, relationships, and new opportunities |
| Undeclared Student Experiences | ➤ Looked forward to getting involved and experiencing new opportunities | ➤ Pleased with their college choice and reported having positive experiences | ➤ Reported that they enjoyed the opportunities and challenges of college |
| Similar Experiences for Both Groups | | | |

Positive change: Aviation students at three weeks. The aviation students thought of college as an opportunity for positive change in their lives as well as new beginnings and experiences. The following quotes provide an overview of how the aviation students perceived their overall transition into the beginning of the fall semester.

“I haven’t been homesick because there’s been a tremendous amount of support and a tremendous ability to get involved, especially within the first few weeks and the first few days.” – Matthew

“It’s been a roller coaster. The first couple of days it’s a lot of stuff; like it’s overwhelming. Then you’re like, ‘I don’t know anyone’, this is boring. And then you meet people, and it’s like ‘wow’, it’s good.” – George

“I didn’t love college right away. But now, this week, everything seemed like it’s becoming more like home. I now have deeper connections with people and I have places that I feel like I could belong.” – Hailey

The aviation students went through many feelings and emotions to come to a place where they felt positive about their transition into their first semester of college. What could be perceived as roadblocks were learning experiences that helped shape their transition within the first few weeks of the semester.

Looking forward: Undeclared students at three weeks. At the beginning of the semester, the undeclared students stated that they were looking forward to getting involved in college life and experiencing new opportunities. They felt they had transitioned well into their new environment and were enjoying the many aspects of college. The following quotes from the undeclared students illustrate their transitional experiences at the beginning of the semester.

“I actually really enjoy college. Everyone’s like a family because we all hang out and spend our nights together and do homework together; we’re like a community.” – Riley

“If I can use one word it would be great. College is definitely different than what you expect or see on movies. I’m excited to see what this college can offer me.” – Marie

The undeclared students were enjoying their college experiences as illustrated in the quotes provided. A sense of community and opportunity shaped the experiences of this population as they transitioned into their new environment.

Focused: Aviation students at eight weeks. Focus and determination provided motivation at eight weeks for the aviation students to manage the challenges and opportunities of college life. The following quotes provide examples of an even greater appreciation the aviation population had for their new experiences as college students at mid-point of their first semester.

“Every day I’ve woken up and thought this is the place I should be.” – Mike

“I’ve enjoyed every day. Each day is a new challenge, but it’s also a new opportunity to do something new and try new things.” – Joey

As the aviation students transitioned through their first semester, there was a sense of place and comfort as they focused on the many challenges of their college experiences. There was recognition in knowing that they had made the right decision to attend the University of North Dakota, and were looking forward to the challenges ahead.

Positive transition: Undeclared students at eight weeks. By mid-semester, the undeclared students reported having positive experiences despite moments of doubt as they transitioned through the first semester of their freshman year. The following quotes provide examples of their experiences as they recognized the many opportunities as college students.

“There are those times where you get sad and homesick, but then you realize why you came here and it makes it all better. It’s been fun and really positive overall.”

– Nina

“I thought I was happy in high school, and now that I’m here, I’m just so happy all the time. It’s just been a really great experience meeting new people and branching out.” – Lynn

“It’s all been really positive, except for a few bad grades, all of it has been a positive experience – with joining the things I’ve joined and meeting the people I’ve met.” – Joe

The undeclared students appreciated the opportunities to get involved, meet new people, and experience college as a means to broaden their lives. It was through these experiences that the undeclared population considered their transition through their first semester as one that was positive and rewarding, even through their academic challenges.

Time of change: Aviation students at 13 weeks. As the semester drew to a close, the aviation students realized that college was built on challenges and adjustments, relationships, and new opportunities. The quotes that follow depict the overall transitional experiences the aviation population voiced as they transitioned out of their first semester as freshman students.

“I was worried in the beginning, but I knew as soon as I got settled in it would get better, and now it kinda feels like another home.” – Hayden

“There’s definitely the shock that you’re in college, and then enjoying the college experience, and then realizing it’s not always fun and games. It’s that weird transition that you don’t get anywhere else.” – Taylor

“I’ve found my place. Life’s good. People care about me. School’s going good.” – Hailey

The aviation students had overcome the initial challenges of college and were enjoying the unique opportunities they were experiencing that only college could provide as their first semester was coming to an end. As they reflected back on their entire first semester, the aviation students could recognize the many challenges they experienced as they transitioned through their first semester of their freshman year.

Enjoyed the opportunities: Undeclared students at 13 weeks. At the end of their first semester, the undeclared students reported that they enjoyed the opportunities and challenges of college life. The undeclared student quotes below provide definition to their lives as they reflected upon their experiences and moved out of their first semester of college.

“A lot of trial and error it seems like. You try to figure out new ways to make things work for you and your schedule. There’s a lot of messing up and learning.”

– Sandy

“My experience is a positive one. I think there’s definitely stress and rough days, but you get through it, you keep going, and I think it’s worth it.” – Sam

“I feel a lot more settled in and a lot more used to it. It’s not as scary anymore.

It’s become a little bit more normal, instead of new.” – Katy

The undeclared population viewed their transition in, through, and out of their first semester of college as positive as well as a time to learn from their experiences. Determination through challenges helped the undeclared students settle into their freshman lives.

Overall Transition Summary

Though somewhat challenging at the beginning of the semester, the students in both groups expressed their overall transition in, through, and out of their first semester to be one that they enjoyed, learned from, and based on their unique experiences, an opportunity to grow as an individual. As identified in the five themes, the students recognized areas of challenge and struggle, as well as opportunities to begin forming new friendships and relationships. Their lived experiences and the ways in which they made meaning of their lives provided grounding for their feelings of an overall successful transition as freshman students.

End of Term Grade Point Averages

As the semester progressed and the interviews were conducted, it was determined that obtaining and examining final grade point averages of the students who participated in the study as compared to the overall undeclared and aviation student populations would provide even more data for which to consider in the first semester transition process. A protocol change form was completed, submitted, and approved by the UND Institutional Research Board in order to request the grade point average data. Upon obtaining protocol change approval, a request was made to the UND Office of Institutional Research to request the grade point average data. Once gathered, the

information indicated that the end of term grade point average for the entire interview group was higher than the end of term grade point average for all new freshmen students who entered in the fall of 2015. Furthermore, the undeclared interview group grade point average was higher than the overall undeclared student population. Similarly, the aviation interview group grade point average at the end of the fall 2015 term was higher than the overall aviation freshman student grade point average for the same time period. Table 10 illustrates the end of term grade point averages (based on a 4.00 scale) for the students who participated in the study, as well as the general freshman aviation and undeclared populations.

Table 10. End of Fall 2015 Term Grade Point Averages for Aviation and Undeclared Students.

| | Number of Students | Mean Grade Point Average |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| New Freshmen | 1,882 | 3.03 |
| Interview Group | 37 | 3.35 |
| New Freshman Aviation Students | 226 | 3.20 |
| Aviation Interview Group | 22 | 3.49 |
| New Undeclared Freshman Students | 161 | 2.94 |
| Undeclared Interview Group | 15 | 3.16 |

Grade Point Average Summary

Grade point averages do not independently determine whether a student is successful or not; however, a student's in-the-classroom accomplishments assist in determining their positive academic progression through their college experiences. The grade point average data indicated that the students who participated in the study had a higher grade point average at the end of the fall 2015 semester than those who choose not

to enroll in undeclared and aviation focused sections of an introduction to university life course. These results could suggest that students enrolled in an introduction to university life course are either more prepared for college, or their experiences in the class had contributed to their academic success. None the less, the data show a higher grade point average for those students who participated in the study compared to those who did not.

Summary

Students encounter many challenges and experiences as they transition through their first semester of college. Through the experiences they shared, it was evident that both groups placed emphasis on their academics, they struggled with time management, their new found independence was refreshing and welcomed, their relationships with family and friends from back home ebbed and flowed, as well as a strong appreciation for their involvement and development of relationships with those on-campus shaped their lived experiences. Within each of these experiences, students made meaning of their lives as they navigated in, through, and out of the transitions as illustrated in their voices and the quotes they provided.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the lived experiences of freshman students as they transitioned through their first semester of college. Described through their own language and voice, the study attempted to capture the experiences of this population of students interviewed, as they moved through the fall semester and made meaning of their lives. It was through the experiences the students shared that outlined the results that emerged from the study.

Methodology and Procedures

A phenomenological, constructivist lens shaped the foundation to explore the freshman population as they constructed their experiences throughout their first semester of college. The work of Schlossberg (1989) and Baxter Magolda (2001) further provided an understanding of how people move in, through, and out of a transition and make meaning of their experiences as they are lived and constructed.

To capture the lived experiences of the freshman students within their first semester of college, individual interviews were conducted at three, eight, and 13 weeks of the fall 2015 term. These timeframes were chosen to coincide with movement in, through, and out of the semester as well as representational of events in the semester that often trigger experiences for students as they navigate their new environment. Questions

were asked of students at each of the three interview periods to examine their academic and social lives, their relationships with family and friends from back home, the new relationships they had formed on-campus, as well as their overall experiences and transition into college. The interviews were conducted in public locations based on the choice of the student, audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and the data analyzed through a thematic analysis process. Assertions emerged from the data to explain and make meaning of the freshman students' lived experiences as they transitioned through their first semester of college. The key findings focused on academic experiences, time management issues and personal independence, as well as relationships and involvement with others that made a difference in how students navigated through and made meaning of their first semester of their freshman year in college.

Summary of Findings

Five themes emerged in the analysis process from the data as it was collected through the individual interviews. The students in the study focused on their academic experiences and the need to stay motivated to meet the academic expectations of college – which were different than high school. New relationships and involvement with others was important to their transition. They felt getting to know new people with similar interests through classroom experiences, campus activities, and residence hall living was influential in a positive transition. They reported their relationships with family and friends from home stayed strong through technology and social media. The use of technology eased their separation anxiety. Time management was a struggle to balance academic and social expectations, which intensified as the semester progressed. And an

acknowledgement of their own personal development over the course of the fall semester provided opportunities for the students to learn and grow from their experiences. All of the experiences they reported, which formed the themes identified in the study, were influential in their movement through the fall 2015 semester.

The students in the study felt the academic expectations required of them were high from the beginning of their first college term and increased as the semester progressed. For many of the students, they were not prepared for the fast paced, more independent learning and the work outside of classes that was necessary for success. As the semester progressed, academic expectations became increasingly more demanding. Enhanced motivation was required by the freshman students to meet the academic challenges. The students recognized a need to improve their study habits and use campus resources to stay academically focused. By week 13, motivation and focus were even more important in order to experience academic success. Many of the students felt that the establishment of a routine helped to maintain and improve their motivation and focus.

As students spoke about relationships with people they had met on-campus, they talked about how difficult it can be at first to form those connections. Common academic and social interests as well as residence hall experiences and classroom connections helped students form relationships with others. At eight weeks, interactions in the residence halls and through involvement opportunities, students began to form bonds and stronger relationships with new friends. Students expressed and defined involvement in various forms, such as athletics, Greek life, other clubs and organizations, and interactions over meals in the dining centers. By the thirteenth week of the semester,

students were still experiencing exchanges with acquaintances, but stronger relationships had formed with a tighter or smaller network of people.

Technology eased the separation students experienced with family and friends from back home. By mid-point in the semester, students experienced more of a struggle being away from home and not involved in the daily lives of their family and friends. At 13 weeks, students still relied on technology to stay connected with family and friends, but also expressed that they were ready to go home to “be with everyone again.”

Time management was a topic that surfaced at each of the interview timeframes, and a concept that students struggled with throughout the semester. At three weeks, the students recognized the need to manage their time based on higher college expectations. At eight weeks, the students focused on the need to balance their academic and social lives with more emphasis on academic over social experiences, but were struggling to do so. By the end of the semester, they continued to struggle in establishing a balance between academic and social expectations.

