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A Phenomenological Study of Two-Year College Students' Transition Experiences at a Four-Year Institution

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS'
TRANSITION EXPERIENCES AT A FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership Higher Education

by
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August 2014

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ABSTRACT

Two-year college students experience challenges as they transfer to a four-year institution. To investigate these documented challenges, the present study used Weidman's Model of Undergraduate Socialization (1989) and Deil-Amen's (2011) notion of socio-academic integrative moments to examine these transitions. Specifically, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore the experiences of twelve two-year college students during their transition to a four-year university in the fall 2013. The results include four themes, which were developed through an iterative data analysis process. These emergent themes were: (a) A student's age impacted their transition and social integration, (b) the academic transition was challenging, (c) making connections to the new campus was critical for a successful transition and (d) communication targeted to new transfer students was valuable and important for a successful transition.

DEDICATION

      This body of work would not be possible without the total support and love from

my husband Karl, daughter Karin, son John, and mother Audra McPeak. I dedicate this

dissertation to them and to all who have supported me in my efforts to gain knowledge

about the transfer transition experience. Without their guidance and constant efforts

behind the scenes, the completion of this project would never have occurred.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Two-year college students experience challenges as they transfer to a four-year institution. To investigate these documented challenges, the present study used Weidman's Model of Undergraduate Socialization (1989) and Deil-Amen's (2011) notion of socio-academic integrative moments to examine these transitions. In Chapter One, the role of two-year colleges within the higher education system in the U. S. is reviewed. Included with this review is a brief synopsis of two-year college student demographics, enrollment trends and transition issues two-year college students experience when they transfer in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Chapter One outlines the basis for the present study and provides an overview of the key concepts, terms, and significance of the research as it relates to challenges two-year college transfer students experience when transitioning to a four-year institution. The purpose of the present study and research questions are examined, and assumptions and delimitations of the study are reviewed before Chapter One conclusions are presented.

Students seeking to earn a baccalaureate degree may choose to enroll at a four-year baccalaureate degree-granting institution as soon as they've completed high school. Another option for students is to enroll at a two-year college to complete entry-level college credits before transferring to a four-year college or university. A number of terms are used when discussing college transfer students including 'swirled' 'reverse transfer', lateral transfer' and 'vertical transfer' (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). A college student enrolled in an institution of higher education today may have

started at one school, transferred to another, 'swirled' to yet another, and may even have returned to the original school via 'reverse transfer' (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). College students who transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution are considered 'reverse transfer' students, while students described as having 'swirled' are those who have been enrolled at several institutions and may have enrolled simultaneously at several schools (NSCRC, 2012). The transfer pattern known as 'lateral transfer' occurs when a student transfers between two similar-sized institutions, such as from a two-year to a different two-year school (NSCRC, 2012). A term commonly used to describe the transition that occurs when a student enrolled at a two-year institution transfers to a four-year institution is 'vertical transfer' (NSCRC, 2012).

Students have become more mobile, moving between different educational settings at a rate that has continued to increase. The most recent data from a National Student Clearinghouse Research Center five-year study (2012) indicated that one-third of the students who began postsecondary enrollment in Fall 2006 and remained enrolled or completed a degree by 2011 began their postsecondary enrollment at a different school, indicating students made at least one transfer between higher education institutions during the five-year period (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). Thus, in postsecondary education today, students are moving between institutions and experiencing challenges associated with transitioning between two or more higher education institutions.

Transition challenges impacted student retention and graduation rates (Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara, 2010). Students transferring from a two-year college to a four-year

institution may need additional semesters to complete a degree program and earn a baccalaureate degree. This potential delay in entering the work force after college graduation is relevant to this introduction in that delayed employment equals delayed earnings. From a national and global economic perspective, the need for more college graduates to fill anticipated hiring demands in virtually all fields has continued to increase. Data from a study conducted by Georgetown University Center for Education Research, *The Undereducated American* (2010), pointed to a significant problem regarding the earnings gap between individuals in the United States without a postsecondary credential and those who have completed at least some postsecondary credits. The distance between these two groups has grown rapidly, a gap that measures the difference in earnings over a lifetime for a person who has earned a college degree. Carnevale and Rose (2010) illustrated this when they stated, "not only is higher education a sure return on investment, but access to postsecondary education has become the arbiter of economic success and upward mobility in our society" (p. 10). More recent data has supported the notion that demand for skilled workers in the United States has continued to impact economic outcomes and is tied to educational attainment. Carnevale, Smith and Strohl (2013) provided an in-depth analysis in *Recovery Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020.* Their report discussed macroeconomic forecasts and growth by industry, and estimated the growth of educational demand within occupations. According to the report, 59.0% of all jobs in the United States in 2010 required postsecondary education and training. By estimating the demand for an educated workforce, Carnevale et al. projected that 65.0% of all jobs would require some form of

postsecondary education or training by the year 2020. Even more targeted was their projected demand for workers who had obtained a baccalaureate, "of all jobs in 2020, 24% will require a bachelor's degree" (Carnevale et al., 2013, p. 18).

The U.S. has been under-producing workers with postsecondary education since the 1980s, and the continued shortfall has had a cumulative effect. The shortfall of postsecondary-educated U.S. citizens has increased each year and could reach 20 million by the year 2020 (Carnevale et al. 2013). The widening gap between individuals with some postsecondary credits and those without can be addressed by increasing the number of college students who successfully earn a postsecondary credential. To meet this increasing demand, more students need to be successful in college. If Carnevale et al. (2013) predicted shortfall of educated workers has merit and the projected shortfall continues to increase, the two-year college may now play an even greater role in offering postsecondary education to more individuals in an effort to lessen the economic impact predicted by Carnevale et al. (2013). The two-year college plays an important role in postsecondary education, particularly if the projected demand for skilled workers continues.

The present study examined two-year college transfer students, investigating the process of transition through Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization.

Weidman's original model (1989) was based on research with undergraduates becoming socialized to their academic environment in college. The model was expanded by Weidman, Twale, and Stein in 2001 as inquiry continued into the socialization processes experienced by both undergraduate and graduate students. More recent

scholarship by Holley and Taylor (2009) provided additional modifications to the original model, applying an adapted version of the socialization model to their study of undergraduate student socialization and learning in an on-line environment or program.

Specifically, I used Weidman's model to consider the transition experiences of twelve two-year college students. I also utilized the notion of socio-academic integrative moments, which are defined as specific instances of interaction in which components of academic and social integration are simultaneously combined (Deil-Amen, 2011). I used them to explore how new transfer students become connected academically and socially at the receiving institution. Given the concern for how students become both academically and socially connected to the new institution, this study also investigated how two-year college students developed information networks as they progressed through the socialization process.

The Role of Two-Year Colleges in Higher Education

The two-year college, also known as the community college, plays a vital role in postsecondary education and vocational training in the United States. First established at the turn of the 20th century, two-year colleges (initially called junior colleges) expanded in both numbers and size while carving out a unique niche in the higher education system (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). As an integral part of the higher education system, two-year colleges continued to play an important role in the transition of students into and through the postsecondary enrollment pipeline. As Helm and Cohen (2001) noted, from their beginning over one hundred years ago, two-year colleges have situated the transfer function at the heart of their mission and vision.

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The transfer function, however, is only one of several missions two-year colleges have embraced over the last four decades. As Dougherty and Townsend (2006) noted, two-year colleges were not static institutions and neither were their missions. Missions changed over time based on demands ranging from economic and business factors to pressures from within individual institutions. One of the earliest missions of the two-year college was the workforce and economic development initiative, often identified as vocational training. The vocational mission was introduced as early as the 1910s, but it did not gain prominence until the 1960s. Another mission of providing adult education and community services was developed as early as the 1930s, but it did not enjoy prominence until several decades later, in the 1970s. Even today, two-year colleges face challenges based on economic demands that can impact each of the missions and create friction between functional areas.

Students enroll in two-year colleges for a variety of reasons: (a) lower costs, (b) location (often closer to home for many students), and (c) flexibility regarding course offerings (Karp, Hughes, O'Gara, 2010). Enrollment in postsecondary education, at both two-year and four-year institutions, continues to grow. According to the National Center for Education Statistics report *The Condition of Education 2012,* total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased by 37.0%, from 13.2 to 18.1 million students in the decade from 2000 to 2010. Enrollment at four-year institutions grew from 7.2 to 10.4 million students, with a projected enrollment of 11.8 million by the year 2021. During that same time period, enrollment at two-year institutions grew from 5.9 to 7.7 million students and is expected to reach 8.8 million

students by 2021. Researchers estimate that total undergraduate postsecondary enrollment will reach 20.6 million students in 2021.

<div align="center">Two-Year College Student Demographics</div>

Students who enroll at two-year colleges may come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and be first-generation college students (Laanan, 2007). In *Why Access Matters The Community College Student Body* (2012), research studies have shown that for the academic year 2007-2008, two-year or community colleges enrolled 1.7 million students who were living at a socio-economic level considered poverty; that enrollment figured accounted for 41.0% of the total number of enrolled low-income postsecondary students. Additional factors or characteristics were discussed in the report and were noted to put two-year college students at risk of not persisting in school. These characteristics included delayed enrollment, part-time enrollment, financially independent, had dependents to care for, and did not earn a high school diploma (AACC 2012).

Students who start postsecondary education at a two-year college may be underprepared for the academic rigor of the four-year institution, and they face significant challenges as they progress through the system. Karp et al. (2010) noted, "community colleges tend to enroll students who are more academically, economically, and socially disadvantaged than do other postsecondary institutions" (p. 70). Students enrolled at two-year colleges may be required to enroll in remedial and developmental courses, which typically do not transfer as college course work towards a baccalaureate degree. Students who must take these types of non-transferrable courses may stay at the

two-year school longer in order to complete basic general education courses that are often required of transfer students (Karp et al., 2010).

Transition Challenges

Research studies suggest students who transferred between postsecondary institutions experience transition issues that may include difficulty becoming socialized to the new school, learning new systems at the receiving institution, and may face increased academic rigor at the receiving four-year institution (Berger and Malaney, 2003, Karp et al., 2010). Students may also experience what Townsend and Wilson (2009) referred to as 'another first year experience' at the receiving institution. They noted, "community college transfer students could be seen as having two first-year college experiences: their first year at the community college and their first year at the four-year college to which they transfer" (p. 410).

Given that two-year college students also frequently have family and work responsibilities, unlike many traditional four-year college students, how they become socialized to the four-year institution may be quite different than that of a traditional student. These issues continue to influence the successful transition of two-year college students to a four-year institution, potentially creating additional difficulties for students trying to transfer and earn a baccalaureate degree (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012).

Key Concepts in this Study

Concepts that are integral to this study are outlined in this section. The concept of integration can be defined as the process by which students make a connection to the

institution, either through academic endeavors or social activities associated with the campus (Tinto, 1993). Originally conceptualized in the research literature by Vincent Tinto (1993, 1997), integration to the campus environment and culture is a concept that has been widely studied over the last four decades. Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Integration was the pioneering model in research examining student success and persistence. Although the model has been widely studied, critics argue that the model is not a good fit for today's student, given that the original study only investigated White students at a traditional four-year school. Even though Tinto updated the research study, and continued to focus on areas of student success at a variety of postsecondary institutions including two-year schools (Tinto, 1997), more current empirical studies have indicated that how educators and students view the concept of integration to the college environment is changing (Deil-Amen 2011; Karp et al. 2010).

According to Tinto's model, integration is divided along two dimensions. One dimension is academic integration, a connection to the academic and intellectual environment of the institution, while the second dimension, social integration, occurs when a student makes connections to the social environment via interactions with other groups (Tinto, 1993; Karp et al. 2010; Townsend and Wilson, 2009).

College student socialization, another important concept in this study, is an essential part of a successful transition from one postsecondary institution to another. Weidman (1989) developed the Model of Undergraduate Socialization resulting from research on the impact of college experiences on undergraduates. How, and to what

extent, the transfer experience impacted two-year college transfer students' socialization at the four-year school was examined as part of this study.

Karp and Hughes (2008) described how students at two-year colleges used social ties to help gather information and obtain important institutional knowledge. Social ties helped students establish information networks, where students could leverage social connections for better outcomes both inside and outside the classroom. The notion of social ties having connections to networks of information is based on chain migration theory, a perspective born out of research on immigrant communities. Person and Rosenbaum (2006) used chain migration theory as the theoretical lens to investigate college enrollment decisions of Latino college students.

<u>Need for Additional Research</u>

Additional studies are needed to address gaps in the research literature studying the socialization of two-year college students post-transfer to a four-year institution. Tinto's (1993) Model of Integration described academic and social integration as separate events, often portrayed as experiences that students would have in completely separate contexts. While one study done by Townsend and Wilson (2009) looked specifically at the social and academic integration of community college students after they had transferred to a four-year school, Deil-Amen (2011) provided a conceptual framework that described the merging of these two concepts as they related to students enrolled at a two-year college. "The concept of a 'socio-academic integrative moment' can be used to describe opportunities for specific instances of interaction in which components of social and academic integration are simultaneously combined" (p. 72).

Empirical studies on student socialization have focused on the traditional four-year student or graduate students beginning their professional studies. Research studies have suggested becoming socialized to the new environment plays a definite role in students' perceived sense of fit to the institution (Karp, 2011). How the transition from the two-year school to the four-year institution impacts undergraduate socialization is an area of study lacking in the literature on two-year transfer students. While studies have been carried out investigating various conceptual frameworks and noting a variety of student success outcomes, no study was found that had specifically investigated the impact of the transfer transition on two-year college students' through the lens of undergraduate socialization at the four-year school.

<u>Purpose of the Study</u>

As previously outlined, two-year college students are often at a disadvantage when they enroll in a four-year college or university. The purpose of the present study was to examine students' transition experiences and observe them interacting in their new environment post-transfer. Given the concern for how students become both academically and socially connected to the new institution, I also examined the notion of socio-academic integrative moments, described by Deil-Amen (2011) as specific instances of interaction where academic and social integration are simultaneously combined. As part of this study, I included an examination of information networks and reviewed how this kind of social connection impacts the two-year college student's transition to the four-year college or university.

Research Question for the Study

  Students who transfer from a two-year college often experience challenges once they enroll at the four-year college or university, and must make adjustments to their new college environment to successfully pursue a baccalaureate degree. The current study viewed transition experiences through a theoretical lens based on undergraduate socialization. The following section describes the primary research question and supplemental questions that guided this study.

Primary Research Question

The following primary research question guided this study:

What are the transition experiences of two-year college students after they transfer to a four-year college or university?

Supplemental Research Questions

Several supplemental research questions were used to further guide this study. They were:

- What impact do transition experiences of two-year college transfer students have on their academic and social integration at the receiving postsecondary institution?
- What socialization experiences do two-year college transfer students describe after their transition to a four-year university campus?
- What ways do two-year college transfer students develop and utilize information networks at the four-year school?

Key Terms Defined

The following list features key terms and definitions pertaining to the present study. Each term has been selected for inclusion on the list based on its importance to the concepts in the study and will assist the reader in clarifying terms in the study.

1. *Four-year institution*: A college or university, public or private, granting baccalaureate degree programs. Typical baccalaureate programs offered require four years of enrollment to meet curriculum requirements for the degree (Forest and Kinser, 2002).

2. *Information networks*: Social ties that facilitate the transfer of institutional knowledge and procedures (Karp and Hughes, 2008).

3. *Integration*: The process by which enrolled college students make a connection, or report experiencing a sense of fit, to their postsecondary institution. Integration is largely defined in the college impact literature as two separate components, academic or social (Tinto, 1993).

   a. *Academic Integration*: A connection to the academic and intellectual environment of the institution (Tinto, 1993).

   b. *Social Integration*: A connection between a student and the social environment associated with the institution such as clubs, groups, organizations, or student gatherings. Students experience social integration via interactions with other groups associated with the institution (Tinto, 1993).

4. *Phenomenology*: A qualitative research methodology focused on studying the life experiences of individuals who have encountered a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld (Van Manen, 1990).

5. *Socialization*: The process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, norms, attitudes, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization (Weidman, 1989).

6. *Socio-academic integrative moments*: Specific instances of interaction in which components of academic and social integration are simultaneously combined (Deil-Amen, 2011).

7. *Transfer patterns*: Postsecondary enrollment patterns indicated by the direction of the student transition or transfer between postsecondary institutions (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012).

    a. *Vertical transfer:* Student transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution, as in moving 'up' in size from a two-year to a four-year school (NSCRC, 2012).

    b. *Lateral transfer:* Student transfer between two institutions similar in size, such as two-year to two-year transfer or four-year to four-year transfer (NSCRC, 2012).

    c. *Reverse transfer:* Student transfer from a four-year to a two-year institution, as in a move from a larger four-year institution to a smaller two-year school (NSCRC, 2012).

       d. *Swirl transfer pattern:* Student transfer from and between multiple

         institutions, back and forth between several schools of different sizes

         (NSCRC, 2012).

8. *Transition*: Any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships,

    routines, assumptions, and roles (Schlossberg et al. 1995).

9. *Two-year college***:** A comprehensive, publicly supported institution that offers

    postsecondary education through college-level courses, trade and industrial

    certificate programs and career services (Forest and Kinser, 2002).