At three weeks, the students recognized college as a time for growth and independence by taking responsibility for themselves. As the semester progressed, the students continued to experience growth and periods of personal independence. By the end of the semester, the freshman students felt more comfortable with their independent decision making skills and their ability to take responsibility for themselves.

Overall, at three weeks, the students considered college experiences to be an opportunity for positive changes as well as new beginnings. By the eighth week, the students recognized that focus, determination, and routine provided motivation to manage

the challenges of college. At the thirteenth week, the students felt that overall, college was built on challenges, adjustments, relationships with others, and new opportunities.

Discussion

The research study attempted to explore the lived experiences of freshman students as they moved through their first semester and made meaning of college. The research questions used to frame the study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college?
2. How do students make meaning of their experiences as they move in, through, and out of their first semester of college?

Through each interview conducted, students shared their lived experiences within the responses they gave as a means to answer the first research question. As patterns in the data emerged, the key findings were lifted out of the words that the students shared as a way to identify their lived experiences. Based on the methodology of the study, it was necessary to capture their experiences at more than one timeframe of the semester. The three timeframes allowed for insight and examination of the lived experiences throughout their transition within the first semester.

The second research question required a deeper examination to not only explore and gain insight into the students' lived experiences, but to determine whether students were making meaning of their experiences. Throughout the data collection process, at each of the three interview timeframes, students used words such as recognized, felt, and understood which signaled that they were making meaning of their experiences. In

addition, changes in behaviors based on their experiences further indicated that students were making meaning of their lives as the semester progressed.

The literature explored for this study focused on earlier research findings which examined influences involved in understanding the transition process, identifying ways in which individuals cope with the transition, and recognizing how situations and perceptions impact the way in which individuals move through their transitions. The key findings in the study can be shown to compare and contrast to the literature reviewed.

Similar to the work of Roe Clark (2005), Schlossberg (1981), and Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra (200), this study provided further indication that a transition is built over time through the experiences that people have in their lives and their responses to those challenges that influence their successes. As the semester progressed, the aviation and undeclared students in this study recognized how their lives were changing based on their experiences and their new opportunities and challenges.

As with the study conducted by Bolle, Wessel, and Mulvhill (2007), this research study found that independence, involvement, academics, and making new friends impacted the transitional issues students experienced in college. The findings of this study were further reinforced by the earlier work of Hu (2011), who found that social and academic engagement were important factors in student success and persistence.

Connections with others and academic challenges were a key finding in this study as well as in the work of Popadiuk (2011) and Copeland and Levesque-Bristol (2010).

Regardless of setting or population examined, past literature clearly has identified the similar themes that the aviation and undeclared students in this study experienced. Focus

was placed on academics as well as how influential making connections with new people were on their overall transition to college.

Additionally, Elkins, Braxton, and James (2000) and Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007) found that support from family and friends were important influences in promoting academic achievement. This study also found that connections to family and friends from back home were important as the students moved through their experiences. Technology and social media will undoubtedly continue to shape the way in which students interact and stay connected to family and friends from home.

Similar to Friedman and Mandel's (2011) work on student motivation, this study found that motivation and focus were influential in achieving academic success. Beck (2007) similarly found that academic achievement and academic motivation are predictors in student success. What Beck (2007) found that was different from the findings of this study was that there was a mistrust of instructors which led to poor academic performance. The students in this study revealed their relationships with professors as being important and positive.

Contrary to Beck's (2007) work, much of what emerged in this study can be similarly compared to the earlier literature on collegiate student transitional experiences. Academics, relationships, independence, and social experiences make a difference in the lived experiences of freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college. The results of this study support and further substantiate key freshman transitional experiences which influence their lives as they move in, through, and out of their first semester of college.

Conclusions

Throughout the semester in which the interviews were conducted for this study, the lived experiences of the freshman students as well as how they made meaning of their lives were the focus of the research. Based on the data that emerged from the experiences that the students shared, this study contributes to the current literature that examines student transitions, retention, and persistence toward graduation by shedding light on the components students identify as important in their first semester transition. The conclusions of the study point to academic experiences, involvement and relationships that are formed with others on-campus, relationships with family and friends from home, experiences of independence, and struggles with time management, as key factors in the lives of freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college. Each of these experiences can be mapped and followed throughout the transition.

Schlossberg's (1981) 4 S's – situation, self, support, and strategies – are evident in the voices of the students as they began to cope with their transitions as their experiences emerged and shaped their lives throughout the semester. Self-perception, the situation they were in, the support available around them, and the strategies they needed to implement to make the necessary changes in their lives, the students began to make meaning of their experiences. As outlined in Baxter Magolda's (2001) work on self-reflection, the students made changes to influence and cope with their transition through the semester. As the students moved into their first semester, they began to become familiar with the expectations of their new environment. At mid-point in the semester as the students were moving through, they recognized the need to sustain their motivation

and commitment to their academic success. And finally, moving out of the semester marked the end of one transition and moving on to the next semester.

Out of the insight gained from the key findings are recommendations for change that can influence the ways in which students move in, through, and out of their first semester of college. These recommendations can be used by faculty, staff, and campus leaders to more positively influence the retention and persistence of their freshman students as they transition through their college experiences.

Recommendations for Further Study

Throughout the interview process, it became clear that individuals on college campuses should invest the time in exploring the student transition phenomenon on a regular basis. The data obtained can be powerful in providing the necessary information to identify areas of strength and places in which improvements can be made to enhance the experiences of the freshman population as they transition through their first semester of college. For a more comprehensive view of the freshman students, it would be suggested to randomly select the group from the overall population. On the other hand, to explore and learn even more about specific groups of students, targeted interviews could be conducted based on identified demographics such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender.

The focus of this study was on the lived experiences of freshman students as they transitioned through their first semester of enrollment and made meaning of their experiences. Further research could examine students as they move through their first year of enrollment and successfully enter their sophomore, or second year of college.

Institutions of higher education are often marked based on their first to second year retention rates, so a longitudinal study would provide individuals on college campuses with even more insight into the lived experiences of their students as they persist toward graduation.

There would be merit in examining the lived experiences of students at other timeframes as well. For example, much could be gained from better understanding the experiences of sophomores as students who have ended their first year, and are moving into their second year of college life. Or seniors, who are ready to graduate, and the experiences they are faced with as they transition from the campus environment to the world of employment.

Another group worthy of exploring as they transition into their first semester at a new institution is the transfer student population. This group brings many unique characteristics with them from the institution in which they came, as well as experience challenges in navigating new expectations, policies, and procedures at their new institution.

The study conducted for this research project attempted to identify the overall themes that emerged from the data collected. Outlier comments and experiences expressed by some of the students throughout the study were treated as such, and not representational of the groups as a collective, therefore not of focus in the overall development of themes. From the vast amount of data collected in this research study, dissection of the results from a different angle could provide for more focus on particular aspects of the lived experiences of the population examined. For example, academic

expectations could be lifted out of the overall data collected to focus on an in-depth analysis conducted on that one particular aspect of the freshman student experience.

Regardless of the structure of the study conducted, there is not a lack of insight that can be gained from exploring the experiences of students on a college campus. The lived experiences of college students can help inform faculty, staff, and campus leaders as environments are created and programs and services designed to enhance student success, retention, and persistence toward graduation. Creating positive college campus environments and opportunities for involvement and interaction among peers are important to the success and wellbeing of students as they transition through their freshman year experiences. The concept of campus ecology (Banning & Bartels, 1997; Banning & Kaiser, 1974; Banning & Kuk, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1994; Gerst & Fonken, 1995; Kuh, 2011) which takes into account the individual, the environment, and the interaction between the two components (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016) can be a means for college campuses to recognize and understand the complexities of student groups, the influence involvement of faculty, staff, and administrators can have on the transition process, and the importance of establishing programs and services designed to shape overall student success, persistence, and graduation.

Recommendations for Practice

Not only is it important for individuals on college campuses to identify and recognize the transitions that students experience as they move through their first semester of college, it is also necessary that programs and services are created in an effort to ease the transition process. The term high-impact practices defined by George Kuh in a

2007 National Survey of Student Engagement report (NSSE, 2007) has been used to identify educational programs and services that make a difference in the lives of undergraduate college students. In that same NSSE (2007) report, Kuh recommended that institutions provide opportunities for all students to participate in at least two high-impact practices throughout their undergraduate experience. Those programs and services that are considered high-impact practices are identified by six distinguishable characteristics (Kuh, 2008; NSSE 2007). First, high-impact practices require time and effort targeted toward a challenging educational goal; second, they involve shared experiences with faculty and peers; third, students are introduced to diverse ideas and experiences; fourth, students involved in a high-impact practice receive frequent and continuous feedback about their performance; fifth, high-impact practice programs and activities provide opportunities for students to apply what they learn in the classroom to various real-world situations; and sixth, they create conditions that make a noticeable change in students' worldviews and self-awareness (Kuh, 2008; NSSE, 2007; Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014). Endorsed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), ten high-impact practices have been identified as opportunities to engage undergraduate students and enhance positive educational success. These high impact practices endorsed by AAC&U are first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects – suggested to lead to enhanced involvement and retention of undergraduate college students (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008). In an even

more recent study, Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, and Pascarella (2014) found that high-impact practices have an overall positive effect on student learning and development providing further evidence of the value and benefit to developing and providing these opportunities for students.

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are suggested to create positive change as freshmen enter and move through their first semester of college. The findings have driven the creation of recommendations to enhance programs and services on college campuses to strengthen academic success, retention rates, and persistence toward graduation. The recommendations are based on the data gathered which can influence faculty, staff, and administrative leadership decision making in creating campus academic and social environments which have the ability to foster student success and a successful transition through the first semester of college. Knowing that some of the following recommendations are suggested based on current high impact practices as defined in earlier research, the data from this study reinforce the need to institutionalize the development and implementation of such programs and services in order to foster student success and persistence toward graduation. The recommendations for practice are as follows.

1. *Intentionally create connections between freshmen and upper-class students prior to the first semester of enrollment and to continue those connections throughout the term.* Students cited the value in getting to know upper-class students as a means to better understand and navigate their academic and social lives. These connections would create an immediate network with others who have

experienced college already. If those connections could be established with someone in the student's intended major, even stronger relationships are possible. Examples of these connections could be mentoring programs established as freshman enter into the institution based on major or program of study interest, upper-class residence hall students grouped with incoming freshmen with intentional academic and social programs offered throughout the year as a means to interact, as well as resident assistant placement based on program of study matches.

2. *Establish meaningful connections between students in the residence halls.* On several occasions, the students mentioned the residence halls serving as the platform where relationships were formed. Technology can be used as a means to encourage and foster connections among students. In one particular interview, the student highlighted a group message exchange that was created through her residence hall, which she felt connected her more closely with others and served as a means to get to know those with whom she lived. Technology is a natural means used by students to make connections with others in their everyday lives, so intentionally creating platforms from which students can create groups, only enhances the opportunities to interact and form relationships. In addition to the use of technology to form connections, common areas of residence halls should be designed and established as gathering places for face-to-face social and academic interactions. Comfortable furniture for lounging and space conducive to studying should be provided for the residents. With a live-on requirement in the

first-year of enrollment at the University of North Dakota, this would be a wise investment for the campus. Creating an environment where students can interact in both an academic and social setting may assist them in their struggles to balance those aspects of their lives, leading students to choose to live in the residence halls in greater numbers beyond their first year of enrollment.