<u>Assumptions and Delimitations of the Study</u>

This phenomenological study draws from qualitative data sources. Qualitative research is interpretive, seeking to use an interpretive understanding with which to explore the participant's experiences with the phenomenon in question, the transition experiences of two-year college transfer students. The interpretive paradigm has the potential to "generate new understandings of complex multi-dimensional human phenomena" (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007, p. 614).

Emergent themes and conclusions of this study are not generalizable to other studies or student populations. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling methods. The participants were all in-state students from two-year colleges in South Carolina, and thus not representative of the general population of postsecondary students who have transitioned between institutions.

As empirical research, this study positioned the Model of Undergraduate Socialization (Weidman, 1989) as the framework through which to investigate the

transition experiences of two-year college students post-transfer at a four-year university. As empirical evidence was documented, the hope was to add to the body of work supporting research investigating the impact of college on student success. By interviewing individual students, I hoped to gain more knowledge about their transition and must trust that each student was honest when responding to the interview questions. I made the assumption that the students' responses were truthful and informative without an over-emphasis on content.

As a novice researcher, I recognized that bias was a part of any project. Any biases I possessed had be stringently acknowledged and appropriate precautions taken to minimize researcher bias when gathering data, conducting interviews, coding and analyzing responses, and writing a final conclusion. My personal biases, related to this study, were a result of professional experiences with students in postsecondary institutions at both the two-year college and four-year university campus. I utilized a journal to record my thoughts, preconceived ideas and concerns about the potential participants in this study. Every effort was taken to structure this research project in a manner that supported trustworthiness. Specific steps designed to increase trustworthiness and reduce researcher bias are outlined in Chapter Three as part of the methods and research protocol.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Chapter One provided an overview of two-year colleges and the important role these institutions play in the hierarchy of postsecondary education in the United States. As noted earlier, two-year colleges have historically served their communities by

providing several educational missions. In the present study, the focus was on the

transfer mission only. Chapter One outlined two-year college student demographic data,

enrollment trends and transition issues. College students today are mobile, with

enrollment patterns that show evidence of vertical transfer, lateral transfer, reverse

transfer, or a 'swirl' pattern back and forth between several institutions. Thus, students

are experiencing challenges associated with the transition from one school to another in

any of the transfer patterns previously described. These challenges often include

becoming socialized to the new environment, learning new systems and facing increased

demands from the academic environment at the receiving institution. The basis for the

present study was reviewed in Chapter One, and included an overview of key concepts,

terms and the significance of the research as it related to two-year college transfer

students.

The primary research question was presented as well as the secondary, guiding

questions pertaining to the present study. Along with the research questions, Chapter one

provided a discussion of the purpose of the study and included a section on the

assumptions and delimitations associated with this research project.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Chapter Two provides a more detailed outline of the two-year college's historical position in the hierarchy of postsecondary education in the U.S. Additionally, this chapter explores the two-year college transfer student, noting the enrollment patterns and transition challenges detailed in the literature on two-year colleges and students entering postsecondary education. In the next section of this chapter, empirical literature is presented as related to the current study, focused on socialization, socio-academic integrative moments, and information networks. In the final sections of this chapter, theoretical literature concerning postsecondary students is presented. The literature review includes theoretical models and concludes with a discussion of the conceptual framework for the present study.

A broad base of research literature has developed over the last four decades assessing the impact of college on student persistence and success. A component of the literature on persistence has been related to integration, or making a solid connection, to the college environment (Tinto, 1993; 1997). Another broad area of research has focused on socialization, investigating how college students become socialized to their role and whether or not they have congruence with the values and norms of the established institution (Weidman, 1989).

Research studies on two-year college students after transfer to four-year higher education institutions have investigated issues ranging from low degree attainment to difficulties dealing with the increased academic rigor of the four-year college or university (Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010). While the two-year college provides open enrollment, access alone in not enough to guarantee a student's success. Studies have pointed to the academic struggles two-year college students may encounter at four-year institutions. Laanan stated, "many students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions have trouble adjusting to the rigorous academic standards" (p. 38). Low degree attainment, poor retention, and academic difficulties were important issues two-year college students may be dealing with when transitioning to a four-year institution.

These issues, low degree attainment and academic struggles, provided the backdrop for the present study, which proposed to investigate the transition experiences of two-year college students who transferred to a four-year public university. Investigating the impact of transition through a theoretical perspective informed by the Model of Undergraduate Socialization (Weidman, 1989) provided an opportunity to study the social and academic integration experienced by new transfer students. Studying how these students become socialized to their new school was important because students who transfer bring with them collegiate experiences, including socialization experiences, from their previous institution. As Laanan (2007) noted in his study of community college students, "the academic and social experiences of a student uniquely depend upon what a student brings to the college environment" (p. 38).

Townsend (2009) reported that socialization to the new college or university is vital to the process of developing a sense of fit with the environment, and ultimately impacts whether or not students remain enrolled. Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) discussed the concept of information networks in their study investigating Tinto's Model of Integration (Tinto, 1993). Their study applied the integration framework to community college students and found that students at the two-year college developed information networks that helped them become integrated to their environment. They defined information networks as "social ties that facilitate the transfer of institutional knowledge and procedures" (Karp et al., 2010, p. 76). Their study illustrated an important connection between academic and social integration, and socialization to the campus environment, that is, a merging or blending of the constructs.

Historical Perspectives

The two-year college is an integral part of the higher education system in the United States and has occupied a unique place in the hierarchy of colleges and universities. Historically, enrollment at two-year colleges increased rapidly after WWII as a result of legislation creating the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The G.I. Bill educational benefits offered affordability to veterans who needed to reenter the workforce. Cohen and Brawer (1996) in *The American Community College*, noted that enrollment at two-year colleges went from over 500,000 in 1960 to over two million by 1970. By the early 1990s, enrollment had reached nearly six million students. The number of two-year schools increased along with the demand for vocational training

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programs, offered primarily at two-year colleges. The various educational options offered at two-year colleges expanded to include the transfer mission. By the early 1970s, students could enroll at a two-year college to obtain an Associates degree, take college-level courses to transfer and pursue a baccalaureate degree, or earn a certificate or diploma in a technical or vocational field.

At the core of the two-year college mission was the philosophy of open access. Laanan (2007) noted, "the transfer function is paramount to maintaining access to higher education" (p. 38). Cohen and Brawer (1996) explained the college transfer mission as an important niche that the two-year or community college could leverage for status. Two-year colleges were driven to incorporate university transfer, or college parallel, courses as a way to be closely aligned with university departments. The more closely the two-year college transfer courses matched those of the four-year institution, the higher the status of the two-year college. The university transfer mission has remained a crucial part of the two-year college pathway towards the baccalaureate degree. As noted by Cohen and Brawer (1996), "In their drive for acceptance as full partners in higher learning, with their faculty trained in university departments, they arranged their curricula in the university image" (p. 309).

The transfer function, according to Dougherty and Townsend (2006), was only one of several missions embraced by two-year colleges. Perhaps the earliest mission was that of workforce development, often known as vocational education. While the vocational mission was introduced nearly one hundred years ago, it gained prominence more recently in the 1960s. The missions of two-year colleges changed over time based on

pressures from society as well as internal pressures. Thus, as one functional area or mission became more dominant, other mission areas retreated into the background. Another mission of the two-year college was adult education and community services, which were introduced into the two-year college system in the 1930s. Programs and services for continuing education and community-focused initiatives did not become popular until the 1970s, illustrating the constant flow between new ideas and projects demanded by one functional area while other areas experienced less demand for services in a different functional area. Today, the two-year college mission continues to be one that is divided between transfer and access and demands for vocational training.

Student Enrollment at Two-Year Colleges

The most recent statistics on two-year college student enrollment show that enrollment continues to increase. Two-year colleges have enrolled nearly 11 million undergraduates each academic year, comprising 38.0% of all enrolled postsecondary students (NCES, 2012). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), total undergraduate enrollment (two-year and four-year) in degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased by 37.0%, from 13.2 to 18.1 million students in the decade from 2000 to 2010. During that same time period, enrollment at 2-year institutions grew from 5.9 to 7.7 million students and is expected to reach 8.8 million students by 2021 (NCES, 2012).

Two-Year College Student Demographics

In *Why Access Matters: The Community College Student Body* (AACA, 2012), research studies pointed to data outlining the differences between traditional college

students and those enrolled at a two-year college. The widely accepted definition of the traditional college student is a student that begins postsecondary enrollment at a four-year institution in the fall semester after high school graduation. Although students enrolled at a two-year college may have started in the fall semester immediately after high school graduation, student demographics are different at a two-year institution.

One common characteristic of two-year college students is that they are often employed part-time. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011a), 84.0% of students at two-year colleges reported being employed, and 60.0% worked more than 20 hours per week. The student body has shifted, with more students enrolled who are under the age of 18 (NCES, 2011a). This trend is representative of partnerships developed between two-year colleges and K-12 school districts, allowing high school students the opportunity to take dual enrollment credits at the two-year college that will count towards their high school diploma as well as act to start them on their way to the baccalaureate.

<div align="center">Transfer Mobility and Enrollment Patterns</div>

Students pursuing postsecondary education often transition between institutions as they continue their course of study. In addition to the transition from a two-year college to a four-year college or university, students may reverse direction and transfer from a four-year school to a two-year college, a scenario known as reverse transfer (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2012). Additionally, students may maintain transient enrollment among multiple institutions, and thus define a pathway that is unique to their own goals for obtaining a credential via postsecondary education.

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center provides educators and policymakers with a picture of mobility and enrollment patterns for students in postsecondary education. Students are far more mobile today than in years previous, as evidenced by the resulting data from a recent five-year study. In the NSC Signature Report *Transfer and Mobility A National View of Pre-Degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions* (2012), researchers at the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported on the fall 2006 cohort of first-time undergraduates across institution types (two-year, four-year, public, private, non-profit, and for-profit). The largest percentage of those first-time postsecondary students, 45.1%, enrolled in fall 2006 at a two-year public institution. The next enrollment category was the four-year public college or university, which enrolled 34.0%. In the private sector, four-year private non-profit institutions enrolled 15.3% of first-time students, with the remaining 3.3% of students in the cohort enrolling at four-year private for-profit, two-year private for-profit with 2.0%, and two-year private non-profit at 0.2% (NSC, 2012).

Additionally, the NSC (2012) report noted that 33.1% of the cohort transferred at least once during the five-year study period (fall 2006-fall 2011). Students were most likely to transfer during their second year in college, which represented 37.1% of the cohort measured in the NSC study. Interestingly, student transfer from public two-year institutions to a four-year public institution was the largest group, with 60.8% of students having transferred from a two-year college to a four-year institution (NSC 2012). Referring to the large number of students at two-year colleges who transferred to a four-year school, NSC researchers noted, "These results testify to the multiple roles of

community colleges, which serve students transferring in large numbers to and from every kind of institution." (NSC Signature Report, 2012, p. 21).

In the state of South Carolina, recent statistics illustrated this trend. In a report by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, *Migration of Undergraduate First-Time Transfers Snapshot Analysis (2010)*, the migration patterns of first time transfer students in the state were reviewed. This report is relevant to the present study in that the research site is a public four-year research institution in the southeast, located in South Carolina.

In South Carolina, the fall 2006 first-time postsecondary cohort was evaluated to determine how many students were moving between similar-size institutions (lateral transfer), from two-year schools to four-year schools (upward or vertical transfer) and the number reversing from a four-year to a two-year institution (reverse transfer). Data for this class of first-time undergraduates across all institutions in the state showed that 188,787 students entered postsecondary education for the fall semester (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 2010). Of that number, 7.1% transferred to another school in the state of South Carolina. Overall results from the analysis showed that 16.8% of first-time undergraduates in South Carolina transferred for the first time between fall 2006 and fall 2008. Even more insightful was the direction of transfer, from two-year colleges to four-year schools. Over the three-year period from fall 2006 through fall 2008, there was a 48.0% increase in the number of two-year college students transferring to a four-year public research institution (SCCHE, 2010). Clearly, students

continued to migrate from two-year colleges to four-year institutions across South

Carolina.

Transition Challenges

Two-year college students have a different experience than traditional college

students when it comes to academic and social integration, as well as socialization to the

college and campus environment. Karp (2011) reported that these differences stem from

the institution's makeup, as two-year colleges are typically commuter campuses, with

little or no residential housing for students. Thus, students enrolled at two-year colleges

may not experience living on their own in a residence hall or other on-campus housing.

Deil-Amen (2011) noted that participants in her study of socio-academic

integrative moments described various experiences related to their integration. For those

students, purely social interactions were not the primary means of social engagement or

integration. Activities such as attending sporting events or going out with friends were

not common methods for making social connections. Deil-Amen (2011) commented

that, "unlike four-year residential students, such relationships were neither expected nor

desired for most of the students interviewed, given the family, work, and other demands

facing them as they struggled to prioritize college" (p. 81). These issues, along with

academic challenges previously noted by Laanan (2007) and Townsend and Wilson

(2009), comprised the larger grouping of transition issues I focused on during this study.

Empirical Literature concerning Postsecondary Students

Empirical studies assessing postsecondary transfer students have provided

important insights about the two-year college student population and transition issues

surrounding the transfer of two-year college students between postsecondary institutions. Studies pertinent to the current research are explored in an effort to further delineate elements of student interaction and socialization, both at the two-year college and the four-year college or university after transfer.

<div align="center">Socialization in Higher Education</div>

The research literature on socialization in higher education was broadly aligned into three overarching categories. One category encompassed organizational socialization (Tierney, 1997), while another broad area was concentrated on graduate student socialization (Gardner 2008; Sallee 2011; Weidman, Twale, and Stein 2001; Weidman and Stein 2003). Yet a third category of studies focused on undergraduate student socialization (Weidman 1989; Shields 2002; Yarbrough and Brown 2003). Studies in each broad category were reviewed and organized in the next sections.

<div align="center">Organizational Socialization</div>

Tierney (1997) emphasized, "socialization is of fundamental importance with regard to many of the most pressing issues that confront academic administrators and faculty" (p. 1). In his work, *Organizational Socialization in Higher Education,* (1997), Tierney directed his research efforts towards the socialization of new faculty to their academic department and larger institutional faculty network. His work looked at organizational socialization from both a modernist and postmodernist viewpoint, arguing that socialization is a cultural act. The modernist versus postmodernist debate notwithstanding, his perspective was that socialization is "an interpretive process involved in the creation—rather than the transmittal—of meaning" (p. 6).

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Socialization involves "a give-and-take where new individuals make sense of an organization through their own unique backgrounds and the current contexts in which the organization resides" (Tierney, p 6). Tierney (1997) felt that individuals experience socialization to an organization by way of "the less dramatic, ordinary daily occurrences that take place as we go about the normal business of being a professor, student, administrator, or staff member" (p. 3).

Tierney's (1997) study pointed to a more broad and widely held idea that organizational socialization is a process. Tierney felt the modernist view of socialization was limiting because that viewpoint stressed socialization as "a unitary and rational process embedded in an understandable culture" (p. 3). Even so, Tierney (1997) agreed that socialization was a process, and that "we need to consider socialization's processes in their entirety, as opposed to limiting ourselves to isolated examples that serve as grand transitional markers from one stage to another" (p. 3).

<center>Undergraduate Socialization</center>

In a similar line of research, scholars' work on undergraduate socialization has focused on the impact of socialization on success and retention. Yarbrough and Brown (2003) researched undergraduates during their first year in college, applying a three-stage model of organizational socialization to the socialization of new, first-year students. In their study, they suggested that academic advisors should consider the impact of the stages of socialization and the potential outcomes that can increase a new student's likelihood of successfully passing through the three stages and becoming truly adjusted to the school's culture and norms. They pointed out, "in addition to conforming to the

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formal rules of conduct and curricular structure, finding one's place in the formal and informal culture of a university or college greatly impacts successful adjustment" (p. 66). The three stages presented in their study are similar to those of Weidman's (1989), whose study on undergraduate student socialization is noted in Tierney's (1997) study on organizational socialization.

Faculty and peer interactions have become widely accepted indicators of positive socialization experiences (Padgett, Goodman, Johnson, Saichaie, Umbach, and Pascarella, 2010). In *The Impact of College Student Socialization, Social Class, and Race on the Need for Cognition*, Padgett et al. (2010) focused their research lens towards expanding the use of Weidman's model by applying it to need for cognition. Their research goal was to determine if Weidman's Model of Undergraduate Socialization could be extended to cognitive outcomes. The results of their study indicated that socialization in college provided students with "an additive boost in need for cognition" (p 109).

Holley and Taylor (2009) studied a group of undergraduate students enrolled in an online degree program. The undergraduates in their study were all considered nontraditional students because they were older adult students, most were employed full time, and many had family responsibilities. Although the participants in this study were not two-year college transfer students, they shared similar characteristics regarding age, employment, and familial responsibilities.

The application of Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization in Holley and Taylor's (2009) study provided an interesting perspective on how

undergraduate students might experience elements of socialization to their college environment even if they did not physically meet with their peers and faculty for classes in the degree program. Because all courses were completely online, Holley and Taylor (2009) positioned the socialization lens to view key elements of Weidman's model such as involvement, knowledge acquisition and investment in the virtual world of online degree programs. Holley and Taylor noted, "Students learn within the context of social networks even if such influences are not comprised of fellow students" (p. 267). Their findings suggested that students experienced their online curriculum within a social network, even without physical interactions between faculty and peers. The social network created by students served to provide them with the interaction and engagement, the ability to acquire knowledge and fostered their individual sense of investment in their own learning (Holley and Taylor, 2009).

Empirical works focused on transfer students' experiences at a four-year institution have generally used qualitative approaches to access deeper levels of student interactions in the academic and social environment. Mechanisms that foster socialization through interactions with faculty and peers can serve to build students' feelings of belonging or 'fitting in' on campus. Townsend and Wilson (2009) used a longitudinal approach to investigate two-year college transfer students' experiences after an extended period of time enrolled at the four-year institution. By following two-year college students after several semesters of enrollment at the four-year institution, they hoped to gain a better understanding of academic and social integration for those students. Townsend and Wilson's (2009) study recognized that the typical two-year

college student had different experiences once they enrolled at the larger four-year institution, and that standard measures of social integration, such as joining a club or group on campus, were simply not relevant while they were at the two-year school. Findings from Townsend and Wilson's (2009) study suggested that the transfer students who were older and more non-traditional did not experience as many social connections as the younger two-year college transfer students.

<center>Socio-Academic Integrative Moments</center>

More recent scholarship on social and academic integration is now well placed in the literature on two-year or community college students, representing a shift away from the long-standing theoretical perspective that students experience integration to their college or campus environment as separate occurrences. In other words, Tinto's (1993) original model approached the concept of academic integration as something that occurred separately from a student's social integration. The following studies illustrate that these constructs can be perceived by students as occurring simultaneously, as unified or combined into the same experience.

Deil-Amen (2011) applied Tinto's (1993) integration framework to a study of two-year college students. This study sought to examine the direct relationship between integration and persistence, where Deil-Amen noted that, "the model theorizes an indirect relationship via goal commitment or institutional commitment" (p. 56). In addition, the study considered how the concepts of academic and social integration should be modified or altered in order to apply more appropriately to two-year students, while also considering the relevance of class, race, and ethnicity in the integrative process.

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Information Networks

Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) continued building the literature by looking at the connection between social and academic integration. Using Tinto's integration framework, they focused on how beginning college students at two-year schools experience social and academic integration. Tinto's (1993) framework had not previously been applied to students at the community college level, because of an underlying assumption about student involvement at community colleges. Essentially, the common belief was that students enrolled at a two-year college would not have either the time or opportunity to become involved on campus with clubs or other groups. Attendance patterns for two-year college students were assumed to keep students away from campus except for periods of time for classes.

Karp et al. (2010) used in-depth interviews with students at two urban community colleges to research how students actually became engaged at the institution and how that sense of attachment to the institution was related to persistence. Even more important were their findings, which suggested that integration did occur for these students, and both academic and social, at their two-year college campus (Karp et al., 2010).

One key finding from the study done by Karp et al. (2010) was that community college students could, and did, develop attachments to their postsecondary institution. The researchers outlined how students reported their sense of belonging, and how that also influenced their academic integration. Another key finding from this study was the idea of information networks. Information networks, in this study, helped students make connections throughout campus. "Information networks appear to have helped students

feel at home on campus while giving them the tools necessary for successful degree completion" (Karp et al., 2010, p. 76).

Karp et al. (2010) also noted that when students in their study learned about the campus through social relationships, they were more likely to take advantage of the service or program, especially if they had a connection to faculty or staff associated with that program. An important link is evident between information networks, socio-academic integrative experiences and socialization experiences. What is not clear, from their study, is how the concept of using information networks as a mechanism for socialization and for experiencing socio-academic integrative moments could be applied to the four-year college setting. If two-year college students develop information networks that can influence their socio-academic integrative experiences, and impact their socialization to the campus, do they have these same experiences after they transfer to the four-year institution?

Learning through social relationships is an important point, as noted by Karp et al. (2010). Support for this point, as related to this study, comes from research on Latino/a college choice. Chain migration, or chain enrollment theory, is a perspective based on research on the immigrant experience (Perez and McDonough, 2008). MacDonald and MacDonald (1974) explained that chain migration refers to methods used by migrant workers to obtain work information via their social ties to groups of other migrant workers. More recent research on college choice examined the ways Latino/a students made decisions about college enrollment. Person and Rosenbaum (2006) noted that Latino/a students in their study frequently cited the influences of family and friends in

their college choice decision process. From the earlier research on immigrant patterns, Person and Rosenbaum (2006) applied the concept of chain migration to the college choice process, noting that, "we expect students to choose colleges where a primary social contact is or has enrolled, enroll with members of their network, and look to contacts for assistance once enrolled" (p. 52). Chain migration theory, then, relates to the current study in that new transfer students coming from a two-year college may tap into their own social networks for information about student life and academics at the larger four-year institution.

Barnett (2011) designed a study to examine the extent to which "community college students' experiences with validation by faculty" helped students develop a sense of academic integration in college and whether or not those experiences contributed to their intent to persist in school (p. 197). One goal of the study was to focus on students' sense of integration, to distinguish between psychosocial behavior and actual participation in campus life. Barnett wanted to look at one of the key mechanisms that may have facilitated a sense of integration, that of student interactions with faculty that validated the student and helped foster a sense of connection. Barnett's study supported the notion that academic and social integration experiences were more fluid and connected to academic life, thus not purely social components of college.

<div align="center">Theoretical Literature concerning Postsecondary Students</div>

This section reviewed theoretical perspectives that related to the current research study. One area of note was the theoretical scholarship concentrated on two-year college students. Another critical area of scholarship was that of student persistence in

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postsecondary institutions. A third body of broad scholarship was that of socialization. Each of these theoretical bodies of work have expanded, becoming more developed over the last three to four decades, and provided an examination of the issues surrounding college students. These issues included: (a) persistence and retention, (b) transition issues associated with pursuing the baccalaureate degree, and (c) the impact of college on student socialization. These perspectives included Transition Theory (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995), the Model of Student Integration (Tinto, 1993), and Model of Undergraduate Socialization (Weidman, 1989).

<div align="center">Transition Theory</div>

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) outlined a transition framework in *Counseling Adults in Transition Linking Practice with Theory.* The general model developed by Schlossberg et al. is based on change that someone is experiencing. They proposed that "a transition can be any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Change itself is part of the transition theory framework. Schlossberg et al. (1995) noted that the individual situation differs, and the kind of transition itself may differ, but the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable. The conceptual framework for transition theory is supported by three components: (a) the approaching transition, (b) taking stock of coping resources, and (c) by taking charge. The first component, the approaching transition, can be anticipated, non-anticipated, or a non-event. The second component, taking stock of coping resources, occurred when the individual assessed their own potential resources (assets/liabilities) to help them with the actual change associated with a transition.

Lastly, the third component, taking charge, is evident when the individual strengthened their resources and thus demonstrated the use of new strategies.

As a theoretical framework, Transition Theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995) is not prevalent in the research literature on two-year college students and success in college. Most of the research involving Transition Theory has been directed towards individuals that are not likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education, but transferring to a new institution, particularly from a two-year college to a four-year university, represents a change that often brings unanticipated consequences. Although not a part of the conceptual framework for this study on transfer students, Transition Theory remains a solid theoretical perspective in the literature.

Model of Student Integration

Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Integration developed as a result of his work investigating student persistence and retention at four-year postsecondary institutions. In the research literature on student persistence and integration, his "interactionalist framework" (Deil-Amen, 2011, p. 56) has been a consistent theoretical perspective for numerous researchers. Tinto built his model based on the belief that a subjective sense of belonging and membership is an important part of a college students decisions, and thus part of the students' outcomes. Deil-Amen (2011) further noted, "Students choose to persist when they perceive intellectual and social congruence, or a normative fit between the student and values, social rules, and academic quality of the college community" (p. 55). Congruence with the institution's academic and social systems acts to reinforce a student's commitment to their institution and educational goals.

According to Tinto's model, integration is divided along two dimensions. One dimension is academic integration, a connection to the academic and intellectual environment of the institution. The second dimension, social integration, occurs when a student makes connections to the social environment via interactions with other groups (Tinto, 1993; Karp et al, 2010; Townsend and Wilson, 2009).

Although prevalent in the literature for decades, Tinto's (1993) model has been investigated by numerous researchers and criticized for its limitations. Townsend and Wilson (2009) pointed to one limitation, "for students to persist in college, they need to assimilate to the prevailing institutional culture. In other words, they must break away from their cultural traditions and assimilate to a new culture to succeed in higher education" (p. 406). Tierney (1997) further criticized Tinto's model, noting that from an anthropological perspective, rites of passage needed to move from one culture to another are intra-cultural, not cross-cultural. Thus, a person would move within a culture but not from one culture to another. This idea had researchers questioning how the concept of leaving one's culture could fit with underrepresented students, particularly at the two-year college.

Model of Undergraduate Socialization

Weidman (1989) developed a model of undergraduate socialization, arguing that the model was necessary in order to fully understand how college impacted the individual student. Weidman's definition of socialization was based on Brim's (1966) work and emphasized socialization as a process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, norms, attitudes and knowledge needed for membership in a given society,

group or organization (Weidman, 1989). Socialization can be conceptualized as having two dimensions. The first dimension, individual, is associated with cognitive development, and is equated to the student role. Weidman and Stein (2003) noted that the general role of the student was to go through the cognitive process of demonstrating competence by passing courses and making progress towards successful completion of an academic degree. The second dimension, organizational, is associated with the affective interpersonal aspects of the student role. Students were expected to learn the procedures or policies their adviser or department required, which involved students making individual efforts to learn what their academic department required of a successful student.

In *Socialization of Students in Higher Education: An Organizational Perspective,* Weidman outlined four main stages of the process of socialization that were assumed to occur when students were enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Thornton and Nardi (1975) emphasize, as did Tierney (1997), that "although socialization is construed as a temporal process, the distinct stages do not necessarily occur in a strict sequence but rather are interactive with movement in both directions" (Weidman, 2006, p. 257).

Undergraduate socialization, as noted above, was described in terms of four phases or stages: (a) anticipatory, (b) formal, (c) informal, and (d) personal (Weidman, 2001; 2006). Students anticipate what might occur when they enter college, although their knowledge is incomplete. As they pass through academic programs, they encountered the "normative influences of peers and faculty in both formal and informal settings (e.g., majors, peer groups, co-curricular activities), ultimately personalizing those experiences

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by either changing or maintaining perspectives held at entrance to higher education"

(Weidman, 2006, p. 257). Weidman's model laid out a process that helped frame

students' experiences as they became immersed in the social and academic culture of

their transfer institution. Weidman's (1989) model included more in-depth processes

associated with socialization: (a) interaction, (b) integration and (c) learning. Weidman

(1989) also included three core elements of socialization in his model, which included:

(a) knowledge acquisition, (b) investment and (c) involvement.

Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Integration remains broadly placed in research

studies on student persistence. Even though critics have cautioned that the model is

flawed, there are elements of the integration framework that are important to the current

study. Deil-Amen's (2011) study suggested that socio-academic integrative moments

had social benefits such as a stronger sense of fit or belonging to the institution, a more

solid image of themselves as a two-year college student and a sense of confidence in their

ability to be a successful student. Most interestingly, Deil-Amen's (2011) study also

suggested socio-academic integrative moments had informational benefits. This is an

important concept for the present study, because socio-academic integrative moments

include critical points of "information exchange where students' strategies for attaining

goals are improved" (p. 73). Access to crucial information enhanced feelings of

congruence and focus on shared goals amongst students. Socio-academic integrative

moments, then, are connected to information networks in that students used their

academic setting (i.e., in the classroom) to extend their social connections as they sought

critical information.

Karp and Hughes (2008) explained that the two-year college students who participated in their qualitative study were more likely to report feelings of integration, or sense of belonging to the institution, if they were involved in information networks. They defined information networks as "a group of social ties that helped them understand college life" (p. 73). Karp and Hughes (2008) posited that information networks facilitated the transfer of institutional knowledge and procedures, and that student participation in such a network became a mechanism that encouraged integration. Thus, information networks and socio-academic integrative moments can be construed as mechanisms fostering a greater connection to the institution. If two-year college students connect to information networks after transfer to a four-year school, they could experience an increased sense of fit. Socio-academic integrative moments could also impact two-year college transfer students by fostering greater connections to faculty and peers at the four-year institution.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework for the Current Study</div>

The broad perspectives outlined in this literature review summarize theoretical and empirical work that is relevant to the current research study. Tinto's research suggests students experience separate instances of social integration and academic integration, making the assumption they are independent of each other and that students experience them as such. Similarly, socialization theory tends to show segmented steps that are connected to each other, although seemingly distinct as earlier noted, in 'stages' even though a student may experience these stages in a fluid sense, without any indication of moving between stages. The current study takes a blended perspective to form a

conceptual framework based on the construct of socio-academic integrative moments, information networks and socialization. A blended conceptual framework allows for a more nuanced approach to investigating the research questions.

The present study explored, using Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization as a lens, the socio-academic integrative experiences of two-year college transfer students after they've transitioned to a four-year school. Additionally, this study hoped to further our understanding of the concept of information networks by examining how students developed and utilized these social connection points.

Figure 1 is a conceptual outline of the Model of Undergraduate Socialization (Weidman, 1989) modified to reflect the current study on two-year college transfer students after enrollment at a four-year university. The primary and secondary research questions are displayed along with the interview questions that corresponded to the questions as viewed through the lens of Undergraduate Socialization. Associated with the core socialization experience, according to Weidman (1989), were the normative contexts of the academic program. For the present study, the normative contexts of the academic program were understood to be the standard schedule of classes a full time student would experience as an undergraduate. The academic program would correspond to the student's program of study for their intended major at the four-year university. Within the overarching socialization experience are the socialization processes, (a) interaction, (b) integration and (c) learning. Also residing conceptually under the umbrella of overarching socialization experiences were the core elements of (a) knowledge acquisition, (b) investment and (c) involvement. This conceptual framework positioned a

lens of Undergraduate Socialization, searching for indicators of how new transfer students from a two-year college described their academic and social experiences (socio-academic integrative moments) and development of, or engagement with, one or more information networks post-transfer to a four-year institution.

Primary Research Question	Secondary Research Questions	Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization	Data Collection Potential Interview Questions
What are the lived experiences of two-year college transfer students after enrollment at a four-year school?	What impact does transition experiences of two-year college transfer students have on their academic and social integration at the receiving school?	The four main stages of the model are Anticipatory, Formal, Informal, and Personal The processes of socialization are Interaction, Integration, and Learning	Describe your transition to South University during your first semester of enrollment. How did you meet other students? Did you join any clubs or groups?
	What are the socialization experiences two-year college transfer students describe after their transition to the larger four-year university campus?	Normative contexts include Majors, Peer Groups, and Co-Curriculum	How did you interact with your instructors? Describe your experiences with faculty and instructors in class. Describe your interactions with faculty and instructors outside of the classroom.
	What are the ways two-year college transfer students develop and utilize information networks at the four-year school?	Deil-Amen (2011) Socio-academic integrative moments Karp and Hughes (2008) Information Networks	How did you find out about events on campus? Describe your methods for gaining knowledge or information about academic requirements. How did you get help if you had questions about rules, policies, or deadlines?

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Current Study

Conclusion

Chapter Two provided a literature review centered on theoretical and empirical research investigating two-year college transfer students. Students from two-year colleges are an important part of the transfer pipeline to four-year institutions, transitioning often between multiple institutions as part of a mobile group in today's society. Research studies on the impact of transferring from a two-year college to a four-year school are lacking in that current research literature does not examine socialization processes for transfer students at four-year institutions.

An important part of the socialization puzzle is that of both social and academic integrative experiences. Posited by Deil-Amen (2011), 'socio-academic integrative moments' is the notion that blends academic and social integration into a more fluid experience. Additionally, research studies such as the present study are needed to more fully examine how two-year college students develop 'information networks' (Karp and Hughes, 2008) as they become socialized to their new college environment. The ultimate goal for this empirical research is to add to the literature informing administrators and higher education professionals about the transition experiences of two-year college students at a four-year institution and how this knowledge can support efforts to increase student success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodology and research design using Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization enhanced by Deil-Amen's (2011) notion of socio-academic integrative moments. I explored the transition experiences of two-year college students after transfer to a four-year institution, making qualitative methods the most suitable research approach. Specifically, the goal was to gain a better understanding of how transfer students experience social and academic integration in their new campus environment. Additionally, this study focused attention on how new transfer students created information networks as they became socialized to the new environment.

As the researcher conducting this study, I addressed gaps in the research literature in the area of academic and social integration of two-year college students and the socialization processes students experienced as they transitioned to the four-year institution. One gap in the literature on social and academic integration is centered on how integration is perceived to occur for students. Tinto's (1993) work indicated that students experienced academic and social integration as separate events. More recent scholarship by Deil-Amen (2011) brought a new approach to the topic of integration. Her study found that students described academic and social integration as flowing together, often occurring simultaneously. Deil-Amen's (2011) study was conducted with two-year college students.