3. *Create living-learning communities for all disciplines.* The aviation students pointed to the opportunities they experienced through the living-learning community as being positive in their lives. When done well, a living-learning community brings people together with similar interests and goals to interact socially and academically in an environment that fosters growth and development. The aviation students who participated in the study and lived in the aviation living-learning community cited that opportunity as being one that brought them together around common interests and experiences and positively influenced their first semester transition. When structured around a discipline, living-learning communities are able to integrate the new students to their program of study, intentionally fostering connections on the academic and social levels.
4. *Create opportunities in the classrooms for students to interact with other students and with faculty members.* Again, connections with other students and faculty members can be enhanced through the use of technology. As cited in the data collected in this study, an aviation Facebook page created a means for students in classes to discuss course topics, assignments, and served as a platform to stay connected socially. Along with technology, creative pedagogy as well as

classroom arrangement and design can create an environment where students and faculty interact and exchange thoughts and views. Ideas do not need to be elaborate or constrained based on the size of the class or resources available. An instructor simply greeting students at the door of a large lecture bowl setting can positively enhance the classroom atmosphere. Or students forming small groups during class to discuss topics or explore questions, encourages interaction with others. Course design as well as space configuration are important components in order to create peer and instructor interactions in the classroom.

5. *Establish an early connection for students to their program of study.* College curricula should include at least one course in the first semester that is directly related to the student's intended area of study. It should be an introductory course, a general education course, or a class that exposes students to their field and profession. This connection to the major encourages stronger ties and enhances academic focus. Students in the study cited their academic motivation increased when enrolled in courses that they felt were directly affiliated with their major.
6. *Provide focused sections of an introduction to university life course for students beyond the undeclared and aviation populations.* Based on data obtained from the UND Office of Institutional Research, students enrolled in the focused sections of an introduction to university life who participated in the study, had higher fall semester grade point averages than those students not enrolled in an introduction to university life course. A focused section of an introduction to university life course could serve as the introductory course for students based on their intended

major. Not only should the course include transitional material, major focused information should be incorporated to provide students with a glimpse of what it will be like to pursue a particular major. In addition, the sections should be team taught by a faculty member along with an upper-class student from the discipline, further creating connections and mentoring opportunities for the new freshmen.

7. *Students should be encouraged to get involved to meet others with similar interests to ease the transition.* On several occasions, getting involved in clubs and organizations was cited by the student in the study as a means in which to interact and get to know others. Students should be encouraged to get involved especially with clubs and organizations associated with their intended area of study or based on their own interests in order to meet others with similar interests. The various clubs and organizations available on a college campus should be presented to students with an opportunity for them to indicate their interest in exploring membership. A member of that organization should then reach out to the freshman student to encourage participation as opposed to the new student having to initiate the connection. This could be accomplished at a campus early orientation and advisement program or through an introduction to university life course by providing students with a listing of current campus clubs and organizations. Upon leaving the orientation and advisement program, or as an assignment for class, the new student would indicate their interest area(s) from a list of current campus clubs and organizations. Student leaders from the club(s) in which the new students noted as of interest would be tasked with connecting with

the freshmen with more information about the club(s) and participation details. Students in the study noted involvement was beneficial to them meeting people and feeling a sense of belonging and connection to others and the campus community early in their first semester. A proactive approach to encourage student involvement would foster those connections for freshmen early in their first semester of college – enhancing a sense of belonging and the building of relationships.

Summary

The recommendations outlined to enhance positive transitional experiences for the new entering freshman student can be as simple as proactive outreach to more complex suggestions such as curricular and pedagogical changes. The recommendations should be structured in such a way that one informs or builds upon another, creating more intentional connections between the freshmen, faculty members, and current students. For example, student mentors could also be co-instructors for the introduction to university life course, as well as provide assistance and guidance for the same population of freshmen grouped together in the residence hall living-learning community. Despite the measures put in place, the results of the study as well as the recommendations provided can help to inform individuals on college campuses to create environments that foster student success and persistence toward graduation.

Through the data collected at the three interview timeframes, much can be learned about freshman student transitional experiences as they navigate their first semester of college. The five themes that emerged – academic experiences, relationships and

involvement with others, connections with family and friends from home, time management, and personal independence – shed light on the lived experiences of the freshman student population who entered the University of North Dakota in the fall of 2015. The themes point to the struggles the students experienced as well as the interactions and opportunities they felt positively influenced their transition to college. The results of the study aim to equip campus faculty, staff, and administrators with the data to reinforce programs and services already in place and offer suggestions to establish new opportunities to address the needs of the entering freshman student population to foster overall student success and persistence toward graduation.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Introduction to Study

Hi! My name is Lisa Burger. I am a doctoral student at the University of North Dakota conducting a research study that will examine the lived experiences of freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college life. Through individual interviews, I intend to gather responses to a series of questions at three different points in the fall semester (3 weeks, 8 weeks, and 13 weeks).

I invite you to participate in my study. An individual interview will take you approximately 60 minutes at each of the three points in the semester. Your name will not be associated with your responses in any way, so you will be encouraged to share as much information as you would like as you answer the questions I ask; however, you are under no obligation to participate and can withdraw from the study at any time. Attached is a consent form to participate in the study if you choose to do so.

At the end of the interviews, your name will be included in a random drawing for a chance to win a \$100 gift card to a local merchant (such as Target) or one of six \$25 gift cards to a local eating establishment (such as Buffalo Wild Wings or Starbucks). Two \$25 gift cards will be drawn at the end of each interview point in the semester. The \$100 gift card will be drawn at the end of the semester.

Thank you for participating in my study. Your thoughts are important and valuable, and will be used to better understand the experiences of freshmen in order to recommend programs and services to help students be even more successful in their first semester at the University of North Dakota! I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. You may contact me through email at lisa.burger@my.und.edu or via phone at 701-740-2705, or my advisor, Dr. Margaret Healy at margaret.healy@und.edu or 701-777-4391. Thank you for your time.

Appendix B

Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: *The lived experiences of freshman students as they transition through their first semester of college life*

PROJECT DIRECTOR: *Lisa Burger*

PHONE # *(701) 740-2705*

DEPARTMENT: *Educational Leadership*

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

As a freshman at the University of North Dakota (UND), you are invited to be in a research study about transitions students experience in their first semester of college life.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of freshman students. Through your own language and voice, the research will capture your experiences at three separate points throughout your first semester at UND – 3 weeks, 8 weeks, and 13 weeks. You will be asked to answer a series of questions that will be used to better understand individual student experiences and their transition into UND. The interview process will allow you to express in your own words, your thoughts based on your unique situation as you live and experience your first semester at UND. Through an understanding of the transitional issues that students face, individuals within institutions of higher education can learn more about freshman students and develop programs and services to enhance opportunities for success and progress toward graduation.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately 30 people will take part in this study at the University of North Dakota. It is anticipated that 30 people will participate at each of the three data collection points (3 weeks, 8 weeks, and 13 weeks).

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last one semester (fall of 2015). You will be invited to participate in an individual interview that will take approximately 30-60 minutes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

You will be provided a series of questions that ask you to think about the experiences you have had as a student at the University of North Dakota at various points over the fall semester. You will be invited to respond to the questions based on your experiences at that point in time. Your responses will be audio taped with no identifiers connected to your name. A pseudonym will be used to keep an accurate record of your responses. Throughout the interview process, you will be able to skip any of the questions that you do not want to answer.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are no foreseeable risks to participate in this study. Your responses are anonymous. If a question creates unpleasant emotions, you can stop at any time. You are encouraged to contact the Counseling Center at the University of North Dakota, McCannel Hall 200, 777-2127 for available help if necessary.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You may not benefit personally from being in this study; however, in the future, other people might benefit from this study. Your responses to the questions will provide insight and recommendations individuals at colleges and universities can use in order to enhance the support provided to students as they transition through their first semester of college life.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study. You will have the option of providing your name at the end of the interview process for a chance (through random

drawing) of a \$100 gift card to Target, or for one of six \$25 gift cards to Buffalo Wild Wings or Starbucks (based on your preference).

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the researcher conducting the study are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies. This study is a portion of the researcher's doctoral requirements to graduate from UND.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. The researcher and her advisor along with her dissertation committee will have access to your responses; however, your name will not be attached to your responses. All responses will be summarized so that you cannot be identified. If quotes are used, your name will not be attached to your responses. The information collected will be kept in a locked location at the home of the researcher for three years. At the end of the three years, the information will be destroyed.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Burger. If you have questions or concerns about the research please contact Lisa Burger at (701) 740-2705 during the day and in the evening. You may also contact Lisa Burger's advisor, Dr. Margaret Healy, at (701) 777-4391.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking "Information for Research Participants" on the web site:
<http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm>

I give consent to be audiotaped during the interview.

Please initial: Yes No

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not be identified.

Please initial: Yes No

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subjects Name: _____

Signature of Subject

Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject.

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date

Appendix C

Analysis of Data – Aviation Students at Three Weeks

| Code | Category | Theme | Assertion |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|---|
| | Expectations of college | | |
| Academically focused | | Aviation students expect college to be focused primarily on academics with rigor and difficulty. | Aviation students represent a group that is expecting college life to be more academically challenging, with an opportunity to meet new people, experience more independence, in a much different environment as depicted in the media and through experiences of others. |
| Anticipate more rigor over time | | | |
| Full academic experiences to come | | | |
| Focus on studying | | | |
| Higher academic expectations | | | |
| Limited social time | | | |
| Students to be driven | | | |
| Overwhelming | | | |
| Busy | | | |
| Studying all the time | | | |
| Need to learn to study | | | |
| Nervous on own | | | |
| Take responsibility for self | | | |
| Make decisions on own | | | |
| Feel bigger | | | |
| Difficult | | | |
| Classes to be difficult | | | |
| Large lecture classes | | | |
| Large classes | | | |
| Impersonal lecture courses | | | |
| All lecture courses | | | |
| Lectures and exams in all classes | | | |
| Small classes | | | |
| Not difficult but a lot of work | | | |
| Parental pressures to do well | | | |
| Lots of homework | | | |
| To be like college prep high school | | | |
| Respect for professors | | | |
| Attendance taken in classes | | | |
| Meet new people | | College as an | |

| | | | |
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| Meet a lot of people | | opportunity to meet new people and experience new things. | |
| More experiences | | | |
| New experiences | | | |
| | | | |
| More freedom | | College as a time for growth and independence. | |
| Freedom | | | |
| Independence | | | |
| More independence | | | |
| Requires independence | | | |
| More relaxed life | | | |
| Opportunities for growth as a person | | | |
| Change as a person | | | |
| Growth and personal change | | | |
| Investment in future | | | |
| | | | |
| People share their experiences of college life | | Experiences of others and those depicted in movies are stereotypes of what college is supposed to be like. | |
| Parents alum, different experience | | | |
| Movies depict as party and fun | | | |
| Stereotypes from movies | | | |
| Horror stories of college | | | |
| | | | |
| | College experiences as occurred | | |
| Everyone trying to meet people | | Small campus environment allows an opportunity to make friends and form relationships of own choosing. | College life for aviation students is an opportunity to meet new people, establish a balance between social and academic expectations, while pursuing a major in an environment that is comfortable and accepting. |
| Made good friends | | | |
| Friends by choice | | | |
| Forming friendships | | | |
| Gotten to know people | | | |
| Small campus allows for more connections | | | |
| | | | |
| Use meal time as social time | | Food and meal time draws people together. | |
| Know people to eat with | | | |
| | | | |

| | | | |
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| Involvement in extracurricular to meet people | | Involvement in social and extracurricular activities provides an opportunity to meet people and experience new things. | |
| Meet different people through involvement | | | |
| Appreciate diversity | | | |
| Culture shock | | | |
| Many experiences | | | |
| Many social opportunities | | | |
| Freshman have similar experiences | | Freshmen are awkward as they go through their experiences in a new environment. | |
| All freshmen have similar experiences | | | |
| All freshmen look lost | | | |
| People awkward at first | | | |
| Responsibility to manage time | | Need to take responsibility for managing time and creating structure to establish a routine. | |
| Use down time efficiently | | | |
| Time management is difficult | | | |
| ROTC adds structure | | | |
| Routine takes time to establish | | | |
| Had to figure out a schedule | | | |
| Don't have to study all the time | | Need to create a balance between social and academic expectations. | |
| Academic focus when classes began | | | |
| Balance between academics and social | | | |
| Focus on academics before social | | | |
| Involvement balances academic expectations | | | |
| Freedom to study what enjoy | | College provides freedom and independence to pursue a program of | |
| Satisfied with major | | | |
| Completely independent | | | |