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No current literature has been found investigating how students experience the notion of socio-academic integrative moments after transfer to a four-year college or university. Yet another gap in the research literature is centered on the notion of information networks. Karp and Hughes (2008) studied two-year college students and noted that students in their study used social ties that facilitated the transfer of institutional knowledge and procedures. The present study added to the literature on information networks by studying how two-year college transfer students navigated their new environment after they transitioned to the four-year school.

In the first major section of this chapter, the epistemological and philosophical underpinnings of the current study are described. Subsequent sections of Chapter Three outline a pilot study designed to test the original research questions about the transition of two-year college students to a four-year institution. Findings and conclusions from the pilot study were discussed in this section. Following the discussion of the pilot study's findings, the present research study was outlined and included discussion of the research design, research site and overview of the sample population demographics and methods for participant selection. Data collection was then addressed and included multiple collection methods chosen to strengthen the trustworthiness of the present study. Finally, the proposed data analysis protocol was presented before final Chapter Three conclusions.

Epistemological Considerations for Methodology: A Constructivist Perspective

The research design and methodological considerations used in this study are derived from an interpretivist paradigm, grounded in constructivism. In *Assumptions*

about the Nature of Social Science, Burrell and Morgan (1979), reviewed broad

assumptions that underpin the foundations of social science research, especially

concerning the subjective versus objective dimensions. The subjectivist dimension was

best described as a view that stresses the importance of, according to Burrell and Morgan

(1979), the "subjective experience of individuals in the creation of the social world" (p.

3). Moving deeper into the analysis leads to the interpretive paradigm, a paradigm most

concerned with understanding the individual's subjective experiences in the social world

(Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Crotty (1998) provided a more structured discussion of methods, methodology,

theoretical perspectives, and epistemology in *The Foundations of Social Research*. For

the current study, the questions that I pose orient me towards the view that knowledge is

constructed. The constructivist epistemology is based on assumptions about how we

construct meaning. Crotty (1998) noted that "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in

and out of our engagement with the realities of our world" (p. 9). Crotty further explored

this and noted that different people might share the same phenomenon yet construct their

knowledge of the event in different ways, at the subjective level. From this position, a

theoretical perspective emerged that guided me in the choice of methodology.

Phenomenology as a methodology was chosen because it aligns well with interpretivist

and constructivist assumptions.

Phenomenological Research

A phenomenological research study is concerned with the lived experiences of a

person or groups of individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon. The

goal of phenomenology is to capture individual descriptions of the meaning of the phenomenon in question and to reduce individual experiences at the subjective level to a description of the universal essence (Van Manen, 1990). The phenomenon in the current study was the transition of students between two college campus environments, from a two-year college to a four-year institution, as they proceeded through the transfer process. The transfer process was the phenomenon common to the study population. As earlier noted by Crotty (1998), individuals who experience the same phenomenon may construct knowledge about that phenomenon differently than other individuals with the same experience. Thus, in-depth semi-structured interviews provided the detailed qualitative responses regarding the phenomenon as described in detail by each participant.

<u>Pilot Study</u>

A pilot study was initiated in September 2011. Upon Institutional Review Board approval, the study continued with data collection and analysis during the spring 2012 semester. The setting for the pilot study was South University, a pseudonym for a four-year public research university in the southeast region of the United States. The pilot study proposed to examine the transition experiences of two-year college students enrolled at South University.

The Research Question for the Pilot Study

The research question guiding the pilot study was:

What are the transition experiences of two-year college students after they enroll at a four-year institution?

Supplemental Research Questions

The following research questions supplemented the main research question. These questions were:

- What are the academic and social integration experiences of two-year college students once they enroll at a four-year school?

- Do students with bridge preparation experience at a two-year college experience academic and social integration in different ways as compared to two-year college transfer students without any bridge preparation experience?

Participants in the pilot study were selected from the list of new transfer students enrolling at South University for the first time after transferring from a two-year college in the fall 2011 semester. The sampling method for the pilot study was convenience sampling. Participants meeting the criteria, two-year college transfer students in their first semester of enrollment, were sent an email invitation to their campus email address, asking them to participate and outlining the research project. Students in this participant pool may also have had experience at a two-year college with a preparation program referred to as a 'Bridge' program.

In general terms, the 'Bridge' program at a local two-year college offered student participants opportunities to attend campus programs and events at the four-year institution, South University. Students also had optional group activities and connections to academic departments associated with their proposed major course of study at South University. Students with experiences associated with a bridge preparation program self-

identified at the beginning of each interview session. Seven in-depth interviews were

conducted with new transfer students at South University between December 2011 and

April 2012.

The theoretical framework for the pilot study, Organizational Socialization

(Tierney, 1997; Shields, 2002), was the lens positioned to examine how students

experienced their transition to the four-year school. Additionally, the framework was

utilized to determine how and if participants' descriptions provided evidence of stages of

socialization after enrollment at the four-year institution. Figure 2 provides a matrix of

each stage in the Organizational Socialization (Tierney, 1997; Shields, 2002) framework,

including participant responses within each stage.

Each participant was interviewed individually with interviews lasting

approximately 45 to 60 minutes. I manually recorded participant responses by typing the

responses into a Word document on a laptop computer. Each participant then reviewed

the transcript for clarity and accuracy. After all interviews were completed, the responses

were reviewed and organized into categories in order to begin a coding process. To code

the participant responses, I reviewed the transcribed interview responses completely, after

which major themes were initially written down next to participant responses. I then

grouped themes together to form clusters of meaning. Student responses were compared

with the stages of organizational socialization as outlined by the model. Themes were

aligned with the three stages in the model, as outlined in Figure 2.

Stage	Length of Stage	Focus	Student Responses associated with this stage	Theme
Anticipatory Socialization (Shields, 2002)	Period of time up to enrollment in a postsecondary institution	Student develops expectations about the institution	--'after going to a study abroad at my previous school, I realized South University had the major and program interest that I wanted' (non-bridge student)	Using existing connections to ease the transition Gaining awareness of limitations with their school or choices
Encounter (Shields, 2002)	The first 6 weeks of enrollment at the institution	Students attempt to make sense of unanticipated events	--'hardest thing has been trying to find my niche' (non-bridge student)	South University is more challenging academically than previous school Starting over, making new friends
Metamorphosis (Shields, 2002)	Period of time from the end of Encounter stage through the end of first year at institution	Students make the transition from an 'outsider' to feeling like a 'member'	--'now I feel that getting involved during my first semester was a good thing, helped me connect…there isn't really a separation between academics and social events, you need both to balance things out' (non-bridge student)	Confident with the academic work after one semester at South University Assimilation into the school culture or social integration

Figure 2: Summary of Three-Stage Organizational Socialization Framework with Student Response.

As noted in Figure 2, the model of Organizational Socialization (Tierney, 1997; Shields, 2002) served as a theoretical lens for the study. Student responses were analyzed through this lens to determine if their responses described social or academic integration experiences or if there were any reported differences in perceived adjustment to the four-year institution. Each of the three stages, Anticipatory, Encounter and Metamorphosis were outlined in Figure 2 along with a definition of each stage and corresponding student responses.

Findings and Conclusions of the Pilot Study

After reviewing participant responses and emergent themes, I evaluated how the responses fit the model and whether or not the different stages were represented via student responses. Additionally, I compared students with bridge preparation experiences and those without bridge experiences to see if there were any reported differences. Findings of this comparison showed no reported differences in academic or social integration between students with bridge preparation experiences and those without any experiences. In other words, student's responses were essentially the same when asked about their academic and social connections to the campus. One possible reason for the lack of differences in student responses could have been due to the small number of students interviewed for the project.

The findings also showed that, although the participant responses did seem to 'fit' the model regarding stages of Organizational Socialization (Tierney, 1997; Shields, 2002), the model lacked depth in areas such as knowledge acquisition, peer interaction, adjustment to the campus culture, and other areas that are more prominently outlined in Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization.

Present Research Project

The pilot study was a project proposed to test a theoretical framework and examine the social and academic integration of two-year college students after transfer to a four-year institution. The theoretical framework used in the pilot study, Organizational Socialization (Tierney, 1997; Shields, 2002), was the conceptual lens through which the researcher could examine the transition experiences of seven students after transfer to the

four-year school. The pilot study limitations proved to be important to the present project in that the assumptions about students with bridge preparation experiences did not impact the student's descriptions of academic and social interactions at the larger institution.

One conclusion from the pilot study, examining the bridge preparation question, was that the study sample was not large enough to gather data that could illuminate the impact of any bridge preparation on student interactions or campus engagement after transfer. In the current project, I excluded students with bridge preparation experiences at their previous two-year institution, to focus the study solely on the phenomenon of transfer as experienced by two-year college students after enrollment at a four-year university. The research questions for the current study outlined a project that was a clear, direct study not impacted by comparisons between two sub-groups in the study population. To assure that the sample population was a group of new transfer students from two-year colleges who did not have experience with a bridge preparation program, I worked closely with the office of Institutional Research and the Office of Admission at the research site to obtain a list of potential research participants that met the criteria specified in the data collection protocol.

Another important limitation of the pilot study was use of the framework itself, a model based on stages of Organizational Socialization. Organizational Socialization (Tierney, 1997) is tied loosely to education in that students progress through stages as they become accustomed to the new environment, but the three-stage scenario outlined by the Organizational Socialization (Shields, 2002) structure did not adequately fit the academic and social integration instances described by the research subjects in the pilot

study. Thus, one conclusion of the pilot study was that the framework did not fit conceptually as I had projected. Further study was necessary to develop a conceptual structure that would present a more detailed yet blended framework. The Model of Undergraduate Socialization developed by Weidman (1989), expanded in 2001 through additional research (Weidman, Twale, and Stein, 2001), and adapted to study undergraduate student socialization (Holley and Taylor, 2009), fit the overarching conceptual outline for the present study.

Research Design

The current study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. The following sections outline and include: (a) a brief discussion of the research site, (b) data collection, (c) sample population characteristics and sampling methods, (d) utilizing triangulation to address trustworthiness issues, and (e) data analysis including development of themes, textural and structural descriptions, and overarching essence of the two-year college transfer student transition experience.

Research Site

The research was conducted on the main campus of a large, public four-year institution in the southeastern Unites States. South University (a pseudonym) had a total enrollment (undergraduate and graduate combined) of 18,963 for fall 2013 semester (Institutional Research FactBook, 2013). Of that number, the total enrollment of new undergraduate transfer students for the fall 2013 semester was 1,106. Demographic data providing an outline of participant characteristics is discussed in a separate section in this

chapter, including information on which two-year colleges students attended prior to transfer to the four-year institution serving as the research site.

Data Collection

This section of Chapter Three outlines the data collection methods utilized in this study. The approach to this study was multi-method, with data collection occurring in four overarching categories: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) document analysis, (c) direct observations, and (d) use of my professional journal. Subsequent sections of this chapter discuss each category and methods of data collection from the appropriate sources.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The first data collection method used was the semi-structured interview. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) provided a concise rationale for using interviews to collect qualitative data when utilizing phenomenology. In their work *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Theory, Method and Research* (2009), Smith et al. noted that the goal for data collection was to design a data collection event that would capture detailed stories, thoughts and feelings from each participant. The best approach to consider was the semi-structured interview, an interview that was one-to-one between the researcher and the participant. Using this method, I was able to obtain rich, thick, textural descriptions of the phenomenon from each participant.

Sample Population Characteristics

Participant selection occurred through a series of steps after approval from the Institutional Review Board. The approval email from the Institutional Review Board is located in Appendix A, item A1.

Students in the sample population for this study had the following characteristics: (a) transferred to the institution in fall 2013, (b) most previous institution of full-time enrollment was a two-year college, in the same state, South Carolina, as the research site, (c) no participation in a bridge preparation program at any two-year school, (d) status verified through the Registrar's office of full-time enrollment with at least 12 credit hours in fall 2013, and (e) enrolled in a degree program, not attending the institution as a 'Special Student' or any other category that was not related to earning a baccalaureate degree. Students were also verified as at least age 18 years for purposes of inclusion in the participant pool.

To identify students who had experiences with a bridge preparation program while enrolled at a two-year college, I worked with Institutional Research to review database sources at the research site. In the student database, the student's previous colleges or universities attended were listed as part of their record. The bridge program was only offered at one particular two-year college in South Carolina. A detailed spreadsheet was developed with potential participants' demographic data and previous schools attended. To correctly identify potential participants that needed to be excluded from the participant pool, I worked with staff to compare lists of students who had bridge experience at one particular two-year college. Having identified those students, I

removed their names from the participant pool before going on to the next steps in the

research plan

The Office of Institutional Research provided a spreadsheet with student

demographic data that matched the required characteristics. The number of students in

the potential pool was 269 students. The approved email message, seeking volunteers for

the study, was sent out to students listed on the spreadsheet, resulting in twelve (12)

students responding to schedule an interview.

Twelve interviews were conducted, each lasting between 12 minutes to 41

minutes, and were audio recorded. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix A,

item A2. The interview protocol included (a) questions related to the individual student's

socialization experiences to the academic and social environment, (b) questions

concerned with how new transfer students gathered information and learned to navigate

the institution's technical and institutional systems, and (c) how students reported they

felt regarding social connections to other students at the institution.

The interviews were held on campus at the research site during the spring 2014

semester. At the beginning of each interview, participants were given the approved

document explaining their part in the research study. The approved document is included

in Appendix A, item A3. Participants were asked if they had any questions and those

were answered before beginning the interview. Before starting with the interview

questions, each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym that would be used during

and after the interview. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the

researcher. At the end of each interview, each participant received the approved

incentive, a $25 VISA gift card.

Incentives to participate in a research study can be a motivating factor when a

potential participant is considering whether or not to be part of the study. Guyll, Spoth,

and Redmond (2003) noted that, "a monetary incentive positively influenced individuals'

decisions to participate" in their study on the effects of incentives and research

requirements on participation rates (p. 37). In general, incentives encouraged

participation (Guyll et al., 2003).

Figure 3 provides participant profile information. Study participants came from

all regions of the state of South Carolina and represented six of the sixteen two-year

(technical) colleges in the state including the largest schools, City Technical College,

Mid-County Technical College, and Upstate Technical College (all names of institutions

are pseudonyms). Three study participants were female, and the remaining nine were

male. All but three of the study participants were taking classes with academic degree

programs in the areas of Engineering and Science. Although age was not a consideration

in the research protocol, three of the twelve participants were significantly older than the

remaining students in the study.

Profile information includes (a) name of the two-year college most recently

attended, (b) the credit hours earned at two-year colleges, (c) the academic program or

major each participant was enrolled in at the time of the interview session, (d) the number

of credit hours attempted and earned for the fall 2013 semester and (f) the participant's

fall 2013 final Grade Point Average (GPA). Five of the participants had withdrawn from

at least one course during the fall 2013 semester, which explains the difference in the number of credit hours attempted and the number of credit hours earned for those five students. Participants discussed the two-year college they'd most recently attended during the interview session. The names of the two-year colleges listed in Figure 3 are pseudonyms I chose in order to maintain an objective stance during the interviews. Appendix A contains the interview protocol.

Name	Age	Two-year college most recently attended	Credit hours earned at two-year colleges (s)	Academic program at South University	Credit hours attempted fall 2013 semester	Credit hours earned fall 2013 semester	GPA fall 2013 semester South University
Holly	20	Upstate Technical College	55	Food Science	13	13	2.30
Thomas	21	Upstate Technical College	92	Biological Sciences	16	16	3.68
Fiona	21	Upstate Technical College	49	Animal and Veterinary Sciences	15	8	2.37
Joe	22	Oceanside Technical College	60	Psychology	15	10	2.0
John	22	Upstate Technical College	43	Pre-Business	15	12	2.0
Jake	22	Mid-Region Technical College	60	Computer Science	16	13	1.45
Alex	22	Lakeside Technical College	52	Civil Engineering	10	10	3.30
Elliott	22	Upstate Technical College	45	Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management	15	15	2.33
Debbie	26	Mid-County Technical College	86	Animal and Veterinary Science	13	13	2.69
Chuck	31	City Technical College	88	Biosystems Engineering	12	12	3.66
Jim	39	City Technical College	71	Biological Science	15	15	2.60
Gus	43	Upstate Technical College	58	Forest Resource Management	12	12	3.33

Figure 3   Participant Profiles

Document Analysis

The second category of data collection utilized in this study was document analysis. Document analysis provided another layer of data to be reviewed and interpreted by the researcher. Smith et al. (2009) noted, "…the sampling of media representations can be a way of further exploring the available cultural resources for making sense of the topic in hand" (p. 73).   Institutions provide a large amount of information to new students as they prepare to enroll each semester. By the time the academic year has begun, new students have already received publications, letters, documents and emails that may have required action for enrollment purposes. Based on the research question concerning information networks and how students learn to

maneuver through the academic and social environment, document analysis was a critical component of the data collection for this study. During interview sessions, I asked each participant how they obtained information about deadlines, rules, policies or procedures. The purpose of that question was to gain a better understanding of how each participant approached the task of becoming more familiar with the campus as part of developing their own network of sources for information and their overall socialization to the environment.

I collected paper documents that were samples of letters, brochures, and announcements sent to new transfer students. These documents were collected from campus offices at the research site, which included the office of Admissions, Orientation, Student Affairs support offices, the Registrar's office, Housing, Financial Aid and Student Fees.

Electronic (email) messages were frequently used to provide students with important information both before and after enrollment. Various departments on campus at the research site sent announcements to new students via their campus email. Thus, copies of mass email messages were obtained from offices such as the Admission Office, Financial Aid Office, and Registration Services. These electronic communication pieces provided another source of data for document analysis. Email messages sent to students from campus departments also advertised events for students. These email messages were sent to encourage students to attend an event or other student activity such as an Organizations Fair, a free movie on campus at the theater, or to encourage students to attend a sporting event.

Additional electronic data sources included Web pages hosted by the institution targeted to new transfer students. One example of this Web source was a Web page on the institution's Web site with detailed information about a transfer student living learning community on campus. Another Web page was specifically directed to enrolled transfer students, and contained links to campus departments and new student housing information.

Facebook™ and Twitter™ are common forms of social media and many, if not most, postsecondary institutions use these two forms to provide broad messages to anyone who wants to follow the named accounts. Although these sites are good resources for obtaining information about events and current trends on campus, I chose not to include them in my data collection efforts. I read the Facebook™ and Twitter™ pages for South University during the data collection time frame. The information I reviewed on each of these sites was not targeted to new students, and thus very broad and general. There were no announcements that had any content connected to academic integration during the period of time I was reviewing the Web pages and reading the Twitter™ feeds. There were some tweets however, that referenced campus events.

During the interview, I asked participants about their use of social media. Based on participants' responses, it became evident that only a few students participated in viewing Facebook™ or Twitter™. The small number of participants who did read Facebook™ and/or Twitter™ were not viewing the institution's Twitter™ or Facebook™ pages. These few participants noted a wide variety of different Facebook™ groups or

Twitter^{TM} feeds they monitored. Because there was no common set of Web pages they were viewing, I did not include my review of those Web sources in my data collection.

Document analysis involved carefully reading through each email message, letter, and reviewing each web page. I analyzed each document in two important areas, the first of which was content. I reviewed each document to determine the overall purpose of the information, and then evaluated how the content was presented. The second area I focused on while analyzing documents was that of construct, that is, I looked at each document to determine if the content was centered on or around socialization, academic or social integration, or if the information in the document was directed towards helping a student maneuver their way through technology as a new student. Figure 4 summarizes the document analysis.

Paper documents analyzed included two Welcome letters, new student orientation materials, and a brochure titled *TransferMation.* One Welcome letter was from the office of Admissions at South University, notifying students of their official acceptance into a degree program at the institution. Additionally, the letter contained specific instructions that encouraged a new student to log in to the campus student system, a web-based portal with a wide variety of options such as registration, tuition and fees totals, and may other specific functions. The second Welcome letter was from a different department, the Office of Undergraduate Studies Transfer Programs. That letter also contained detailed information in a step-by-step format that instructed the new student to set up their campus email, turn in specific transcripts and be advised of the importance of attending an orientation during the summer prior to the start of fall 2013 classes.

Analysis of the orientation document provided insight into what types of information the institution presented to new students as the most important. From the perspective of the Orientation Office, new transfer students needed to know about the technical aspects of being a student at South University. The technical aspects included knowing how to use the campus email system and where to find academic support services once classes started. Students were also encouraged to learn about the history and traditions of the institution, including learning about the athletic team mascots, the school colors, and other information that pertained to traditions and legends.

Emails sent to students after enrollment included announcements advertising social events on campus. These messages were primarily social in content, encouraging all students to attend events and student activities on campus. I analyzed email messages from several campus organizations that gave students details about specific social events and encouraged participation by attending the event.

Figure 4 provides detail regarding the documents I collected and analyzed. Although the number of documents (including emails) I reviewed was extensive, these emails were not inclusive of all of the emails students would have received while enrolled at South University. In short, more messages were sent to students via email after enrollment than were possible to include in this study due to time constraints.

During interview sessions, participants were able to identify specific ways they obtained key information, such as academic deadlines. Although their answers revealed a variety of sources, the majority of sources discussed came from documents or email communication provided by the institution. As the researcher, it was valuable information

in that I could better understand how participants used these sources. Working at the institution that served as the research site, I was aware of the content of documents and email communication sent to new transfer students. I found the participant's responses regarding documents and email supportive of the institution's efforts to provide key information in a timely manner. These responses supported development of one thematic element, communication from the institution. Themes and additional results are discussed in Chapter Four.

Semester	Paper Document	Web Page/Web Resource	Content	Social/Academic	Information Network
Fall 2013	Admission acceptance letter Welcome letter and paper copy of *TransferMation* brochure	Transfer student learning community web page on university web site	Admissions letter contained instructions to access the electronic student system *TransferMation* contained a checklist of required tasks	Social, Academic	Information about university policies, housing and dining plans
	Orientation packet materials Paper materials from campus departments		Housing options, dining hall meal plans, academic support services	Social, Academic	
		Registration emails via student's university email account		Academic	
		Bi-Monthly enewsletter for new students via student's university email account	Current academic deadlines, semester news, current campus events	Social, Academic	
		Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	University-sponsored web pages and sites	Social	Information about current events associated with South University
Spring 2014	*TransferMation* newsletter	Bi-Monthly enewsletter for new students via student's university email account		Social, Academic	
		Registration emails via student's university email account		Academic	
	Flyers and posters in residence halls, dining halls			Social, Academic	Flyers announcing student events, workshops
		Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	University-sponsored web pages and sites	Social	Information about current events associated with South University

Figure 4 Summary of Document Analysis

Direct Observation

Data collection included direct observations of new transfer students on campus. The purpose of direct observations was to examine the ways new students interact with other students on campus in various locations (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) outlined the primary reasons for qualitative observation in data collection, "through direct observations the inquirer is better able to understand and capture the context within which people interact" (p. 262). For this study, direct observation of new transfer students was obtained in three separate locations, which included: (a) the residence hall common/open space areas in the specific residence hall designated for new transfer students, (b) outside classroom areas (such as hallways) in academic buildings on campus where new transfer students were on class rosters, and (c) at one of the academic support buildings on campus where tutoring and other academic support services were provided for students.

To identify new transfer students without directly meeting them in these observational settings provided a logistical challenge to me as the researcher. Discussion with staff in the Office of Institutional Research indicated it was possible to identify new transfer students enrolled in specific classes on campus, such as SU 1000 workshops. Direct observations were successfully obtained by observing several SU 1000 workshops. Because all new students, including transfer students, were required to enroll in SU 1000 during their first semester, it was possible to observe students at several SU 1000 workshops during the fall 2013 semester. Additional observations took place during

spring 2014, when new transfer students were involved in another SU 1000 workshop. The goal was to collect observational data that would reflect efforts new transfer students made to engage academically and socially on campus, as well as reflect what these new transfer students did in order to facilitate development of an information network.

Additional observations were obtained at drop-in advising sessions offered in two locations on campus. New transfer students were the only students who were sent an email with drop-in advising dates, times, and locations. Therefore, only new transfer students on the list received the email to attend. After each observation session of drop-in advising, I made journal entries about the student, the issues discussed, and my overall impressions of the student and how the student described their transition issues during the session.

Research Journal of Professional Experiences

The fourth overarching category of data collection was comprised of the professional experiences and knowledge I wrote about in my research journal. The research journal I used included events where I experienced interactions with new transfer students during the course of my professional day as a full time staff member working at the research site. The written entries were made during the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters at South University. Writing journal entries assisted me with awareness of my personal biases and provided a vehicle for me to 'bracket out' or set aside these biases and any pre-determined thoughts I may have had about the participants, such as prejudging any student's academic outcomes based on the two-year college they attended prior to enrollment at the research site.

Moustakas (1994) explained that 'bracketing out' was a technique used by researchers to set aside any preconceived ideas, thoughts, or beliefs about the study population or participants. For purposes of this study, I used the professional journal to use the technique of bracketing out. By reflecting on my personal biases or preconceived ideas, I was able to clear my thoughts about the participants and where they came from (two-year college) prior to enrolling at the research site, South University. Setting aside my personal biases via entries in my professional research journal proved to be effective in keeping my focus on the participant's individual experiences. By focusing only on the specific aspects of each participant's individual transition experiences, I found that I was more keenly aware of the nuances each student talked about during their interview session.

My professional experiences leading up to the present study included employment on the campuses of several two-year college campuses in South Carolina. Additionally, I have ten years of professional experience at South University, the research site for the present study. These professional experiences included interactions with two-year college students in the areas of student clubs and organizations, academic advising and financial aid. In particular, my professional experiences at the research site in the Financial Aid Department gave me first-hand knowledge of issues new transfer students faced when transitioning to South University. I became the person in the Financial Aid Office at South University that many transfer students sought out when they had questions about the State of South Carolina scholarship programs, the LIFE and Palmetto Fellows Scholarships. By interacting daily with transfer students, (from both two-year

and four-year institutions), I developed opinions about different two-year and four-year colleges and universities in the areas of academic rigor, ease of transition and transfer of credits, and whether or not the institution was academically as challenging as South University was to a large number of new transfer students. Thus, at the beginning of the present research study, I had definite ideas and preconceived notions about students who transferred to South from certain schools in the state of South Carolina. Utilizing the research journal was critical to the entire research process and facilitated my ability to bracket out preconceived notions and ideas.

My professional journal entries allowed me to note things about each student interaction I experienced during advising sessions and student appointments. During the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters, I met individually with approximately 100 new transfer students during advising sessions. I kept detailed notes about each discussion with students, including their major issues or concerns, and whether or not those issues were related to their transition to South as a new student, or if the issues were related to some other topic. My notes from each session also included asking the student which school they had previously attended, in order for me to categorize my notes based on whether a student came from a two-year college in South Carolina or whether they transferred to South from a four-year institution. By collecting data via my professional experiences and advising notes, I could provide more background and depth to the emergent themes.

Triangulation of Data and Trustworthiness Measures

Trustworthiness, sometimes called validation, rather than replication or generalizability, are the measures that should be employed to examine the quality of qualitative work (Creswell, 2007). Trustworthiness can be established by using rigorous data collection methods and incorporating multiple data sources focused on the research questions and data collection protocol. Creswell (2007) outlines the most prominent methods of validation in qualitative research as (a) peer review or debriefing, (b) negative case analysis, (c) member checking, (d) triangulation of data with multiple sources to provide corroborating evidence, (e) clarifying researcher biases, (f) using rich, thick description, (g) having external audits and (h) spending extended time in the field with participants. For the present study, I utilized (a) member checking, (b) clarifying researcher biases, (c) including rich, thick description and (d) triangulation of data via multiple sources. Multiple sources included data from (a) document analysis, (b) observation notes taken during sessions where I observed the sample population in campus settings, and (c) professional journal notes from interactions with the sample population on campus in academic settings.

Member Checking

The first measure of trustworthiness employed in this project was member checking. Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed each audio recording into a Word document. I asked each participant to review the transcribed interview document and make any corrections or changes necessary to make ensure the document accurately captured the essence of the responses. Member checking allowed each participant the

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opportunity to review the data from their individual interview, and make corrections to the text. It also served as a confirmation from each participant that what they read in the transcribed document was accurate and consistent with the questions and responses they experienced during the interview session. Creswell (2007) noted that member checking was one of eight validation strategies frequently used in qualitative research.

Clarifying Researcher Bias

Clarifying researcher bias, according to Creswell (2007), is a technique where the researcher writes about past experiences, prejudices or biases the researcher recognizes they posses about any aspect of the research project. Setting aside researcher bias is the second measure of trustworthiness utilized during the present research study. Utilizing a research journal assisted me with setting aside my biases. Similarly, Van Manen (1990) noted:

> Researchers, too, have found that keeping a journal, diary or log can be
> very helpful for keeping a record of insights gained, for discerning
> patterns of the work in progress, for reflecting on previous reflections, for
> making the activities of research themselves topics for study, and so forth
> (p. 73).

I used the journal to note my thoughts, interpretations, and feelings about the sample population as I reflected on my professional interactions with new transfer students. Use of the research journal began with IRB approval for the study and continued throughout the research processes of data collection, analysis, review, and final project discussion and findings. Additional discussion on how I used the professional

journal to clarify my researcher bias is included in the next section on researcher subjectivity.

Thick, Rich Descriptions

The third method for ensuring trustworthiness used in the present study was the use of thick, rich descriptions. As noted by Creswell (2007), the use of thick, rich descriptions is a method frequently used by qualitative researchers to provide more details about the participants themselves and about other data elements. In the present study, rich thick descriptions were used to provide evidence supporting the development of themes. These detailed descriptions can be found in Figure 5 in Appendix B. Figure 5 includes significant statements from participants and the corresponding themes associated with the statements.

Multiple Sources of Data

The fourth measure of trustworthiness built into the study was to gather evidence from several sources. According to Creswell (2007), this process involves corroborating data from different sources. In addition to the interview responses, data was collected through (a) participant observations and (b) document analysis. The additional sources, participant observations and document analysis, strengthened the study and created a solid foundation for analysis.

Participant observations, or direct observations, provided an interesting and informative method for noting how new transfer students interacted on campus in various settings. As previously noted, I observed new transfer students at various locations on campus at South University during the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters. The purpose

of these observations was to note how students interacted in settings that were (a) academic, such as the CU 1000 course workshops, and (b) non-academic, such as the residence hall for new transfer students. During each observation, I made research notes about whether or not students were sitting by themselves, studying, reading, or interacting with other students. My research notes added to the background and depth of the data for the present study by providing some insight into how new transfer students interacted and engaged on campus.

Document analysis, as previously noted in Chapter Three, provided written and electronic communication messages sent to new transfer students during their first semester of enrollment at South. The analysis featured in Figure 4 provided additional support for development of emergent themes. By analyzing all the available sources of information provided to new transfer students at South, I hoped to strengthen the present study and provide more depth as the emergent themes were developed and presented.

Researcher Subjectivity

Researcher subjectivity is an element of every study. I am keenly aware of my own subjectivity in that I have interacted daily with transfer students at the research site. In general, I acknowledge that I have biased views about the transfer student experience; it is my professional duty to assist these students when they are new to the four-year institution that serves as the research site for this study. I have frequently connected with new transfer students at weekly drop-in advising sessions on campus and via email for the purpose of answering their transition questions. Essentially, my professional role is that of an institutional agent for this population of new transfer students.

My biases include a greater understanding of what types of communications new transfer students received from the institution's various offices such as the Office of Admissions, Registrar's Office, and others. Clarifying researcher biases has involved writing about my personal biases with regards to the participants in this study. I've consciously reflected on my professional experiences working on a daily basis with transfer students at the research site. By explicitly outlining my thoughts and experiences with a professional journaling approach, I have worked to 'bracket' or set aside my personal thoughts, feelings and ideas about the research project. Moustakas (1994) described bracketing as the approach the researcher takes to set aside preconceived ideas or notions about the phenomenon and take a new, fresh perspective towards it in the research process. As a result of my professional work and thus advanced knowledge, I went through the process of 'bracketing out', or setting aside, my own thoughts about how new transfer students connect to the campus environment, how they become socialized through interactions with faculty and peers and my perceptions of information networks students may have created or utilized as a resource.

    As previously noted, my personal biases were more evident to me as I prepared to follow the approved research protocol for the present study. The research journal was a tool I used virtually every day during the data collection process, and found I was more focused on the individual experiences each participant reported after having written in my journal.

Data Analysis

I followed a sequence of steps for the data analysis protocol, based on Creswell's (2007) straightforward approach to the analysis of a phenomenological study. The analysis of a phenomenological study involves careful review of all data sources in order to discover the overarching essence of the phenomenon in question. The steps I followed for data analysis were: (a) I described personal experiences with the phenomenon in the study, (b) developed an outline of the significant statements gleaned from the interview transcripts and other data elements, (c) grouped the significant statements into larger units of information called themes, (d) developed the textural description, (e) developed the structural description, and (f) finally, developed the composite, overarching essence.

I used NVivo ^{TM} qualitative software as a tool to organize the data from interview transcripts. After reading through all interview transcripts, responses from each participant's individual interview were added to the NVivo ^{TM} software program. Participant responses were grouped into the major categories associated with the primary and secondary research questions. These categories were: (a) academic integration, (b) social integration, (c) socio-academic integrative moments and (d) information networks. Through participant responses by these overarching categories, I was able to gain a more clear understanding of the transition phenomenon by way of the participant's rich, think responses.

The first step, describing personal experiences with the phenomenon in the study, was accomplished via use of my professional research journal. As already noted earlier in this chapter, writing in my research journal served as a method of trustworthiness and a

way to present, or lay out in the open, my researcher bias towards transfer students and towards particular institutions in South Carolina. Creswell (2007) notes that in order to direct the focus towards the participants in the study, the researcher must set aside their personal experiences. This is also the technique Moustakas (1994) described as bracketing out personal biases and preconceived notions about the research topic or participants.

The second step was to review the interview transcripts and documents analyzed to create an outline of significant statements. According to Creswell (2007), it is during this step that the researcher works to create a list of significant statements that describe how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Each participant gave thoughtful answers during the interview sessions, considering different aspects of their transition to South University. Participant responses were grouped into significant statements that provided me with an overarching understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon of transfer as a two-year college student.