| | | | |
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| and on own | | study based on own interests. | |
| Having a vehicle provides independence | | | |
| Room to explore self | | | |
| Attending college for yourself | | | |
| High parental expectations | | | |
| | | | |
| College feels like home | | Despite occurrences of homesickness, college begins to feel like home. | |
| Enjoyable | | | |
| Homesick | | | |
| | | | |
| | College experiences different than expected | | |
| Small classes and open discussion | | Didn't anticipate small classes with open discussion and an opportunity to get to know classmates and professors. | Aviation students anticipated larger classes with less discussion, less structure to college life, and difficulty in seeking out help when needed. |
| Small classes | | | |
| Interaction in classes | | | |
| Met more people | | | |
| Professors more approachable | | | |
| Discuss new topics – LGBT | | | |
| | | | |
| Must seek out own help | | Anticipated difficulty in seeking out help. | |
| Anticipated difficult to find help | | | |
| Need to study | | | |
| | | | |
| Less structure | | Less structure and independence creates more issues with time management and focus. | |
| Not as much structure | | | |
| Time management is more difficult | | | |
| More independence | | | |
| Lack of knowledge creates uncertainty | | | |
| Everyone focused on career path | | | |
| | | | |
| | Class experiences | | |
| Courses move quickly | | College courses are faster paced, challenging, and cover more material in a | For aviation students, courses are faster paced, more independent learning |
| Fast paced | | | |
| Courses cover a lot of material | | | |

| | | | |
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| Challenging | | shorter period of time. | is required, with preference given to smaller hands-on classroom environments that create opportunities for interactive learning. |
| More challenging than expected | | | |
| High expectations | | | |
| Demanding | | | |
| English is demanding | | | |
| Not familiar with lectures | | Lecture structure is a new and less appealing concept since these students are more familiar and enjoy a smaller classroom setting. | |
| Lectures not interactive | | | |
| Separate lab to further explain lecture | | | |
| Labs allow interaction | | | |
| Mix of lecture and interactive | | | |
| Used to smaller classes | | | |
| Small courses like high school | | | |
| More comfortable in smaller classes | | | |
| Enjoy smaller courses | | | |
| Comfortable speaking in smaller classes | | | |
| Smaller classes foster connections | | | |
| More individual attention in smaller classes | | | |
| Many perspectives in larger classes | | | |
| Lecture courses don't allow one-on-one | | | |
| Lecture courses less personal | | | |
| Difficult to build relationships in lecture courses | | | |
| Classes manageable | | Overall, classes are manageable, straight forward, and build on one another. | |
| Classes are flexible | | | |
| Concrete material | | | |
| Straight forward | | | |
| Not demanding | | | |
| Workload easier than expected | | | |

| | | | |
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| Structured as anticipated | | | |
| Not new material | | | |
| Learn material and apply to other courses | | | |
| Caring atmosphere | | Courses provide an opportunity to create an environment that supports learning between students in and out-of-the classroom. | |
| Support transition to college life | | | |
| Support learning | | | |
| Positive learning through debate | | | |
| Hands on learning | | | |
| Learn from one another | | | |
| Team building skills developed | | | |
| Develop skills to be successful | | | |
| Discuss different perspectives | | Course material provides an opportunity to discuss different perspectives based on new subjects and topics. | |
| Exposed to new subjects | | | |
| Enjoy new class experiences | | | |
| Enjoy learning | | | |
| New material | | | |
| Different material than high school | | | |
| Relearn what was taught in high school | | | |
| Begin early in major courses fosters focus toward goals | | Schedule is made up of a mix of major and general courses, with general courses less interesting but relevant to major. | |
| Foundation for career | | | |
| Specific to major and career | | | |
| Courses relevant to interests | | | |
| Major courses enjoyable | | | |
| Focused on interests | | | |
| Students passionate about subject | | | |
| Interaction with professors | | | |
| Courses outside of major not as interesting | | | |
| Mix of major and | | | |

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| general courses | | | |
| Quizzes keep course interesting | | More independent learning outside the classroom is expected. | |
| More writing expected | | | |
| Expected more work | | | |
| Expected courses to be more difficult | | | |
| Independent learning | | | |
| Work on your own time | | | |
| Have to become independent learner | | | |
| Reading can be overwhelming | | | |
| | | | |
| | Professors | | |
| Professor not teacher | | Professors are knowledgeable in their subject, approachable, and dedicated to student learning. | Aviation students value the connections they form with professors to ease the transition to college. |
| Knowledgeable in subject | | | |
| Approachable | | | |
| Available outside of class | | | |
| Great | | | |
| Dedicated to student learning | | | |
| Supports interaction and learning | | | |
| Engage students in discussions | | | |
| Create Facebook page to connect students together | | | |
| Learn from professors | | | |
| | | | |
| Want students to succeed | | Professors care about student success, growth, and development. | |
| Care about student success | | | |
| Encourage student success | | | |
| Help with student growth and development | | | |
| Can't assume students are learning | | | |
| Appreciate clarification received | | | |
| Confirms learning | | | |
| | | | |

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| Personal relationships developed | | It is advantageous to get to know and develop personal relationships with professors. | |
| Advantageous to get to know | | | |
| Build relationships in smaller courses | | | |
| Good teachers influence interests | | | |
| Office hours but not always available | | Professors aren't always available and can be perceived as intimidating. | |
| Intimidated by media portrayal | | | |
| | | | |
| | Resources | | |
| Available when needed | | Resources are available on campus for students to enhance academic success. | The Aviation program is considered a community with resources and support available to students to enhance academic success. |
| Need to use to be successful | | | |
| Help is available | | | |
| People willing to help | | | |
| Ask questions | | | |
| Campus cares about student success | | | |
| Staff provide help to succeed | | | |
| Supportive of students | | | |
| Avit program is a community | | | |
| | High school preparation for college classes | | |
| High school experiences prepared for college courses | | High school prep courses prepared aviation students for college courses. | College prep courses can prepare students for academic expectations, but not for exposure to diversity of subjects and topics. |
| AP prepared for college | | | |
| College prep school prepared for academic expectations in college | | | |
| Even with science background courses difficult | | Students not prepared for rigorous college course content and exposure to diversity. | |
| Little exposure to diversity in high school classes | | | |
| | | | |

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| | Connections with other students | | |
| Social interactions difficult at first | | Social interactions and relationship building can be difficult for new students. | Though difficult at first, aviation students value the relationships and connections that are formed through common academic and social interests and involvement opportunities. |
| Scary starting new relationships | | | |
| Introvert limits involvement | | | |
| Strong bonds formed immediately | | Aviation students appreciate and form strong bonds with others quickly at the beginning of the semester. | |
| Get close to people quickly | | | |
| Weekend activities with people just met | | | |
| Appreciated development of friendships right away | | | |
| Strong connections with people in residence hall | | Residence halls provide an environment for students to meet, get to know others, and form friendships. | |
| Get close to roommate and suitemates | | | |
| Great friends in res hall | | | |
| Great friends with suitemates | | | |
| Hang out in residence halls | | | |
| Most people met in res halls | | | |
| Most friends from res halls | | | |
| Eat together | | Students bond and interact over meals together. | |
| Get to know people while eating | | | |
| Interact through food | | | |
| College immersion forced interactions | | Continuous interactions with others form connections and relationships that are strong or merely acquaintances. | |
| Surrounded by people majority of time | | | |
| Continuously meeting people and forming friendships | | | |

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| Continuous interactions form relationships | | | |
| Meet people through others | | | |
| Important to get connected | | | |
| Talk to people | | | |
| Random questions turn into friendships | | | |
| Meet so many new people | | | |
| Meet as many people as possible | | | |
| Didn't know anyone | | | |
| Know faces but not names | | | |
| Many acquaintances and a few core friends | | | |
| More people yet to meet | | | |
| In free time build community | | | |
| Associate new friends with old friends | | | |
| Mix of old friends and new | | | |
| | | | |
| Common interests bring people together | | Common academic interests bring people together over similar goals and passions. | |
| Interact with people in class | | | |
| Academic interest creates common bond | | | |
| Connect through major interests | | | |
| People have similar interests | | | |
| Meet people with similar interests | | | |
| Form quick connections with people same interests | | | |
| Talk about common interests | | | |
| Enjoy being with people with similar passions | | | |
| Same academic and career goals | | | |
| People who share same | | | |

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| goals | | | |
| Discuss goals | | | |
| Talk about backgrounds | | | |
| Parties not worth the risk | | | |
| Meet people in and out of major | | Relationships with others outside of the aviation discipline broadens perspectives and creates culturally enriching experiences. | |
| Friend groups from different majors | | | |
| Faith is challenged through experiences with different people | | | |
| Want to meet people without compromising self | | | |
| Respect one another | | | |
| Relationships with diverse people | | | |
| Broadening perspective through friendship with trans person | | | |
| Appreciate differences | | | |
| Appreciate meeting people worldwide | | | |
| Culturally enriching experiences | | | |
| Learn from others who are different | | | |
| New opportunities through meeting different people | | | |
| Meet people at Wellness Center | | Activities and involvement opportunities outside of class bring people together and help to relieve stress. | |
| Interactions at Wellness Center | | | |
| First weekend activities | | | |
| Welcome weekend activities inviting atmosphere | | | |
| Meet people through extracurricular activities | | | |
| Band adds to experience | | | |
| Marching band experience | | | |
| Attend sporting events together | | | |

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| Involvement in clubs/organizations | | | |
| Social interactions relieve stress | | | |
| Participate in activities with friends | | | |
| Meet people through work on campus | | | |
| | | | |
| Upper-class can guide freshmen | | People are friendly and welcoming, while upper-class students can provide guidance to freshmen as they adjust to college life. | |
| People are friendly | | | |
| People friendly and open | | | |
| Everyone nice | | | |
| Nicer than people back home | | | |
| | | | |
| Rushed fraternity | | Fraternity and sorority life offers an option to meet people and get involved. | |
| Rushed fraternity | | | |
| Spend time at fraternity | | | |
| Rushing sorority to meet people | | | |
| | | | |
| | Living experiences | | |
| Avit LLC support one another | | Aviation living-learning community provides an environment that supports engagement, academic learning, and social interactions. | Living arrangements for aviation students create an environment of support, encouragement, and academic success. |
| LLC students academically support each other | | | |
| LLC students interact socially | | | |
| LLC students with similar interests | | | |
| LLC students all focused in same direction/goals | | | |
| LLC students work together | | | |
| LLC students different personalities but focus on same goal | | | |
| Surrounded by people in same experiences | | | |
| Helpful to be grouped based on major | | | |
| Support each other | | | |

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| academically | | | |
| LLC students have same passion | | | |
| Enjoying LLC | | | |
| LLC helps form connections | | | |
| Learn from each other in LLC | | | |
| LLC provides learning opportunities | | | |
| LLC supports academics | | | |
| LLC creates academic and social environment | | | |
| Independence from parents | | Residence halls prepare students to live on their own through support from one another. | |
| Food is great | | | |
| Campus is inviting | | | |
| Res hall provides social opportunities | | | |
| People in res hall care about each other | | | |
| Enjoy time with RA | | | |
| Selke Hall group chat forms bonds | | | |
| Learned skills to be independent | | | |
| Prepared to be living on own | | | |
| | Connections to family and friends | | |
| Strong | | Connections to family and friends are strong and provide support to aviation student from afar. | Aviation students make connections to family and friends through technology to ease the separation from home. |
| Supported college choice | | | |
| Support from back home | | | |
| Easy because want to stay connected | | | |
| Visit home periodically | | Some students are able to stay connected through visits to home. | |
| Weekend visits | | | |
| Social media helps | | Connecting to family and friends is not | |
| Phone calls and social | | | |

| | | | |
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| media | | difficult with various forms of technology, but different than in person. | |
| Text and social media | | | |
| Phone, text, email | | | |
| Talk at night | | | |
| Texting | | | |
| Send text messages | | | |
| Facetime | | | |
| Not difficult with technology | | | |
| Conversations different than in person | | | |
| Connections throughout week | | Connections throughout the week help ease being separated from home. | |
| Connections to home every week | | | |
| GPS allows connection while flying | | | |
| Difficult being separated from home | | | |
| | Connections to family | | |
| Strong connection | | Aviation students keep strong connections to family. | Frequent connections to family primarily through technology, is a means to stay connected and provide support to the aviation students. |
| Youngest to leave home | | | |
| Brothers are role models | | Aviation students keep connections with siblings. | |
| Brother had come to visit | | | |
| Call and text brothers | | | |
| Text sister | | | |
| Text, Facetime, and talk to sister | | | |
| Call mom every Sunday | | Strong connections with mom and dad with some outreach occurring daily with moms, while dads give students space. | |
| Mom reaches out | | | |
| Mom calls a lot | | | |
| Mom calls daily | | | |
| Mom calls throughout week | | | |
| Mom sends texts everyday | | | |

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| Mom stays connected but gives room | | | |
| Joke with dad about experiences | | | |
| Dad gives space | | | |
| Dad struggling | | | |
| Dad accepting, mom struggling | | | |
| Parents support college choice | | | |
| Talk to parents through phone calls | | | |
| Call and text parents | | | |
| Facetime parents | | | |
| Connect with parents regularly | | | |
| Connect with mom on occasion | | | |
| Call mom to talk about flights | | | |
| Mom coming to visit | | | |
| | | | |
| Technology makes connections easier | | Technology systems make connections with family easier. | |
| Through technology and mail | | | |
| Texts, emails, phone calls | | | |
| Facebook, texting, calling | | | |
| Skype, Facebook, and Snapchat | | | |
| Letters from home | | | |
| Care packages | | | |
| Talk at night | | | |
| | | | |
| Try to stay connected to extended family | | Aviation students stay connected with extended family as another support network. | |
| Extended family available when needed | | | |
| Grandparents send mail | | | |
| | | | |
| Distance has strengthened relationship | | Distance provides opportunities and creates obstacles to relationships with people back home. | |
| Distance makes connections different | | | |

| | | | |
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| Parents focused on other things | | | |
| | Connections to friends from home | | |
| Difficult to be separated from friends | | Connect with friends everyday through texts, Snapchat, Skype, Facetime, and gaming. | Aviation students stay connected to a core group of friends from home through various technology systems. |
| Connect everyday | | | |
| Snapchat | | | |
| Snapchat and text | | | |
| Group message through Facebook | | | |
| Text and send videos | | | |
| Skype and gaming | | | |
| Text and Facetime | | | |
| Not as connected | | Core group of friends has faded with limited communication. | |
| Less communication with past friends | | | |
| Core group has faded | | | |
| Only stay connected with close friends | | | |
| Different experiences separate friends | | | |
| | Helpful to know before college | | |
| Connect with roommate before semester begins | | Getting to know roommate prior to college is key to getting along. | Aviation students suggest to use time wisely, be open to meeting others, and prepare for college while still in high school. |
| Get along with roommate | | | |
| Explore textbook prices | | Explore textbook requirements and costs. | |
| Determine textbooks needed | | | |
| Study habits developed on own | | Stay focused and use time wisely to stay ahead of academic expectations. | |
| Don't procrastinate | | | |
| Can't delay studying | | | |
| Amount of study time needed | | | |
| Study in free time | | | |
| Manage free time | | | |

| | | | |
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| Anticipate academic expectations | | | |
| Sit in front row in larger classes | | | |
| Focus to reduce stress | | | |
| Stay ahead of expectations | | | |
| Expect more pressure | | | |
| Stay active in summer | | | |
| Use first semester to adjust | | | |
| | | | |
| Establish healthy sleep schedule | | Develop healthy eating and sleeping habits to promote success. | |
| Stay healthy to enhance learning | | | |
| | | | |
| Plan a schedule for each day | | Use a planner to stay organized and keep a schedule. | |
| Use a planner | | | |
| Organization necessary | | | |
| | | | |
| Anticipate culture shock | | Be patient, friendly, and open in the process of meeting new friends as everyone is attempting to do the same. | |
| People reserved at first | | | |
| Be friendly | | | |
| Getting to know people will be enjoyable | | | |
| Be open to meeting people | | | |
| Takes time to get to know people | | | |
| Create opportunities to meet people | | | |
| Make friends | | | |
| Attend events as a group | | | |
| Need to be flexible | | | |
| Be patient | | | |
| | | | |
| Take college courses in high school | | Prepare for college while still in high school. | |
| Shadow to explore major | | | |
| Figure out internet before arriving | | | |
| Rules about airport | | | |
| | | | |
| | Transition and | | |

| | | | |
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| | experiences | | |
| Personal space is limited | | Need to leave campus to find time for self away from others. | Aviation students focus on personal growth and independence, developing a routine free from distractions, as well as establishing friendships and connections to ease the transition to college life. |
| Need to leave campus to find space | | | |
| Spend time focusing on self | | | |
| Procrastination is difficult to overcome | | Procrastination and time management are barriers to success and establishing a routine. | |
| Worried about distractions from academics | | | |
| Time management necessary | | | |
| Able to manage time better | | | |
| Establish a routine | | | |
| Feeling responsible for self and decisions | | Independence and new responsibilities provide a sense of freedom and personal growth. | |
| Responsible for self now | | | |
| Enjoy freedom | | | |
| More freedom to manage schedule | | | |
| Vehicle provides freedom | | | |
| Enjoy independence | | | |
| Liberating | | | |
| Responsible for self and own decisions | | | |
| Take responsibility and mature | | | |
| Transition from being a kid | | | |
| Transition to adulthood | | | |
| Parents prepared for independence | | | |
| Social experiences ease transition | | Connections and social experiences ease the transition for | |
| Made good connections | | | |

| | | | |
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| with new friends | | new freshmen aviation students. | |
| Everyone trying to make friends | | | |
| Enjoyed the change | | College is an opportunity for positive and exciting changes as well as new beginnings. | |
| Enjoyed new beginnings | | | |
| Excited for new experiences | | | |
| Many new opportunities | | | |
| Trying to determine expectations | | | |
| Not homesick | | | |
| Felt welcomed | | | |
| Positive experiences | | | |
| Enjoy combo of social and academic | | | |
| Appreciate friends focused on same goals | | Students support one another while focused on same goals. | |
| Students support one another | | | |
| Miss comforts of home | | College is a time of ups and downs with new opportunities, experiences, connections, and motivators to succeed. | |
| Didn't immediately love college | | | |
| Navigating campus was strange | | | |
| Campus communication helps to stay connected | | | |
| All freshmen in similar situation | | | |
| First year is difficult for everybody | | | |
| Others expect freshmen lack confidence | | | |
| Enjoy learning | | | |
| Getting involved adds to experiences | | | |
| Looking forward to more experiences | | | |
| Fun roller coaster ride | | | |
| College enjoyable | | | |
| Social barriers redefined | | | |
| Money is a motivator to do well | | | |

Appendix D

Analysis of Data – Undeclared Students at Three Weeks

| Code | Category | Theme | Assertion |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| | Expectations of college | | |
| High parental academic expectations | | Undeclared students expected college to be academically challenging with more studying and preparation required outside of class. | College expectations for undeclared students are full of academic challenges and time management issues, difficulties getting involved and meeting people, as well as an environment that creates independence amidst parties and social activities. |
| Challenging | | | |
| More homework | | | |
| Study a lot | | | |
| More and harder out of class material | | | |
| More academic pressure | | | |
| More academically challenging | | | |
| Difficult academically | | | |
| More difficult classes | | | |
| Go through a routine and get a degree | | | |
| Classes intimidating with upper-class | | | |
| Academic challenges | | | |
| Less pleasant living in res hall | | Undeclared students expected to have difficulties getting involved and meeting people. | |
| No alone time | | | |
| Social challenges | | | |
| Difficult meeting people | | | |
| Difficult making friends | | | |
| Lonely | | | |
| Large and impersonal | | | |
| No time for fun | | | |
| Sports fun to attend | | | |
| Always busy | | Undeclared students expected to always be busy and struggle with managing their time. | |
| Struggle with time management | | | |
| Way to mature on | | Undeclared students | |

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| own | | anticipated college to be an environment that fosters independence. | |
| Become independent | | | |
| Different than high school | | | |
| Like portrayed in the movies | | Undeclared students expected college life to be full of parties and friendships as portrayed in the movies. | |
| To resemble movies; more parties than academics | | | |
| More parties | | | |
| Parties and friends | | | |
| To use laptop as seen on TV | | | |
| | College experiences as occurred | | |
| Hang out on floor in res hall | | The residence halls are a place to meet, get to know, and spend time with others. | Undeclared students enjoy the campus environment as a place to interact social and academically with others, establish new friendships, gain independence and learn to use time wisely to stay focused. |
| RA available for guidance | | | |
| Fun hanging out with friends | | | |
| Gotten to know roommate | | | |
| Love roommate | | | |
| Meet people in residence hall | | | |
| Interact with people through food | | Interactions with people occur over meals, social activities, and in class. | |
| Connect with people through activities | | | |
| Participate in social activities | | | |
| Met people in classes | | | |
| Interact with classmates | | | |
| Met many people | | Undeclared students have met and continue to enjoy making friends with people from different places. | |
| Still meeting new people | | | |
| People open to meeting others | | | |
| Many acquaintances but not close friends | | | |
| Challenge self to meet | | | |

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| people | | | |
| Challenge to get involved | | | |
| Everyone in same situation | | | |
| Made friends from different places | | | |
| Enjoy meeting different kinds of people | | | |
| Enjoying college experience | | Undeclared students are enjoying and getting used to the college experience as their home away from home. | |
| Getting used to college life | | | |
| Consider college to be home | | | |
| Fun and enjoyable | | | |
| Enjoyed Welcome Weekend activities | | | |
| Joined club | | | |
| More activities to get involved | | | |
| Not scary | | | |
| Need to study out of class | | Undeclared students recognize the need to study and learn on their own in order to stay ahead and do well academically. | |
| Material goes faster | | | |
| Always busy | | | |
| Read more | | | |
| Reading is rigorous | | | |
| More homework | | | |
| Stay ahead and will do well | | | |
| Assignments take longer | | | |
| Academic expectations manageable if stay focused | | | |
| Have to stay motivated to do homework | | | |
| Study groups motivate focus | | | |
| Study during free time | | | |
| Learning on own | | | |

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| Time management is important | | Undeclared students recognize the importance of taking responsibility to manage their own time and schedule to reduce procrastination. | |
| Reduced procrastination | | | |
| Use time wisely | | | |
| Budget time | | | |
| Have to manage own time | | | |
| Manage own schedule | | | |
| Free time can be distracting | | | |
| Stressful in the beginning | | | |
| Exhausting but fun | | Undeclared students use social time with friends to stay academically motivated and complete homework. | |
| Hang out and do homework with friends | | | |
| Friends help to stay academically motivated | | | |
| | College experiences different than expected | | |
| Study time difficult to find | | Undeclared students didn't expect as much ungraded, independent work required for classes, but did expect classes to be in larger lecture halls. | Undeclared students anticipated larger lecture classes, an opportunity to meet people, less free time, and experience challenges to change in their new environment. |
| More independent work | | | |
| Expected lecture halls | | | |
| Expected larger classes | | | |
| Didn't expect such large classes | | | |
| Learning to use more technology | | | |
| Most college work not graded | | | |
| More tests and quizzes in high school | | | |
| More hands on work in high school | | | |
| Expected to be meeting people but haven't yet | | Some undeclared students have met many people and | |