The third step was to gather the significant statements together into larger units of information forming themes. Upon completing my analysis, four overarching themes emerged, which were: (a) a student's age impacted their transition, affecting both social engagement and academic integration, (b) the academic transition was challenging, (c) making social connections to the new campus was critical to a successful transition, and (d) communication provided by the institution targeting new transfer students was valuable and important for a successful transition. Chapter Four contains a more detailed discussion of the themes and significant statements associated with the themes.

The fourth step in the analysis process was to develop the textural description. The textural description is what happened to the participants, that is, what they experienced as two-year college transfer students enrolled at a four-year university. Creswell (2007) noted that the textural description is a description of what happened, including elements from all the experiences described by participants. The textural description for the present study is:

Two-year college transfer students experienced academic challenges during their first semester at the four-year institution. Students needed to have self-reliance to stay up with the academic demands. Adjusting socially and making connections to new groups took initiative on the part of each student, challenging them to look outside their normal social groups and make new connections.

The fifth step in the process of analysis was to create a structural description, or what Creswell (2007) noted as the 'how' of the experience. Essentially, the structural description is a description that could include the setting and context for the phenomenon. The structural description for the present study is:

Two-year college transfer students experienced a physical setting that was large and unfamiliar, and felt out of place because their cohort peers were already a year or more ahead of them in enrollment at the university. Living off campus, they learned to navigate various systems and where to go to get assistance for logistical issues.

The final step in the process was to develop the overarching meaning or essence. According to Creswell (2007), the researcher should "write a composite description of

the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions" (p. 159).

The overarching essence of the study was:

> The academic adjustment from the two-year college environment to the four-year university was more difficult than expected and making social connections to the new campus was crucially important for students to feel they were making a successful transition.

During each step of the analysis process, I considered my carefully detailed observations and research journal notes when proceeding with the study. I specifically reviewed those data elements (observations and journal notes) in order to add them to the body of evidence collected in support of revealing more about how new transfer students engaged with other students on campus. My analysis of document evidence was conducted in order to see what kinds of information new transfer students were receiving from the institution as they entered their first semester of enrollment and throughout their first term. Campus event announcements and email messages were collected and reviewed for content through a lens focused on social integration, academic integration, and use of social ties to gain information, as in information networks.

Conclusion

Chapter Three began with a discussion of the epistemological considerations for the current study. Based on the research questions, (primary and supplemental), phenomenology was selected as the method most appropriate for the present research. Included in this chapter has been an overview of the research site and discussion centered on data collection involving three different sources of data. Also, included in this chapter

has been a brief discussion of the pilot study, with a table summarizing the findings and examining the pilot study student responses from interviews. Based on the findings of the pilot study, the primary research question and supplemental or secondary research questions and data collection strategies were refined for the present study. Additionally, a new conceptual framework was adapted from previous socialization models. The current study used a more nuanced model of undergraduate socialization and investigated key components of the transfer student transition experiences at the four-year institution. A specific change was made with the research design of the present study, to exclude any two-year college transfer student who had prior experience with a bridge preparation program at the two-year college.

Additional sections of Chapter Three included discussion on the triangulation of data and trustworthiness measures along with a section on researcher subjectivity. Finally, a discussion was presented focused on the data analysis I conducted with detailed analysis that resulted in development of the textural and structural descriptions and overall themes. The final section contained the development of the overarching essence. Additional discussion will be included in Chapter Four and Five regarding the emergent themes.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four contains the discussion of results for the present study, where the central purpose was to investigate two-year college transfer student experiences as they transitioned from a two-year college to a four-year university. The results included in this chapter start with a discussion of participant responses to the first interview question, "Describe your transition experiences as a new transfer student at South University".

Supplemental, guiding research questions were used in addition to the primary research question, which included:

- What impact do transition experiences of two-year college transfer students have on their academic and social integration at the receiving postsecondary institution?

- What socialization experiences do two-year college transfer students describe after their transition to a four-year college or university campus?

- What ways do two-year college transfer students develop and utilize information networks at the four-year college or university?

Data for the present study is presented in several sections, starting with reasons participants chose to transfer from their two-year college to the four-year university that served as the research site. As two-year college students, the participants were motivated to continue pursuing their goal of obtaining a baccalaureate degree at a four-year college or university. Each participant had specific reasons they chose to enroll at South

University, even though many admitted it was a big challenge for them to transfer successfully to a larger four-year institution.

In the second section, data is discussed as related to the development of themes. Themes were developed as a result of an iterative process, whereby I reviewed and analyzed interview transcripts to form an understanding of the significant statements participants made as they answered the interview questions. Significant statements are discussed that support the development of each theme, along with quotes from participants. Age turned out to be an interesting aspect of one of the themes, and discussion is included with participant statements supporting the development of that theme. The themes discussed in this chapter are: (a) the student's age impacted their transition, (b) the academic transition was challenging, (c) making social connections was critical to a successful transition, and (d) communication from the institution was valuable and important for a successful transition.

<p style="text-align:center">Reasons Participants Transferred to the Research Site</p>

Participants spoke about their transition to the four-year university as a positive experience overall. Participants were asked about their choice of South University, specifically, why did they choose to transfer to this particular institution? Half (six) of the participants, indicated it was because of the academic degree programs offered by South University. They described South University as a prestigious top-level research university, one they aspired to attend and were happy, excited and apprehensive to begin their academic career at a top-tier research university.

The first student participant chose South University because of her choice of academic major or degree program. Debbie (all participant's names are pseudonyms) worked approximately five years after attending Mid-County Technical College. At age 26, she considered herself older than most of the other students she had met. Her motivation to return to college and pursue a baccalaureate degree came from a desire to become more skilled in her chosen field, working with farm projects, animals, and agriculture. Ultimately, she chose South University because of its Animal and Veterinary Sciences degree program. Her goal was to continue with the bachelor's degree and go on to a professional school, such as Veterinary School.

Joe, 22, a Psychology major who transferred from Oceanside Technical College, perceived a sense of fit based on the location of the campus. Located in the northwest section of the state, South University is close to nature trails and national park areas along the Blue Ridge Mountains. A self-described nature guy who liked the small town feel of South, he transferred after having attended Oceanside Technical College for two academic years. He too considered himself older than the other students he interacted with on campus.

John, 22, transferred from Upstate Technical College, a medium-sized two-year college located within five miles of the campus of South University. A Business major, John chose to transfer to South University because of family and friends. He commented:

I already knew people who went here, it's really close to where I'm from, and I've had family that went here and have grown up around here. This

was my best option to stay close to my family but not too close. It wasn't

that I really thought about coming to South for a specific program but I

just thought that overall it is a good school.

Thomas, 21, a Biological Sciences major, reflected on his decision to attend South

University after attending Upstate Technical College. Not only did he have family ties to

the institution, he also spoke about the academic reputation and how pervasive the culture

of South University was in this geographic area. He noted:

I've been in love with South ever since I was a little kid; my aunt attended

South and got her master's degree. I grew up in this area, so South is

very ingrained in the culture here; it's one of the first institutions I ever

learned about.

Thomas continued:

I knew South had strong roots in the Life Sciences, so that added just

another level of why attending South made sense to me.

Alex, 22, an Engineering major, also felt that the University's academic culture,

prestige, and reputation were important factors in his decision to attend South. He chose

South based on the advice of others who knew that the Engineering programs were very

good and nationally recognized. He stated that:

South kept coming up as a well-known engineering school. I guess I may

have been conditioned to think that South was the BEST engineering

school. Without ever having been here (to the campus) before I applied,

I relied on what others had told me about the school. After coming here

and seeing the gardens and the emphasis on sustainability, I personally

love the school. Instead of me choosing the school, it kind of chose me.

Jake, a computer science major who attended Mid-Region Technical College, felt

that he came to South University based on his family wishes and his desire to continue

the trend of attending South as so many other members of his family. At age 22, he

wanted to continue where his brother and cousins had earned college degrees.

Elliott, also 22, described his desire to attend South as something he's always

known he wanted to do. He too had a family connection to the University, having had an

older brother graduate from South. Elliott chose the same academic major as his older

brother had, Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management. He described himself as

someone who was upset that he did not get accepted to South University immediately out

of high school, and chose to attend Upstate Technical College because he knew it was

close by and many other university transfer students took their first year general

education courses at Upstate Tech.

Gus, at age 43, was the oldest participant in the study. He had earned an

Associates Degree from Upstate Technical College, and he wanted to continue towards a

baccalaureate degree in Forest Resource Management at South. When discussing his

motivation to go beyond the Associates Degree level, he commented:

> South is #1 for return on your investment. I'm investing a lot in me and
> they have such a great success rate. South was the best choice and also
> my Mom, having come here, was kind of pushing for it as well.

Chuck, at age 31, chose to enroll at South because of South's exemplary engineering programs. He discussed his path to college as very difficult, attending college at a four-year institution right out of high school, but finding quickly that he did not fit with that school. After working for the last 15 years or so and starting a family, he said he realized he needed more stable and reliable work and saw the demand for engineering. He commented:

> I realized I was never going to break that $10 per hour cap unless I worked
>
> exclusively for twenty years with no guarantee that I'd still have a job
>
> with that company. There was no way for me to claim the experience I
>
> would have, with no guarantee of any sort of tier in income.

Holly, 20, transferred to South University from Upstate Technical College. She had applied to South during her senior year of high school but she was not offered admission as a freshmen. She chose to enroll at Upstate due to the short distance between the campus of South University and Upstate Technical College. Holly's original choice of academic major was Food Science, but after enrolling at South for the fall 2013 semester, she realized she was more interested in Business. Although she had not officially changed her academic major at the time of the interview session, she planned to accomplish that task before the end of the semester. She did enroll in courses that were part of the Pre-Business curriculum at South.

Fiona, 21, enrolled at South as a Veterinary Sciences major, with the intended goal of going to a professional school such as Veterinary School. She described South as the school she had always wanted to attend, as did many of the other participants.

Jim, 39, was the second oldest participant in the study. He was enrolled as a Biological Sciences major at South, and commented that he was originally planning to go to medical school after earning a baccalaureate degree in biological sciences. He noted:

Before I decided to come here (to South) I was thinking about going to

med school and I thought that in the state of South Carolina, it all came

down to financial aid for the most part, and if I was going to get into med

school in South Carolina, I needed to look as unique as possible. I thought

that South would help me stand out during the application process.

Themes

Themes, in phenomenological research, can be understood as the 'structures of the experience'. Van Manen (1990) pointed out "when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up the experience" (p. 79). I used a series of steps as outlined by Creswell (2007) to develop themes based on my analysis of the participants' interview responses. The development of themes was accomplished by analyzing the transcript data and highlighting significant statements from each participant's responses. Gathering the significant statements into clusters of meaning allowed me to step back from the data and look at the overarching categories that described the participants' transition experiences. The overarching categories became the four themes for this study.

The results of the study revealed four major themes. The themes were: (a) a student's age impacted their transition, affecting both social engagement and academic integration; (b) the academic transition was challenging; (c) making social connections to

the new campus was critical to a successful transition; and (d) communication provided by the institution targeting new transfer students was valuable and important for a successful transition.

<div align="center">Theme: The Student's Age Impacted Their Transition</div>

Age was a factor when it came to making social connections on campus. Three of the twelve participants were between 11 to 20 years older than their peers as entering transfer students. The older the student, the wider the gap they experienced when they attempted to make social connections. Jim, 39, commented on his attempts to get involved socially with campus groups:

> I tried joining an organization last semester and I didn't feel very comfortable because it was 30 20-year olds and me, so it was harder to stay involved in the group because there seemed to be a lot more communication between the other students than they shared with me. It's been a challenge to try to stay involved.

All of the study participants lived off campus, while the three oldest participants also had family dynamics to contend with while they transitioned to South University. Living off campus, because he was an older student who was married and had a family, created restrictions for Gus, 43, when he considered making social connections at South via clubs. He depended on riding the campus bus to get to classes, and had limited transportation after hours to use to return to campus for a club or group meeting. He commented:

I was planning to try and do that (look into clubs and organizations to join)

within the next year or so. I wanted to see how the transition went for a

year and make sure I have a ....handle on time management and my classes

before I get involved.

Debbie, 26, was 4 to 5 years older than the youngest study participant. During the

interview session, I asked her if she joined any clubs or groups during her first semester.

She replied:

There is one club, I guess, that I thought I was interested in, so I attended

like an open meeting, but then decided maybe it's not quite for me. Just

because I'm a little older than the majority of students in these groups and

organizations; I've got my own life outside of college, that it gets to be

difficult especially living some distance away, where I can't readily be

available, like 'hey we're having a meeting at 8 o'clock'that is my dinner

time and then bed, so I can't really do that.

Chuck, 31, originally did not think he would have the time to devote to joining a

club. However, in the interview session, he discussed how his thinking changed as a

result of hearing about the great benefits of participating in clubs and groups at South.

He noted:

I kept hearing about the benefits of being in the clubs, networking, being

able to find out about more opportunities, getting more information about

what to expect from certain classes and professors, finding out about co-op

or internship opportunities, and getting a better perspective and planning for the future.

Chuck also mentioned that because of his schedule, living off campus in a nearby city and sharing one vehicle with his wife, he kept his interactions with potential clubs going via email. He was not able to attend actual meetings but kept up with what the group was doing by connecting through emails.

Although the majority of the participants were much younger, aged 20 – 22, age remained a factor, they felt, in how they made social connections to South University. In particular, several participants noted they enrolled at South after two years at a two-year college, and that their peers who started at South as freshmen already had established groups of social connections. In other words, the study participants felt that they were older in that they entered South as a student with several years of college already completed. Joe, 22, felt he had a harder time meeting new people at South because he was already a junior in credit hours and years of school, and noted that his peers who started at South as freshmen had established social groups he did not think he could break in to without a lot of extra effort. He said:

So I know it has been a little bit harder for me to meet and socialize because I came in as a junior instead of a freshmen going as a regular student, like 18 or 19 years old, I came in later as a junior, older, so it was a little harder for me to connect because most of the people in my age group or whatever had already been here for two years or more. They had

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established a network of friends and so found that to be difficult to break

into.

Age also impacted academic connections. One older student indicated he had experienced differences in how he was treated in the classroom setting as far as academic connections to faculty. Jim, 39, said:

I've had to adjust my thinking, because I'm an older student and most of

the other students are half my age. I've noticed that I'm not usually

perceived as a traditional student so when conversations in class occur,

I'm usually the kid picked last or excluded, or what I say isn't respected

as much as other things people in the same age group say.

Debbie, 26, also commented on how age and years away from the classroom impacted her academic experiences and connections. She felt she had to do additional research herself to get back up to the pace expected of students in some of her classes. She noted:

Academically, it was a little bit challenging; it wasn't necessarily the jump

from the small classroom to the big one, it's just sometimes I haven't had,

from so many years ago; many of the kids are coming right from high

school and they remember everything the teacher is going over. But I

have found I have to go back and refresh on some of the mathematics.

Gus, 43, found that technology issues impacted his academic work. As he sought more assistance with technology-related problems, he found his connections in the area of academic resources were deepened. Unlike the other participants, who saw their age

as a factor that created more issues, Gus saw that his age-related technology issues gave him more opportunities to connect when seeking help. He described his situation with technology and attending college:

> It's been a crash course in computers. When I first started, I took a computer class at Upstate Tech and while I'm still learning, I'm leaps and bounds ahead of where I was when I started out. I've gone to the Academic Success Center and gotten help with staff in the ePortfolio office, they've helped me upload pictures and documents.

Chuck, 31, had prior two-year college experiences with academic advising that were unsuccessful. He felt that he got bad advice while a student at a two-year college, and stopped attending that particular school. After working full time for a few more years, he returned to that same two-year college and made connections with faculty in the Engineering department, where he took some of his classes. He found, to his surprise, that he got good advice from faculty, and he continued his enrollment. After transferring to South in fall 2013, he found that connections to faculty were again important and helpful with regards to academic issues.

For Chuck, age became a factor when he experienced two situations that required him to work with individual faculty to resolve the problems. One problem involved a medical emergency that required him to miss classes. The faculty member accepted his doctor's excuse and allowed him to make up the work he missed, but another faculty member, for a different class, refused to accept the medical excuse and would not allow Chuck to take a make-up test on a day when he was scheduled to be on campus.

As a full time student with a family, he worked out his class schedule to be available three days a week at home while his wife worked full time. With younger children, staying home a few days a week dramatically reduced their childcare expenses and made it possible for him to be a full time student. When the second faculty member would not allow Chuck to take the makeup test on a day he was already scheduled to be on campus, Chuck was at a loss as to what to do. He commented:

With my schedule being on campus Tuesdays and Thursdays, his professor wanted me to be on campus at night on a different night to take the test. This professor told me I was being unreasonable because I'm not able to be on campus everyday due to my prior responsibilities of being a parent and not being able to easily find childcare.

Chuck ended up dropping the class, and had to plan for summer school at the local technical college in order to take the class and catch up regarding his academic program. The course he had to drop was a prerequisite for many of the upper level math and physics courses he needed for the next semester. His situation was a dynamic example of how his age, along with characteristics associated with being an older student, impacted his academic connections within his major course of study.

Theme: The Academic Transition was Challenging

Becoming adjusted to the academic challenges at South University was a major challenge to each participant, and the second theme of this study. All the study participants commented on the difficulties they encountered with making the adjustment academically. Based on Grade Point Average results after their first semester of

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enrollment, only four of the twelve study participants had a cumulative 3.0 or higher

Grade Point Average on a 4.0 scale. The remaining participants were closer to the 2.0 or

2.5 Grade Point Average range. The Grade Point Averages were available to me as the

researcher via access to the Student Information System.