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| Meeting so many people | | established relationships, while others expected to, but have not. | |
| Establish relationships early on | | | |
| More free time than expected | | Undeclared students have a more relaxed and open schedule with free time then they expected. | |
| Open schedule easier than expected | | | |
| More relaxed | | | |
| Sleep more | | | |
| Change is difficult | | Change is difficult and challenging being in a new environment. | |
| Change is challenging | | | |
| Didn't want to attend college | | | |
| Confusing to navigate campus | | | |
| Media doesn't portray true picture of college | | Expectations not as anticipated based on what is depicted in the media. | |
| Seems surreal | | | |
| Not what expected but not disappointed | | | |
| | Class experiences | | |
| As difficult as AP | | Undeclared students have found college classes to be challenging, faster paced, and requiring more outside effort based on the workload. | Undeclared student classroom experiences are challenging yet enjoyable, require more online work than anticipated, and provide an opportunity to explore options for possible major declaration. |
| Challenging | | | |
| Rise to expectations | | | |
| Difficult | | | |
| Faster paced | | | |
| Cover more material | | | |
| More in depth | | | |
| More workload | | | |
| Need to put more effort in | | | |
| English frustrating | | | |
| Require more outside work | | | |
| Have to teach self from book and lecture notes | | | |
| Must develop ways to learn | | | |
| Learning a lot | | Undeclared students are learning much, | |
| Interesting subjects | | | |

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| Interactive | | enjoy their classroom experiences, and have settled in and feel comfortable. | |
| Easier than expected | | | |
| Enjoy classroom experiences | | | |
| Enjoy most classes | | | |
| Enjoy going to them | | | |
| Manageable | | | |
| Comfortable | | | |
| Settled into classes | | | |
| Want to go to class | | | |
| Set goals and ask questions | | | |
| Not difficult | | | |
| Helpful for other classes | | | |
| Not scared to go to class | | | |
| Taking classes of interest | | Undeclared students take courses of interest to explore options which ultimately determine major choice. | |
| Basic classes to explore | | | |
| Taking general courses to explore | | | |
| Varied because undeclared | | | |
| Experiences influence major choice | | | |
| Costs influence major choice | | | |
| Exploring options | | | |
| Like class sizes | | Undeclared students prefer smaller classes to larger lectures which are overwhelming and limit one-on-one interactions. | |
| Enjoy smaller classes | | | |
| Can interact more in small classes | | | |
| More one-on-one in smaller classes | | | |
| Difficult to hide in small classes | | | |
| Sit by same people to get to know them | | | |
| Small to lecture bowl | | | |
| Sit in front row of lecture bowl | | | |
| Need to adjust to lecture classes | | | |

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| Overwhelmed if all lectures | | | |
| Would need resources if all lectures | | | |
| Easier to skip a lecture course | | | |
| Bigger than graduating class | | | |
| Big classes limit one-on-one | | | |
| Some courses resemble high school | | | |
| Expected to use online materials | | Undeclared students have experienced more online work and new and different college classroom designs than expected. | |
| More online work than expected | | | |
| Didn't anticipate online expectations | | | |
| New classroom designs | | | |
| | Professors | | |
| Want to connect with students | | Professors want to connect with students, are willing to help, and create interesting classroom experiences to promote learning. | Undeclared students appreciate the opportunity to form relationships with professors and find them knowledgeable and approachable to offer assistance and guidance. |
| Like having a connection with | | | |
| Make classes interesting | | | |
| Helpful | | | |
| ND nice | | | |
| Friendly | | | |
| Approachable | | | |
| Understanding of athlete's schedule | | | |
| Willing to help | | | |
| From different backgrounds | | | |
| Getting to know them | | Professors aren't intimidating or demanding once a relationship is established. | |
| Not scary once know them | | | |
| Thought would be intimidating | | | |
| Thought would be demanding | | | |

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| Knowledgeable | | Professors are knowledgeable and connected to the subject in which they teach. | |
| Connected to subject | | | |
| Have own teaching style | | | |
| | Resources | | |
| Rely on other students and not just family | | Undeclared students use other students and family along with campus resources to be successful. | Campus supports as well as other students and family members can serve as resources to ensure success. |
| Use campus resources to be successful | | | |
| | High school preparation for college classes | | |
| Would have liked more preparation | | Undeclared students would have appreciated more preparation in high school for college classes. | More preparation while in high school would have prepared the undeclared students to be intellectually ready for college. |
| Didn't think intellectually ready for college | | | |
| | Connections with other students | | |
| No one to call close friend | | Undeclared students haven't made many close friends. | Undeclared students make connections with others through academics, activities and involvement opportunities, similar interests as well as residence hall and dining experiences which all provide a level of comfort to their overall experiences. |
| Only small talk with new friends | | | |
| Haven't made many good friends | | | |
| Didn't anticipate would fit in | | | |
| Hang out with many people | | Undeclared students enjoy meeting people and making connections through spontaneous interactions and spending time with people with similar | |
| College expectation is to meet people | | | |
| Meet people randomly and find common interest | | | |
| Making connections is | | | |

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| spontaneous | | interests. | |
| Make connections by reaching out | | | |
| Meet people by talking to them | | | |
| Get to know people through small talk | | | |
| Hang out | | | |
| Goof off | | | |
| Enjoy interacting with people | | | |
| Enjoy meeting new people with similarities | | | |
| Enjoy time with friends | | | |
| New friends like family | | | |
| Everyone open to making new friends | | | |
| Hang out instead of hide | | | |
| Met roommate and suitemates first | | Roommate and suitemate relationships can be positive and negative experiences. | |
| Bonded with roommate first weekend | | | |
| Difficult roommate experiences unanticipated | | | |
| Awkward interactions with roommate | | | |
| Get along well with roommate met on Facebook | | | |
| Attend campus activities with roommate | | | |
| Meet people through others | | | |
| Go out to eat with people | | Food and dining experiences bring students together. | |
| Meet people in dining center | | | |

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| Plan to get involved to meet more people | | Involvement in clubs, organizations, and athletics bring students together and provide an opportunity to meet people. | |
| Participate in activities with people | | | |
| Meet friends through activities | | | |
| Get involved in activities with others | | | |
| Attend sporting events together | | | |
| Enjoy attending sporting events with others | | | |
| Advice from brother to get involved | | | |
| Participate in club sport helps to meet people | | | |
| Instant family through athletics | | | |
| Support other athletes | | | |
| | | | |
| Hang out with classmates outside of class | | The classroom environment as well as academic interactions outside of class provide opportunities for undeclared students to meet and support others. | |
| Met most people in classes | | | |
| Classmates share different perspectives | | | |
| Most interactions are in class | | | |
| Get together with people to do homework | | | |
| Help each other with studies | | | |
| Talk about homework as focus | | | |
| | | | |
| Met a lot of fun people | | Undeclared students enjoy meeting people and making connections which add a level of comfort. | |
| Enjoy meeting people | | | |
| Making connections is interesting and fun | | | |
| More comfortable meeting people | | | |
| Better at starting | | | |

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| conversations | | | |
| Nice to see friendly face | | | |
| Welcoming | | | |
| Connect with people who share common experiences | | Undeclared students connect and interact with people who share common experiences and interests and want to make friends. | |
| Talk to people about interests | | | |
| Meet people with similar interests | | | |
| Everyone wants to make friends | | | |
| Everyone going through same experiences | | | |
| New freshmen want to make friends | | | |
| Everyone like a family | | | |
| Joining sorority to get involved | | Fraternity and sorority life is a way to make connections and get involved. | |
| Joining sorority will provide connections | | | |
| Plan to join a sorority | | | |
| Rushing topic of conversations | | | |
| | Living experiences | | |
| Meeting people feels more like home | | The residence halls provide a place for many different people to meet and connect in a comfortable environment. | Undeclared students appreciate the opportunities they get to meet different types of people in the comfort of their residence hall experiences. |
| Meet people from different places | | | |
| Connect with people on different levels | | | |
| | Connections to family and friends | | |
| Phones and technology | | Technology and social media provide an opportunity for undeclared students to connect every day with family and friends. | Technology and social media allow undeclared students to stay the most connected to family and friends they are closest to. |
| Connect every day through technology | | | |
| Call or text | | | |
| Facetime and texts | | | |
| Post on Facebook | | | |

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| Social media | | | |
| Go home occasionally | | Long distance relationships are challenging, so undeclared students stay in contact with family and friends they are closest to. | |
| Would appreciate going home for afternoon | | | |
| Go home to visit family often | | | |
| Split time visiting family and friends | | | |
| Strange to be separated | | | |
| Connect with those closest to | | | |
| Long distance relationships difficult | | | |
| Challenging | | | |
| | Connections to family | | |
| Family supportive | | Connections and support from family are through the phone, with stronger and more frequent contact with mom than with dad. | Undeclared students use technology to stay connected with family on a frequent basis. |
| Facetime with family several times a day | | | |
| Family calls everyday | | | |
| Call parents every Sunday | | | |
| Talk to parents every Sunday | | | |
| Parents text every morning | | | |
| Text mom frequently | | | |
| Talk to mom everyday | | | |
| Talk to mom on phone everyday | | | |
| Call mom several times a week | | | |
| Mom supportive and letting go | | | |
| Talk to dad once a week | | | |
| Seldom talk to dad | | | |
| Call grandma when lonely | | Grandparents play a support role through phone calls and visits. | |
| Talk to grandparents few times a week | | | |
| Go to grandma's house on weekends | | | |

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| Talk with sister | | Frequent contacts are made with siblings through technology to stay connected. | |
| Text sister everyday | | | |
| Snap and text sister | | | |
| Talk and game with brother | | | |
| Strange not seeing brother every day | | | |
| Brother going to college close by so can support one another | | | |
| | Connections to friends from home | | |
| Text, call, Skype | | Connections with friends from home are through phone calls, text messages, Snapchat, and the web. | Undeclared students use technology to stay connected with friends from home. |
| Text occasionally | | | |
| Call friends randomly | | | |
| Snapchat best friend daily | | | |
| Snap and text | | | |
| High school group message | | | |
| Through web | | | |
| Designate time | | | |
| | Helpful to know before college | | |
| More about what's available on campus | | Undeclared students would have liked to have known more about the campus environment and preparation for being a member of the community. | Undeclared students recognize the need to explore campus prior to arrival, that meeting people will be difficult, and taking responsibility for social and academic expectations is necessary to adjust to college life. |
| Explore campus more through website | | | |
| Learn to use technology systems | | | |
| School supplies change | | | |
| Extracurricular activities available | | | |
| Size of campus and freshman class | | | |
| Okay to be nervous to meet roommate | | Meeting people can be challenging, but can also ease the transition to college life. | |
| Meeting people eases the transition | | | |
| Challenge self to meet new people | | | |