Study participants made academic connections both inside the classroom and

outside at tutoring sessions, Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions and academic support

workshops on campus. Students majoring in degree programs in the areas of engineering

and science were exposed to SI information during classes that offered such support.

Other study participants knew about these types of academic support sessions as a result

of either having used SI or tutoring at the two-year college or knowing someone who did

use these services.

During the interview, participants were asked to describe their academic

experiences during their first semester. While participants indicted their academic

experiences were positive, they also learned, through experience, that academic

expectations were higher at South University than they had anticipated. Several

participants commented on the faster pace and the higher level of critical thinking that

was required if a student was to be successful in class. Thomas, 22, noted a key

difference for him between academic work and demands at the two-year college and at

South University:

> In terms of daily assignments, it has been less than at my previous
>
> institution but I attribute that to the larger class loads so a professor
>
> probably doesn't have time to grade a bunch of homework assignments

each week. Rather than fewer weekly assignments , there wer more major

assignments. Because of that, I've spent less time doing homework and

more time studying than I did at my previous school. It is more

knowledge based testing than effort based.

Thomas, 22, a student majoring in Biological Sciences, stated that he had to adjust

to the larger lecture hall class sizes, as well as make a shift in his own approach to

academics once he transferred to South University:

Well, the most interesting thing from transitioning from a small

community college to a large major research university was adjusting to

being in an environment where you're primarily in classrooms of about 20

students to being in lecture halls with 100-plus students. It's been a shift

in how I have to approach my classes, there's a lot more self-reliance

when you're doing your studies at a major university compared to a small

community college. Because when you have so many students taking the

classes, there's not as much one-on-one time with your teachers. I've

kind of enjoyed that because I kind of like relying on myself.

Holly, 20, described her academic transition as more difficult than she anticipated.

She transferred from Upstate Technical College, and noted that her professors at Upstate

Tech had been more lenient than the professors or faculty she had interacted with at

South. She said:

The classwork, the professors aren't as lenient as they were when I went to

Upstate, it was a lot harder to transition from something that was a lot

easier. Harder too because of having to ask questions, I guess. And you'd

be given a straight answer (at Upstate Tech). But here you have to think

of the answers and you have to do a lot more work to get the answer.

They make you think a lot more, which is good, but it's also like, a

different transition.

Debbie, 26, worked for five years before transferring to South to pursue a baccalaureate degree in Animal and Veterinary Sciences. She felt that she was adequately prepared, having earned an Associate in Science degree from Upstate Technical College after having attended Mid-County Technical College. Still, she described her classroom experiences as challenging:

A lot of the undergraduate classes are so large, that the professor is just

lecturing to a large group. But as I've progressed a little bit further, the

class sizes are not so big, and that's been better.

Fiona, 21, described her academic experiences as difficult. As a student majoring in Animal and Veterinary Sciences, she commented on her difficulties with instructors in science classes at the two-year college she attended before enrolling at South. Her overall academic transition to South was difficult. She noted: " I kind of felt unprepared. My time at Upstate Tech didn't prepare me for what South was going to be like".

When I pressed her further during the interview, I asked if she felt unprepared academically or socially. She replied: "Academically, academically overall. And I feel like it (Upstate Tech) did not get me ready"

Although we continued to discuss her academic transition during the interview, she did not relay any further indication of why she felt unprepared academically when she entered South University. She did, however, comment on her faculty adviser at South. She noted:

> Well, my adviser is pretty slack. You could email him as much as you
>
> want and he pretty much won't get back to you. Just getting help from
>
> professors, even if you aren't in their class, they are pretty willing to help
>
> you, as long as you ask.

Fiona, then, felt that overall, the professors at South were friendly and approachable, she clearly had nothing good to say about her faculty adviser in the department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences.

Theme: Making Social Connections was Critical to a Successful Transition

Study participants could clearly describe situations where they had social interactions with their peers on campus. During interviews, participants consistently commented on their individual attempts to meet other students during their first semester at South University. Some participants said they had to step up, not be shy, and start talking to other students. Elliott, 22, emphasized that, from his perspective, a student had to take the initiative. He said:

As much as South offers opportunities to meet new people and even with

the campus being as friendly as it is, they can't do everything and at some

point you have to make the initiative to start making friends on your own.

Others gained friends by interacting through clubs and by joining organizations

on campus. Joe, 22, discussed how he met other students:

Well, the best way I've found to meet other people is to get involved in

extracurricular activities. So through clubs, like recreational sports, that's

the way I found the best to meet new people.

Some study participants already knew other students enrolled at South University.

For others, they came to the institution without any social connections, relying on campus

resources to help them establish social connections. While Joe eventually made new

friends, he had very definite comments regarding the social scene at South and how he

felt membership in a fraternity or sorority gave students increased social connections. He

chose not to participate in the process of fraternity parties and rush. As a result, he

perceived he had less to offer when it came to making new social connections. He felt

somewhat left out because he felt he was missing out on numerous social events held

exclusively for fraternity and sorority members. He found his way to connect through a

club in his major, the Psychology Club.

Two participants made deliberate choices to stay uninvolved with clubs and

groups during their first semester. They pointed to concerns about time management,

being able to keep up with the academic workload, and chose to focus their time and

attention away from social groups. For Thomas, 22, he felt he needed to wait until he

was into his second semester before feeling comfortable enough with his academic skills

to allow for extra curricular activities. He commented:

> I didn't get involved with anything during my first semester. Recently,
>
> I've decided to try to go out for more clubs. I received an email for an
>
> Honor Society that I'm going to apply for. So in terms of my first
>
> semester, I was mostly focusing on getting myself on track academically,
>
> and I didn't have a lot of time for finding extracurricular things to do. I
>
> feel now that I'm in my second semester, I know how things work here
>
> and I feel like I can spread my wings a little more and find things to do
>
> other than going to class.

Another participant, Alex, a Civil Engineering major, offered another reason for

not seeking membership in a club or group during his first semester of enrollment. When

asked if he had made friends during his first semester, he replied:

> The first semester I didn't really make any friends, not because I couldn't
>
> but because I just didn't have time to, I was transitioning way too much
>
> into the academic sphere here where I would interact with people but
>
> without really forming a connection because I simply couldn't afford the
>
> distraction.

Debbie, one of the older students at age 26, explained her unusual way of

connecting socially. In fact, her connections were very different from any of the other

participants because she made connections with faculty form her college outside of class.

She played music with an informal group of individuals, many of whom are faculty in the

department she is majoring in, Animal and Veterinary Sciences. After meeting some

faculty members initially, her social connections grew to include the family members of

the faculty she played music with, and eventually faculty from other departments who

happened to be friends or fellow musicians. She felt these social connections, although a

unique way to meet more people, helped her with her transition. She commented:

> We interact outside of the classroom, once a week or every other week;
>
> and through them have kind of gotten to know some of the other people
>
> indifferent colleges, not just agriculture. And so it's been, I think, my
>
> position is more unique than most other students, but it has been a positive
>
> thing especially with the adjustment and learning the ins and outs about
>
> how the university works.

The current study applied the notion of socio-academic integrative moments to the

review of interview transcripts. When study participants were talking about how they

met other students or made friends, frequently they mentioned being in the academic

classroom during the time they met peers enrolled in the same class or classes. It was

common amongst the participants that they met other students during study sessions,

tutoring sessions or group meetings associated with a particular class. Students even used

academic assignments to reach out to other students via social media, ultimately

connecting with even more students who were enrolled in the same or similar courses.

Numerous examples were noted during a review of the interview transcripts, where study

participants described campus academic settings as common locations for meeting other

students and making new social contacts. Thomas, 22, commented on how he met other

students and described what can be considered an example of socio-academic integrative moments:

> Well, primarily through my classes, with some of the students I would regularly sit next to in class, we would sometimes form study groups. He added, when you start doing upper-level classes, you're with students who are in the same major as you so you'll be taking multiple classes with them. So when you're spending a lot of time with the same students it becomes easier to form relationships, especially when they're studying the same thing as you are.

While students also talked about specific social events and described their level of involvement with such activities, all mentioned academic settings as the most prominent or popular place to meet other students. Gus, 43, commented on his experiences meeting other students in an academic setting. Gus did not seem to have any hesitation talking to other students in class or starting conversations. He said:

> Usually it just comes together over schoolwork or talking after a test and comparing how you think it went. In those ways you just kind of get to know most people in the classroom.

Fiona too commented that she made new social connections in classrooms or other similar locations. She noted:

> Through my major, just walking around campus. Once you figure out the people in your major, and the people who sit next to you, you can start like that and then branch out; you meet their friends and their friends' friends.

Fiona even found that her social connections from her major went further when she became really good friends with another student who had many of the same classes and labs as Fiona did. The other student encouraged Fiona to join a sorority in the spring semester, which she did.

Theme: Communication from the Institution was Valuable and Important

for a Successful Transition

Participants in the current study were asked to describe how they learned about events on campus, study groups, and generally found out about other things associated with events and/or classes at South University. Each study participant described their own methods of gathering information they deemed valuable, both academic and social information as well as institutional information. Jake, 22, was one of the study participants who noted they read the emails sent out by South targeted to new transfer students. Email messages sent to students at their official university email account contained information covering topics that ranged from upcoming deadlines to the latest movie schedule for the on-campus theater. He commented:

> The emails that South sends out, those are helpful to let you know what's
>
> going on, following some different Twitter^{TM} and Facebook^{TM} pages let's
>
> you know what's going on, and also seeing flyers in the library or student
>
> center.

Jake also mentioned a transition course he (along with all new transfer students) took during their first semester. From his perspective, what he learned in the course was valuable information:

That South U 1000 class that I had to take when I transferred in helped a

lot; learning about the library and the academic success center and all

those sorts of things.

Joe also felt he gained a lot by keeping up with the email messages sent by South

to new students. He also recognized that the communication about academic advising

and registration for the next semester were vital pieces of information. He commented:

I get emails once very couple of weeks, that say 'advising, you should

schedule an advising appointment', suggesting you should go and set

that up with your adviser.

Joe's most important academic advising communication occurred when he met

with his academic adviser and was introduced to the degree audit tools available to

students on the South University student system.

Communication from the institution was valuable to participants and helped them

learn where to go for assistance or directed them to particular resources. Chuck, 31,

spoke in great detail about how he read through all email messages and thoroughly

followed the enrollment checklist items in paper documents mailed to his house prior to

attending orientation. Chuck stated, "Specifically, the acceptance packet was a plethora

of information, and it was wonderful. Then I got to orientation and it was pretty much an

exact repeat of that in person, so I got all of the information twice".

Participants also utilized their own information networks to gather important

information and to tap into as a source of continued knowledge. The concept of

information networks as social ties students used to gain information was evident based

on participant responses. Only one of the twelve participants had not physically been on campus prior to enrollment at the start of the fall 2013 semester. All other participants in the study had some type of familiarity with South University. For many of these students, they had either a friend from high school, a family member, or a friend from their first year in college at the two-year school that was either already enrolled at South University or had been a student at one time. Elliott, a Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management (PRTM) major, discussed his unique way of forming and using a network for gathering collegial information:

> I was actually involved with organizations at South University that didn't
> require you to be a student; so I knew several people that were students
> here. I know several campus ministers, and my brother is an alumna of
> South. So I had several people for expertise, to kind of guide me as far as
> my major; my brother was a PRTM major, and that's what I am. So yes, I
> would say I did have a lot of guidance. I would say part of it was guidance
> from others, the faculty and people I knew around but part of it would also
> be myself and my personality.

Other participants had similar experiences in that they made the choice to attend South University based on a social tie they had connecting them to the institution, often utilizing those ties once they were enrolled. John, a Business major, remarked on his use of social ties:

> I'm really fortunate that a lot of my friends from high school and friends
> from the area where I grew up already got to South University. Some are

a few years older than me so they've been around; my roommate goes

here and I've known him for a long time so that was helpful because he

showed me around and helped me figure out a lot of things. I'll still call

my friends and ask where a building is if I don't know.

Chuck, 31, had a different approach to the notion of information networks. He

indicated he did not have any real ties to South University, although he knew of

individuals who had attended South and earned a baccalaureate degree, he did not know

them personally. For him, he used the social connections of a study group to develop his

own information network. It began by going to a study group and talking with other

students in a face-to face situation, where he could ask questions about how they studied

for that particular class, or how they approached homework and so forth. From his

perspective, he felt he was branching out by creating new social ties that could help him

in the future when it came to selecting his classes for the next semester, or finding out

about internship opportunities. He said:

I've found that networking with other students in person, while not as

simple as an online interaction, has the means to bridge the gap that occurs

when students interact with other students. That's why I believe that these

study groups, beyond just focusing on the class, are extremely useful for

gaining more experience as a student at South.

As noted by these participant responses, they utilized some form of network to

engage socially and connect academically to the campus environment of South. Their

statements supported the notion of information networks as social ties or connections that helped students feel more connected to the campus (Karp and Hughes, 2008).

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Chapter Four opened with an introduction to the present study and a discussion of the results. Information from the participant interviews was presented in the section focused on reasons participants transferred to the research institution. Comments from participants were included as illustrations for the major transfer rationales. Next, themes were outlined and reviewed with participants' statements corresponding to the theme. The four themes presented were: (a) the student's age impacted their transition, both academically and socially, (b) the academic transition was challenging, (c) making social connections to the new campus was critical for a successful transition, and (d) communication provided by the institution was valuable and important for a successful transition.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

<u>INTROUCTION</u>

Two-year college students often experience transition issues when they continue towards earning a baccalaureate degree via transfer to a larger four-year college or university. In the present study, the primary research question was:

What are the transition experiences of two-year college transfer students

after they transfer to a four-year university?

The supplemental research questions that guided this study were:

- What impact do transition experiences of two-year college transfer students have on their academic and social integration at the receiving four-year institution?

- What socialization experiences do two-year college transfer students describe after their transition to a four-year university campus?

- What ways do two-year college transfer students develop and utilize information networks at the four-year school?

The results of the study are discussed in several sections. The first section reviews the textural and structural descriptions I developed through an iterative data analysis process. The overarching essence of the two-year college student transition experience that I provided in Chapter Three is included as well. Subsequent sections of the Chapter Five provide discussion of the primary research question and corresponding themes.

Participant responses that provided context for each theme associated with the primary research question will be highlighted. The supplemental research questions and associated themes are also discussed with corresponding participant statements that supported those themes. The next section in this chapter is a discussion of Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization. Included with the discussion are examples of participant experiences that supported the notion of socio-academic integrative moments as posited by Deil-Amen (2011). The final sections of Chapter Five provides more detailed discussion of conclusions from the study, implications for theory and practice, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and a final conclusions section.

<center>Review of the Textural and Structural Descriptions</center>

The textural description is what happened to the participants, that is, what they experienced as two-year college transfer students enrolled at a four-year university. Creswell (2007) noted that the textural description is a description of what happened, including elements from all the experiences described by participants. The textural description for the present study is:

> Two-year college transfer students experienced academic challenges
> during their first semester at the four-year institution. Students needed to
> have self-reliance to stay up with the academic demands. Adjusting
> socially and making connections to new groups took initiative on the part
> of each student, challenging them to look outside their normal social
> groups and make new connections.

Essentially, the structural description is a description that could include the setting and context for the phenomenon. The structural description for the present study is:

> Two-year college transfer students experienced a physical setting that was
>
> large and unfamiliar, and felt out of place because their cohort peers were
>
> already a year or more ahead of them in enrollment at the university.
>
> Living off campus, they learned to navigate various systems and where to
>
> go to get assistance for logistical issues.

Finally, the overarching essence of the study was written. According to Creswell (2007), the researcher should "write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions" (p. 159). The overarching essence of the study was:

> The academic adjustment from the two-year college environment to the
>
> four-year university was more difficult than expected and making social
>
> connections to the new campus was crucially important for students to feel
>
> they were making a successful transition.

Participants described how the transition impacted their academic work, commenting that they had to work at a higher level to achieve success. Socially, students described efforts to make new connections and gave very interesting and personal accounts of how they developed key relationships that helped them during their first semester of enrollment. Study participants were able to provide clear examples of how they found key information, how they navigated various systems on campus, and provided insight into how a new student makes a fresh start at a new school after transfer.

Primary Research Question and Corresponding Themes

The primary research question for the present study served as the focal point for my analysis. After the data analysis steps were completed, I examined how each of the four themes connected to each of the primary and supplemental research questions.

Two of the four themes were connected to the primary research question, What are the transition experiences of two-year college students after they transfer to a four-year college or university?

The theme most often described by the participants regarding their transition was the theme of academic challenge. Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) discussed how transition challenges could impact student retention and graduation rates, and that two-year college students transferring to a four-year college or university may need additional semesters to complete a degree program. Needing additional semesters to make degree progress is reflective of the overall notion that two-year college students are not as academically prepared for the rigor and standards in place at a four-year college or university.