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| Not everyone open to making friends | | | |
| Don't get much sleep | | College students need to take responsibility for themselves, recognize lifestyle changes, and adjust to academic expectations. | |
| Have own schedule to manage | | | |
| Anticipate amount of reading | | | |
| | Transition and experiences | | |
| Practicing success tips from brother | | Undeclared students have enjoyed the independence and personal experiences of college life as well as appreciated the advice from others in their transition. | Separation from family and friends as well as limited personal space and time management can be challenging, but independence, involvement, and academic opportunities have assisted the undeclared students in the college transition process. |
| Appreciated an older sibling to provide advice | | | |
| Positive transition | | | |
| Enjoy the freedom | | | |
| Enjoy independence | | | |
| Enjoy college life | | | |
| Like college life | | | |
| Enjoy personal experience | | | |
| Excited to experience college life | | | |
| Can stay without going home | | | |
| Like the community atmosphere | | Undeclared students look forward to getting involved and the community atmosphere that is created. | |
| Looking forward to getting involved | | | |
| Important to get involved | | | |
| Excited to go to classes | | Undeclared students enjoy learning and recognize the need to manage their time to better prepare for the adjustments to college life. | |
| Set goals to stay positive | | | |
| Enjoy learning | | | |
| Always something to get done | | | |
| Need to learn to manage time | | | |
| Managing time better | | | |

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| Getting more comfortable with schedule | | | |
| Scheduling time is beneficial to success | | | |
| Managing schedule is an adjustment | | | |
| Adjusted to college life | | | |
| Helped others adjust to college life | | | |
| Can better prepare with a planner | | | |
| | | | |
| Difficult first two weeks | | Sharing space and separation from family and friends are challenges in the first two weeks. | |
| Miss family and friends | | | |
| Sharing space is difficult | | | |

Appendix E

Analysis of Data – Aviation Students at Eight Weeks

| Codes | Categories | Themes | Assertions |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--|--|
| | College Expectations | | |
| Busy | | Aviation students expected that their academic life would be busy and more challenging at this point in the semester | Aviation students expected academic challenges, established in their routine, and have found a balance between academic and social life. |
| Classes to become more demanding | | | |
| More difficult at this point | | | |
| To still feel nervous | | | |
| | | | |
| To be establishing routine | | They anticipated having a routine established. | |
| Comfortable with a routine | | | |
| Established a routine | | | |
| Familiar with campus | | | |
| | | | |
| Adjusted to workload | | Expected to be adjusted to workload and able to balance academic and social life. | |
| Adjusted to academic expectations | | | |
| Balance academic and social | | | |
| Adjusted to academic and social life | | | |
| Getting more involved | | | |
| | | | |
| | Academic Experiences | | |
| Feel good about commitment | | Aviation students are putting in more effort to stay ahead of expectations. | An aviation major is demanding and requires effort and commitment to obtain the expected B average. |
| Stay ahead of expectations | | | |
| Putting more effort into homework | | | |
| | | | |
| Expecting a B+ average | | Determining grades can be difficult to find in several different | |
| Anticipate B-C grades | | | |

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| Expect A-B range | | online systems, but aviation students expect a B average. | |
| Need to put in effort to maintain B average | | | |
| Uncertain of grades | | | |
| Have to search several online systems to find grades | | | |
| Have to check 3 online systems to find grades | | | |
| Grades available online | | | |
| Feedback on homework and tests | | | |
| Can ask about progress from professor | | | |
| Can ask for grades | | | |
| Professors available for help | | | |
| | | | |
| Academically demanding major | | Their major is academically demanding and becoming increasingly more challenging. | |
| Those in same major understand academic struggles | | | |
| Fell behind as semester progressed | | | |
| Dropped a course to refocus on others | | | |
| College courses more accelerated | | | |
| Courses interesting but not challenging | | | |
| Classes are challenging | | | |
| Academics getting more difficult | | | |
| Classes increasingly more difficult | | | |
| Increase as semester progresses | | | |
| College courses cover more material | | | |
| Procrastination not productive | | | |
| Focus on academics | | | |
| Need to develop | | | |

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| discipline to focus on academics | | | |
| Need to be academically self-motivated | | | |
| Learning teaching styles of professors | | | |
| | | | |
| | Social Experiences | | |
| Fraternity consumes a lot of time | | Commitment to a fraternity consumes time in their life. | Aviation students form bonds with those who have similar interests, such as those who live in the residence halls, a member of fraternity, and through activities and organizations. |
| Life revolves around Fraternity | | | |
| | | | |
| Spend time socializing with friends | | Aviation students spend time socializing with friends in the residence halls and participating together in activities and organizations. | |
| Enjoy time with friends | | | |
| Spend time socializing in the residence halls | | | |
| Hang out on wing | | | |
| Continue to meet people through activities | | | |
| Attend athletic activities with friends | | | |
| Involved in variety of clubs and organizations | | | |
| Getting to know others through involvement | | | |
| Joined organizations | | | |
| Have a lot of free time | | | |
| | | | |
| | Academic and Social Management | | |
| Prioritize with academic coming before social | | Aviation students find it challenging to balance academic and social life, but recognize that academics come before social | |
| Prioritize to balance social and academic | | | |
| Priority is academics | | | |
| Need to focus on | | | |

| | | | |
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| academic before social | | activities. | |
| Schedule academic before social time | | | |
| Focus on academics but make time for social | | | |
| Academic and social priorities reversed right now | | | |
| Social life more popular than studying | | | |
| Challenging to balance | | | |
| Need to self-discipline to balance | | | |
| Social life interferes with academics | | | |
| | | | |
| | Relationships with Others | | |
| Fraternity members like real brothers | | Fraternity life is a positive means to build relationships with others. | Aviation students have developed strong relationships with a select group of students, in both fraternity and residence hall life. |
| Established stronger relationships with Fraternity members | | | |
| Fraternity brotherhood is positive | | | |
| Interact with upper-class in Fraternity | | | |
| Getting to know Fraternity brothers | | | |
| | | | |
| Res hall friends go own ways | | Residence halls help establish relationships with others. | |
| People in Res hall like family | | | |
| Strong relationships in res hall | | | |
| | | | |
| Stronger and smaller friend groups formed | | Stronger relationships built with smaller friend groups. | |
| Strong relationships with select girls | | | |
| Many acquaintances but not best friends | | | |
| Lots of acquaintances with more limited stronger friendships | | | |

| | Challenges | | |
|--|--------------|---|--|
| Time management | | Time management and developing study habits has been challenging for Aviation students. | Time management, developing study habits, and establishing independence are struggles for Aviation students. |
| Study habits | | | |
| Developing study habits | | | |
| Independence | | Becoming more independent has been difficult for Aviation students. | |
| Becoming more independent | | | |
| Moving away from home and meeting new people | | | |
| Homesick | | | |
| | Changes Made | | |
| Started a job | | Aviation students have made positive changes to their study habits. | Aviation students have made positive changes to their study habits. |
| Found distraction free places to study | | | |
| Study habits increased | | | |
| Joined a Fraternity | | | |
| Interact with professors | | | |
| | Transition | | |
| Trying to focus to finish strong | | Focus, determination, and routine provide motivation to manage new challenges and opportunities and transition from high school to college. | |
| Quality education improves outlook | | | |
| Every day is a new challenge and opportunity | | | |
| Established a routine to manage transition | | | |
| From high schooler to college guy | | | |
| New relationships in a new environment | | | |

Appendix F

Analysis of Data – Undeclared Students at Eight Weeks

| Codes | Categories | Themes | Assertions |
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| | Expectations of College | | |
| Being able to manage unique experiences | | Expected to adjust to new experiences, adjust socially, and excel academically. | Undeclared students expected to adjust to manage new experiences, adapt socially, and excel academically. |
| Anticipated homesickness | | | |
| Expected to adjust socially | | | |
| Expected to get good grades | | | |
| Academics to be getting more difficult | | | |
| More tests | | | |
| More stress | | | |
| Establishing a routine | | | |
| Higher expectations | | | |
| | Academic Experiences | | |
| Have to work harder academically | | Classes, academic expectations, and workload have gotten more difficult if not focused. | Academic workload as well as professor expectations have gotten more difficult for the undeclared population, however, improved study habits, and use of a planner and campus resources helps to stay focused. |
| Classes have gotten more difficult | | | |
| Classes more difficult | | | |
| Increased academic expectations | | | |
| Adjusting to demanding workload | | | |
| Need to stay focused to excel | | | |
| Need to know own abilities | | | |
| Focused on studying | | Undeclared students recognize the need to improve study habits and use campus resources. | |
| Need to focus on study habits | | | |
| Need to improve study habits | | | |
| Binge studying doesn't work | | | |

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| Formed study groups | | | |
| Need to improve test taking ability | | | |
| Use campus resources | | | |
| Prefer smaller classes to lectures | | Undeclared students feel intimidated in large lecture courses, so prefer smaller classes. | |
| Feel intimidated in large lecture courses | | | |
| Professors have straight forward expectations | | Undeclared students recognize that professors expect students to take responsibility for their own learning. | |
| Professors expect students to take responsibility | | | |
| Professors expect students to be responsible for learning | | | |
| Use a planner and keep it current | | Using a planner helps undeclared students stay organized and focused on goals. | |
| Stay organized to keep on track | | | |
| Organization necessary to stay focused | | | |
| Difficult to stay focused | | | |
| End goal helps to focus | | | |
| Expect good grades | | Undeclared students expect above average grades, but do have a concept of how well they are doing academically. | |
| Expect better than average grades | | | |
| Don't know what grades are | | | |
| Not many grades in system yet | | | |
| Not many grades posted | | | |
| Grades online but difficult to identify | | | |
| Class websites difficult to manage | | | |

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| | Social Experiences | | |
| Have made good friends and found a niche | | Undeclared students have made friends and found a niche through positive social interactions. | |
| Made more friends | | | |
| Dress not important anymore | | | |
| Positive social experiences | | | |
| Important to interact with people | | | |
| | | | |
| Joined a sorority | | Undeclared students have joined Greek organizations which takes much of their social time. | |
| Greek life events expected | | | |
| Sorority life is time consuming | | | |
| | | | |
| Involvement enhances ability to meet people | | Involvement in clubs and organizations as well as attending sporting events enhances their ability to meet people and experience social life. | |
| Meet people through extra-curricular activities | | | |
| Attend sporting events | | | |
| Joined organization | | | |
| Experiencing different activities | | | |
| Can't just focus on academics | | | |
| | | | |
| | Academic and Social Management | | |
| Have to balance academic and social life | | Undeclared students recognize a need to balance academic and social experiences. | |
| Struggling to balance | | | |
| Mix of academic and social activities | | | |
| Focus on academic and social experiences | | | |
| | | | |
| | Relationships with Others | | |
| Friendships not deep yet | | Many acquaintances and a few close friends. | Undeclared students continue to have many acquaintances and not |
| A few close friends | | | |

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| and many acquaintances | | | deep friendships with a select group. |
| Friendships have grown deeper | | Friendships have grown deeper and are becoming genuine with a smaller group of people. | |
| Friend groups like family | | | |
| Friend groups have gotten smaller | | | |
| Friendships becoming genuine | | | |
| Choose your friends in college | | | |
| Making connections with upper-class | | Close relationships with sorority sisters. | |
| Closer to sorority sisters than others | | | |
| Have made connections with classmates | | Undeclared students make connections with classmates and some professors. | |
| Made connections with professors | | | |
| Building relationships with professors too time consuming | | | |
| Lack relationships with professors | | | |
| | Challenges | | |
| Focus on physical health | | Undeclared students focus on physical and healthy eating options. | Undeclared students focus on healthy habits, while struggling with separation from home, time management, and independence. |
| Stay physically active | | | |
| Choose healthy eating options | | | |
| | | | |
| Miss friends from home | | Undeclared students struggle with separation from home. | |
| Missing friends from home | | | |
| More homesick than before | | | |
| Separation from home | | | |
| Going home is difficult because of | | | |

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| distance | | | |
| Time management | | Time management and independence are challenges for undeclared students. | |
| Managing time | | | |
| Learn to manage time | | | |
| Need to manage self, based on expectations | | | |
| Avoid procrastination | | | |
| Focus on present | | | |
| Difficult to live with someone | | | |
| | Changes | | |
| Adjusted to schedule | | Undeclared students have adjusted to a routine, established a schedule, and are able to navigate the campus. | Undeclared students have adjusted to a routine, established a schedule, and are able to navigate the campus. |
| Developed study schedule | | | |
| Have a routine | | | |
| Established a routine | | | |
| Adjusted to getting around campus | | | |
| | Transitions | | |
| Pleased with college choice | | Undeclared students are happy with their college choice and are having positive experiences. | Undeclared students are happy with their college choice and are having positive experiences. |
| Happy with experiences | | | |
| Positive college experiences | | | |

Appendix G

Analysis of Data – Aviation Students at 13 Weeks

| Codes | Categories | Themes | Assertions |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|---|--|
| | College Expectations | | |
| Adjusted academically | | Aviation students expected to be adjusted to the academic expectations at this point in the semester and have established a routine. | Aviation students expected to be adjusted academically and socially, and used to the independence of college life. |
| Adjusted to academic expectations | | | |
| Focused academically | | | |
| Academic rigor | | | |
| Academic challenges | | | |
| More academically stable | | | |
| To have a routine | | | |
| Meeting new people | | Aviation students expected to be adjusted to the new experiences and independence while meeting new people. | |
| New experiences | | | |
| Adjusted to independence | | | |
| | Enjoyed Academically | | |
| Adjusted to classes | | Aviation students are adjusted to and enjoy courses focused on their major and the support they receive in the living-learning community. | Aviation students have adjusted well to their major courses and are satisfied with their academic achievements. |
| Courses are major specific | | | |
| Focus on major | | | |
| Enjoy major specific courses | | | |
| LLC provides academic support network | | | |
| Accomplishments are satisfying | | Aviation students are pleased with their academic accomplishments. | |
| Enjoy learning | | | |
| Pleased with academic achievements | | | |
| | Enjoyed Socially | | |
| Meeting people and making new friends | | Aviation students enjoy meeting new people | Aviation students enjoy the |

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| New people are now closest friends | | and making new friends while adjusting to living together. | opportunities to meet new people as well as the independence of college life. |
| Living in residence halls with friends | | | |
| Adjusting to living with friends | | | |
| Attending sporting events | | Aviation students enjoy free time and the independence of college life. | |
| Free time | | | |
| Freedom | | | |
| Feel settled in | | | |
| Enjoy independence | | | |
| Enjoying the independence | | | |
| Learning about self | | | |
| | Academic Challenges | | |
| Motivation | | Aviation students recognize that motivation is necessary for academic success. | Aviation students realize that motivation and focus are necessary for academic success. |
| Staying motivated | | | |
| Confident in ability, just need motivation | | | |
| Self-learning is a challenge | | | |
| Dropped a course to focus on others | | Academic challenges have altered their first semester outcomes and adjustments and focus needed for next semester. | |
| 200 level course too difficult | | | |
| Learning from academic challenges | | | |
| Use academic experiences to prepare for next semester | | | |
| Stressed academically | | | |
| Classes require more focus | | | |
| Workload | | | |
| Don't like academic aspect of college | | | |
| Recognize purpose of academic work | | | |
| Focus on academics before social | | | |
| Switch focus from making friends to | | | |

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| academics | | | |
| College more than academics | | | |
| | | | |
| | Social Challenges | | |
| Relationships become routine | | Aviation students experience difficulties in managing time, independence, and balance between social and academic expectations. | Aviation students experience difficulties in managing time, independence, and balance between social and academic expectations. |
| Independent decision making | | | |
| College assumes can handle independence | | | |
| Managing own time | | | |
| Time management | | | |
| Need to manage time better | | | |
| Time management is difficult | | | |
| More going on than just classes | | | |
| Difficult to balance social, academic, and healthy choices | | | |
| | | | |
| | Relationships with Others | | |
| A few close friends and wider friend group | | Aviation students have many friendships that have developed stronger with a smaller group of people. | Friendships have formed and gotten stronger with small groups of people and those in Greek life. |
| Good friends with a group | | | |
| Stronger relationships with a few | | | |

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| Unique friendships with suitemates | | | |
| Many acquaintances | | | |
| Have many friends on campus | | | |
| Continue to improve friendships | | | |
| | | | |
| Met new people through fraternity | | Fraternity and sorority life is a means for aviation students to get to know others. | |
| Standards of sorority are guides to live by | | | |
| Getting to know fraternity members | | | |

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| Time spent with fraternity members | | | |
| | | | |
| | Relationships with Family and Friends | | |
| Relationship with family built on trust | | Relationships with family are close and built on trust. | Aviation students maintain strong relationships with family and closest friends through the use of social media and technology, but also ready to go home. |
| Maintaining relationships | | | |
| Close ties to family and friends | | | |
| Parents give space | | | |
| | | | |
| Talk to parents frequently | | Connect with family and friends through social media and technology. | |
| Talk to parents throughout week | | | |
| Talk to parents throughout the week | | | |
| Easily stay connected through social media | | | |
| Use social media to stay connected | | | |
| Stay in contact with closest friends | | | |
| Connect with friends frequently | | | |
| Stay in contact with friends through social media | | | |
| | | | |
| Ready to go home | | Aviation students are ready to go home. | |
| Only homesick after going home | | | |
| | | | |
| | Advice to New Freshmen | | |
| Focus academically from the beginning | | Aviation students advise to focus on academics right away to stay ahead academically. | |
| Focus on homework right away | | | |
| Go to class and focus academically | | | |
| Focus on school | | | |
| Stay ahead academically | | | |
| Stay focused and | | | |

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| don't give up | | | |
| Limit distractions | | | |
| Take college courses in high school to build confidence | | | |
| Make friends before groups form | | Aviation students encourage establishing friendships before groups form, making it more difficult to meet people. | |
| Difficult to meet people when groups form | | | |
| Get involved right away | | | |
| Use the bus system | | College is a time of adjustment, so aviation students advise to use resources to help with the confusion. | |
| Explore professors before take courses from them | | | |
| College is a time of adjustment | | | |
| Freshman confusion | | | |
| | Experiences and Transition | | |
| New challenges but adjusting | | Aviation students recognize the challenges, adjustments, and that college is a learning process, so with focus, confidence and the use of resources, they will be successful. | Aviation students realize that college is built on challenges and adjustments, developing time management skills and forming relationships, and are enjoying their experiences and opportunities. |
| Feel adjusted to college life | | | |
| College is a learning process | | | |
| First semester is a time for adjustment | | | |
| Time for growth and development in a safe environment | | | |
| Focus and confidence and will be successful | | | |
| Using resources for help | | | |
| Help from upper-class | | | |
| College experiences don't seem real | | Aviation students are getting into the | |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Gone by quickly | | college routine, adjusting to managing their schedule, and recognizing how quickly time is going. | |
| Time going quickly | | | |
| First semester went by fast | | | |
| Getting into college routine | | | |
| Able to manage schedule | | | |
| Adjusted to managing time | | | |
| Use a planner to manage time | | | |
| Academics heavy from the beginning | | | |
| | | | |
| Difficult meeting new people | | Aviation students meet people through involvement. | |
| Meeting different people through involvement | | | |
| | | | |
| Enjoy college experiences | | Aviation students are enjoying their college experiences and opportunities. | |
| Positive transition | | | |
| Love the opportunities | | | |

Appendix H

Analysis of Data – Undeclared Students at 13 Weeks

| Codes | Categories | Themes | Assertions |
|--|----------------------|--|--|
| | College Expectations | | |
| Adjusted to college life | | Expected to be adjusted to college life, with a routine in place and know professor expectations. | Expected to be adjusted to college life, with a routine in place and know professor expectations. |
| Routine in place | | | |
| Know professor expectations | | | |
| How to manage time | | | |
| Friends established | | | |
| | College Experiences | | |
| Feel comfortable | | Feel comfortable and adjusted to the freedom and independence. | Undeclared students feel more comfortable with the freedom of college life as their schedules get busier and they recognize a need to adjust their study habits. |
| Starting to feel comfortable | | | |
| Adjusted to freedom and independence | | | |
| Enjoy the independence | | | |
| Enjoy the freedom | | | |
| Busy | | Becoming busier and more focus is placed on establishing better study and sleep habits. | |
| Stressful as semester ends | | | |
| Studying more | | | |
| Positive changes to study habits | | | |
| Established better sleep schedule | | | |
| | Enjoyed Academically | | |
| Comprehending the material throughout the semester | | Undeclared students have established a schedule and routine which positively influence study habits and time management. | Undeclared students have settled into a routine, promoting study habits, time management, and their overall academic progress |
| Established study groups | | | |
| Have established a schedule and routine | | | |

| | | | |
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| Study habits and time management have gotten better | | | and performance. |
| Have a handle on things | | | |
| Doing well is rewarding | | Undeclared students feel good about their academic progress and performance. | |
| Pleased with academic performance | | | |
| Declared a major | | | |
| | Enjoyed Socially | | |
| Appreciate the independence and relaxed atmosphere | | Spending time with new friends is refreshing, in a relaxed atmosphere. | |
| Attending sporting events | | | |
| Spending time with friends | | | |
| Meeting new people | | | |
| Refreshing to meet new people | | | |
| | Academic Challenges | | |
| Weather impacting motivation | | Undeclared students recognize the need to stay focused to address the academic challenges. | Academic challenges are addressed with better time management skills. |
| Need to stay academically focused | | | |
| Need to force yourself to study | | | |
| College is difficult | | | |
| Difficult to focus | | | |
| Experience academic struggles | | | |
| Less free time now | | Less free time requires more time management skills. | |
| Relieved survived first semester | | | |
| Time management | | | |
| Focus on declaring a major | | | |
| | Social Challenges | | |
| Weather constrains to campus | | Social challenges varied. | |
| Easy to get sick | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| | Relationships with Others | | |
| Gotten close to athletic team | | Gotten close and made good friends through involvement opportunities. | Undeclared students have made lasting memories with good friends through the strong relationships that have been built. |
| Made good friends in a sorority | | | |
| Appreciate opportunity to meet new people | | Friendships have changed over the semester to become stronger where people care for one another and make memories with each other. | |
| People care for one another | | | |
| Support system established | | | |
| Will be sad to leave college friends over break | | | |
| Strong friendships have formed | | | |
| Friendships grow fast and deeper | | | |
| Friendships change over the semester | | | |
| Making memories | | | |
| | Relationships with Family and Friends | | |
| Family reaches out | | Undeclared students continue to have strong relationships with family and friends. | Relationships with family have stayed the same and the undeclared students are looking forward to going home. |
| Connections through phone and text | | | |
| Text and talk to stay connected | | | |
| Text best friend daily | | | |
| Family relationships are great | | | |
| Realize importance of family | | | |
| Family relationships have stayed the same | | | |
| Relationships with siblings stronger | | | |
| Relationships with friends have changed | | Relationships with friends have changed. | |
| Grow apart from some friends | | | |

| | | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|--|
| Miss parents | | Looking forward to end of the semester as an opportunity to see family again. | |
| Miss parents and friends from home | | | |
| Need a break to go home | | | |
| Looking forward to going home | | | |
| Appreciate visits home | | | |
| | | | |
| | Advice | | |
| Lack of time management can hinder academic progress | | Undeclared students recognize the need to focus academically, work hard from the beginning, and take responsibility for themselves. | |
| Study before social activities | | | |
| Get into a study routine early | | | |
| Focus on declaring a major from the beginning | | | |
| Work hard from the beginning | | | |
| Pace yourself | | | |
| Use a planner to stay organized | | | |
| Talk to professors | | | |
| Take responsibility for yourself | | | |
| Find a good roommate | | | |
| | | | |
| | Experiences and Transition | | |
| Enjoyed opportunity to branch out and meet new people | | Undeclared students have enjoyed the opportunities and challenges of college life. | |
| College experiences are great | | | |
| College provides opportunities for the future | | | |
| College not as scary as anticipated | | | |
| Enjoying college life | | | |
| College is a huge step from high school | | | |

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