Lanaan (2007), in his study on two-year college students, gave similar discussion regarding the academic rigor transfer students faced at the four-year college or university. In fact, two of the participants in the study talked about their academic work at the two-year school they transferred from, and revealed they needed an additional year of enrollment to obtain the Grade Point Average required by South University in order to transfer to the institution. Elliott, 22, was completely up front during the interview session, commenting that he enrolled at Upstate Technical College to be as close as

possible to South University. He said, "I ended up going to Upstate Tech for two years and got my general education done. Knowing that I wanted to go to South, it was a kind of no-brainer for me. I was able to get my grades up where they needed to be for me to be accepted."

Jake, 22, also talked about his start in postsecondary education at his local two-year college, Mid-Region Technical College. Jake had earned 60 credit hours of college work by the time he transferred to South University in the fall 2013 semester. His reason for the two year enrollment at Mid-Region had to do with academics and choice of major. He said:

> I started out as a Pharmacy major but I wasn't very good at all the science
> classes so that didn't really work out. So I switched out of that and started
> taking computer science classes. I was doing really well in those classes
> so I figured I could do that.

Debbie, 26, described her academic challenges during the first semester she attended South University. She commented:

> Academically, it was a little bit challenging; it wasn't necessarily the jump
> from the small classroom to the big one, it's just sometimes the material's
> presented n a different way, or maybe it's just because I haven't had it,
> from so many years ago. But I have found I have to go back and refresh
> on some of the mathematics or if there's something going on, I have to
> actually do my own research to kinda bring myself back up to speed.

Another theme, making social connections, was also discussed by all of the participants. Participants noted how they met other students, and described their efforts to 'step-up' and take the initiative to make the first move. Making social connections was connected to the student's transition in that participants felt they had to develop a new set of friends in order to feel they had made a successful transition. Establishing social connections at the four-year campus was supported by Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization in that participants expressed a need to meet other students and develop relationships as soon as possible. As part of the socialization process, establishing new friendships after enrolling at the four-year institution was centered on the social aspect of the informal socialization stage. Alex, 22, sought out opportunities to make informal social connections. He looked for social events on campus, commenting:

> I know there are a lot of things going on, sometimes I'll get them on my
> email, but that's something I'm kind of lacking. One way I know about
> them, is I'll ride around school, especially at the beginning of the
> semester, on my long board or bicycle and I'll just hear music or see
> people walking around with the same propaganda (t-shirts or cups) and I'll
> know there's an event nearby.

One of the participants used the social structure of membership in a sorority as a method for making informal social connections. Fiona, 21, made informal social connections with other students in classes she took in her major field of study, Animal and Veterinary Sciences. In those classes, she met a few students, one in particular that

became a good friend and eventually a roommate. Fiona noted, "we just kind of got really close and she joined a sorority last semester and convinced me it would be a good idea to join this semester, and I did."

<p style="text-align:center">Supplemental Research Questions and Corresponding Themes</p>

The first supplemental research question used to guide this study was focused on the transition experience and how that impacted the two-year college student's academic and social integration at the four-year institution. Both themes listed above, 'making social connections was important' and 'academic challenges impacted their transition' are connected to this supplemental question. One example of the academic transition impacting the individual student after transfer was offered via the comments made by Thomas, 22, who said:

> It's been a shift in how I approach my classes, there's a lot more self-
> reliance when you're doing your studies at a major university compared to
> a small community college. Because when you have so many students
> taking the classes, there's not as much one-on-one time with your
> teachers. I've kind of enjoyed that because I kind of like relying on
> myself a little bit more.

Gus, 43, described good relationships with the faculty in his major, Forest Resource Management. While he had good grades at Upstate Technical College, he also recognized his need to attend tutoring sessions while enrolled at Upstate Tech. When he got to South, he commented on the math tutoring experiences he had and the difficulties he experienced with those sessions. He said:

The tutoring went well for an extent but at some point I started to disagree

with the tutoring style. The tutoring directors wanted the tutors to lead the

students to the answer by asking questions to kind of direct them.

However, for me, that wasn't a style that worked for me and when I asked

the tutor to give me an example of the kind of problem we were working

on, that wasn't something the tutor was able to do.

In order to be successful in the math course, Gus went back and forth between the

faculty member's office and tutoring, relying on both sources of assistance to make a

passing grade.

The second supplemental research question asked about the socialization

experiences participants talked about or described as having occurred after transfer to

South University. Socialization experiences were an important element of the transition

process for the majority of the participants. The theme 'making connections to the new

campus was critical for a successful transition' is supportive of the second supplemental

research question. Jim, 39, had difficulties making the kind of connections he thought

would occur fairly quickly after he had enrolled at South. He said:

I've had to adjust my thinking, because I'm an older student and most of

the other students are half my age. I've noticed that I'm not usually

perceived as a traditional student so when conversations in class occur,

I'm usually the kid picked last or excluded, or what I say isn't respected

as much as other things people in the same age group say.

Holly, 20, felt that she had to get involved on campus at South as soon as possible.

She commented, "I knew I wanted to get involved, just because I was a transfer student, I

knew it would be harder to meet people, so I figured joining some kind of club would be

ideal, just to meet people."

The third supplemental research question was focused on information networks

and how participants utilized already established networks, or used their own. Karp and

Hughes (2008) described how two-year college students used such networks, comprised

of social ties, to gain information that would benefit them after transfer. The theme

'communication targeted to new transfer students was valuable and important for a

successful transition' is connected to the third supplemental research question.

Three participants, Holly, Jake, and Thomas, all commented on specific instances

where they tapped into a network of collegial information, in order to gain helpful or

beneficial rewards, such as greater 'insider' information about courses and faculty

members. Holly, 20, loved the Business 1010 class she took during her first semester of

enrollment. She said, "I took the Business 1010 class, and it had a lot of information. It

only met once a week, but I wish it had gone to more days; I learned a lot about so many

things." Jake also commented on a class he took, a required transition-type course called

South U 1000. He noted: "That South U 1000 class I had to take when I transferred in

helped a lot; learning about the library and the Academic Success Center and all those

sorts of things." Thomas, 22, utilized South University's online portal, OrgSync, to gain

valuable information about how to meet other people with similar interests. He noted,

"Well, there are great web resources at South. OrgSync is a great resource for finding out

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about clubs. Going to meet people face-to-face was great. OrgSync and Tiger Prowl

(organizations fair) were the most helpful for me."

<div align="center">Discussion of Conceptual Framework and Theory</div>

<div align="center">Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization</div>

Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization provided the theoretical

lens through which I, the researcher, viewed all aspects of the study. According to the

original model, Weidman's theory projected four stages of socialization: (a) anticipatory,

(b) formal, (c) informal, and (d) personal. Associated with the core socialization

experience, according to Weidman (1989), were the normative contexts of the academic

program. For the present study, the normative contexts of the academic program were

understood to be the standard schedule of classes a full time student would experience as

an undergraduate. The academic program would correspond to the student's program of

study for their intended major at the four-year university. Within the overarching

socialization experience were the socialization processes, (a) interaction, (b) integration

and (c) learning. Also residing conceptually under the umbrella of overarching

socialization experiences were the core elements of (a) knowledge acquisition, (b)

investment and (c) involvement.

Weidman's (1989) Model of Undergraduate Socialization outlined anticipatory,

formal and informal stages, which correspond with socialization experiences participants

discussed during their interview session. The participants' socialization experiences

aligned with all four of the stages in the model. Elliott, 22, described experiences were

more anticipatory. He commented:

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I have a background in church and being involved in youth so I decided

I'd give it a shot. I didn't really know that ministry really exists on

college campuses as detailed as they are and ended up going the first week

and found myself in a place that felt very much like home.

Three of the older students, Debbie, 26, Chuck, 31, and Gus, 43, all described experiences that were aligned with the anticipatory stage, served as part of the learning process, and conceptually aligned with knowledge acquisition. Debbie, having been in the work force for several years prior to enrolling at South, researched the academic requirements for her major even before she applied to attend South as a transfer student. She utilized her connection to a college recruiter for the agricultural college as a source to gain as much information as possible. She said:

I started meeting with her about a year before I actually enrolled at South,

to make sure that the courses I was taking at the two-year college were in

line with transferring and making sure that I had the classes that I needed,

mostly working on general education requirements.

Chuck, 31, found that after some bad advising experiences early in his college career, he gained a new awareness of the benefits of working directly with faculty as a source of information while taking the foundational classes he needed at City Technical College. He made this discovery after returning to the two-year college after several years of working full time. He said:

Then I came back to school, realizing there's a plethora of information,

you just have to avoid advising altogether and just talk to the faculty, and

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the faculty at that school were worth their weight in gold.

Gus, 43, utilized an institutional agent, or contact within his college, to gain more knowledge as soon as he entered South. While Weidman's (1989) anticipatory stage from the model is applicable to situations where the participants sought information before they enrolled, the anticipatory stage also applied when the student has already enrolled but is facing new challenges or coming up against new experiences that they do not have any background in, such as using the degree audit program at South or getting ready for advising sessions during their first semester at South. For Gus, knowing an individual inside the department he could go to for answers was valuable and proved to be a resource he tapped into throughout his first semester. He commented:

> Probably Susie Smith (a pseudonym), she would point me in the right
> direction to someone she knows that could tell me about it. Since I'm
> based out of Lehotsky (campus building) most of the time I usually go ask
> Susie and even if she doesn't know she can tell me someone to talk to who
> does know.

The next two stages of the model, formal and informal, refer to settings that students were exposed to on a typical college campus. Participants' interactions with faculty and peers in formal settings such as classroom, labs and workshops, provided the more formal setting. Informal settings with key interactions were on-campus locations where students gathered informally such as the dining halls, residence halls, recreation center, and other areas of campus not formally used for instruction. Participants in this study reflected on interactions they had with peers and faculty in informal settings such

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as outdoor labs and study groups that met in the campus coffee shop. Thomas, 21, took the initiative to form a study group for his Ecology class. He commented, "There wasn't a preexisting group of students that always got together or anything, it was always I tried to find students who were interested in studying with me".

The last stage of the model, personal, referred to the personalization of key experiences after a student has had an academic or social experience. These experiences also align with the processes of interaction and integration, and provide examples of two other core elements, investment and involvement. After the experience, which then becomes personalized, they are further influenced by the experiences as they move through their academic environment.

Two participants described key experiences that became very personalized for them, after which they felt differently about their academic involvement. Both of the experiences described occurred through academic interactions and integration in a particular course or set of activities. Joe, 22, transferred from Oceanside Tech and was a Psychology major. He had an academic experience that was completely unexpected but had great benefits afterwards, more than he thought. He took a Leisure Skills class on birding, and described meeting with the instructor, a grad student, at informal activities for students in the class. He described the graduate student as a person who was very passionate about birding, so much so that he invited students to hang out and do activities purely for the love of birding. He noted, "I mean, obviously it improves the experience you get, and the knowledge you acquire, and it was done soley from a passion

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standpoint." He continued by commenting, after having reflected on the experience, "honestly, I learned so much more besides birding from that class."

Thomas, 21, described a different experience that became personalized through interactions he had with faculty. A Biological Sciences major, he talked about his desire to eventually go into academia, commenting that, "I'm able to see people who are on the cutting edge of their field of research. Because I eventually want to be an academic and do research of my own, it makes the experience a bit more realistic." He noted further that, "People who are doing the research are teaching me first-hand. That makes me much more engaged in the material because I understand the authenticity of the teacher and the information." Thomas discussed more about his experiences with research and how excited he was to be on a research team that was carrying out projects that he would one day like to do.

Socio-Academic Integrative Moments

Participants described both formal and informal socialization experiences that were closely related to the notion of socio-academic integrative moments. Deil-Amen (2011) found that two-year college students described experiences that were both social and academic while on campus in classroom and study area locations. In the present study, two-year college transfer students described similar blended experiences, where academic and social connections occurred in and around campus settings. Many examples have already been included in Chapter Four, with additional statements in Figure 5, Appendix B.

Based on participant's responses, the results of the present study suggest that, at least for these participants, they experienced instances where they connected both academically and socially to other students through classroom activities, study groups and other informal sessions associated with their academic assignments. Participant responses also provided examples of faculty and student interaction that was based in the academic setting, but also had social connections.

Conclusions

Conclusions from the study results are supportive of the original research questions. Students who participated in the study responded candidly to questions about their transition from a two-year college to a four-year university. Their responses supported the development of significant statements, which led to development of the overarching essence of the transfer experience. All of the participants, to a varying degree, were challenged by the academic rigor and pace at the four-year university. As a result, many expressed they had to change their approach and develop better skills in order to be successful. Specifically, participants expressed they had to take more initiative with academic assignments and learn to be more self-reliant. Socially, participants had different experiences depending on their age. The older the student, the more challenging it was for them to feel that they fit in with the other students in class. For some, the age difference impacted their campus interactions and how much effort they put into establishing new connections. Participant comments (see Figure 5, Appendix B, Themes and Significant Statements) supported the notion that students experience academic and social integration experiences simultaneously. Numerous

examples were provided by the study participants, see also Figure 5, Appendix B. For example, they made new connections in class and learned about a campus social event by hearing about it from other students while sitting in class. Participant comments also supported the perspective that information networks were comprised of social ties and were used to gain information that helped them be more successful on campus.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Results from this study have implications for both theory and practice. From a practical standpoint, college campuses today strive to increase student retention and improve graduation rates. Based on the themes of this study, improvements could be implemented to improve retention rates by increasing new transfer students' opportunities for social connections very early in their transition. One suggestion for such an opportunity would be to offer a 1-credit hour 'transfer' class at the four-year institution. Such a class would promote familiarity and assist two-year college students with making connections to institutional agents at the four-year university.

Another implication from the results would be that two-year colleges work to improve the preparation of transfer students before they matriculate to the larger four-year institution. Two-year colleges could implement socialization opportunities that would familiarize the potential transfer students with the demands they face after transfer. This could even include targeted academic advising for key degree programs and joint transition courses offered at both institutions.

Four study participants were older than the rest of the students I interviewed. Age, then, became a factor in their transition and was included in the development of one

major theme from this study. Age-related issues are often ignored at the four-year institution, as older students are not the norm as far as being considered a 'traditional' student. While it is more common to see older students at a two-year college, four-year institutions are not necessarily reviewing their policies or procedures with regard to adjusting for age. With an aging population and increasing numbers of veterans returning to postsecondary education, the number of students self-identifying as non-traditional or older is certain to increase. Utilizing current technology to target student populations could positively impact how institutions promote student events and assist with age-related issues faced by nontraditional transfer students.

Gender and choice of academic major are two areas of the present study that were not associated with the research questions. However, it is important to note that nine of the twelve participants were male and only three were female. Gender issues were only slightly highlighted by one student, who felt that he was left out of the social scene because he was not affiliated with a fraternity. He seemed to infer that membership in a fraternity, an all-male group, would greatly increase his social opportunities on campus.

Choice of major was not an area of focus with this study, although it is interesting to note that nine of the twelve participants were in academic programs affiliated with engineering and science. Students frequently met other students in classes, and felt that they could develop a closer relationship with other students in the same major. One limitation, then, of this study is that the research questions and corresponding interview questions did not explore any transition issues that may have been present as a result of the participant's choice of major at South University.

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Limitations

There are several limitations to note with this study. These limitations include (a) the nature of qualitative work, (b) limitations based on the findings relating to age, gender, and choice of major, (c) limitations based on my work as a novice researcher the unique qualities associated with the institution that served as the research site and (d) the unique qualities associated with the institution that served as the research site.

As a qualitative study, the results are not generalizable to a larger, broader college-age population. While comments from participants are meaningful within the context of the two-year and four-year college settings, it is not possible to generalize beyond the scope of this sample of twelve students. Qualitative research is interpretive, and results can suggest new meanings, but offer no proof of theory.

Another limitation to this study relates to the findings that age impacted the transition experiences of each student who participated in the study. Participants gave detailed descriptions of their interactions with faculty, staff and other students, and how they felt their age impacted those interactions. However, the interview protocol did not include any questions related to the participant's age or feelings about being considered a nontraditional student. It is quite possible that if the twelve participants had all been around the same age, the age theme and it's impact on their transition would not be evident in the results. With a purposeful sampling method, attempting to attract two-year college transfer students from South Carolina without bridge experience, the pool of potential participants was fairly narrow. Having a more narrow pool of potential

participants may have affected the results with participants being predominantly in the science and engineering fields.

Additionally, the institution that served as the research site for this study has unique qualities that attract large numbers of new students. Each year, the Admissions Office at South University reviews thousands of freshmen and transfer student applications. Although the academic rigor is well established at this institution, students are not dissuaded from applying to become a student. From a social standpoint, the younger study participants reported being drawn to South for the opportunities to make social connections and participate in collegiate activities such as attending campus sporting events. The older participants, notably, were more in tune with the academic degree programs offered at the institution, and enrolled to earn a particular degree or to be enrolled in a particular college. South University, thus, is not an institution that must heavily recruit for its' freshmen and transfer class members each academic year. As such, this makes the research participants perhaps less similar to other public four-year institutions that do not have the same unique qualities that are so attractive to students.

Another limitation is based on my role as a novice researcher. Bias is a part of any project, and I recognized that my biases, preconceived ideas, and thoughts about transfer student outcomes were difficult to push aside. Use of a professional journal allowed me to bracket out, or set aside, my preconceived ideas and approach the research from a less biases frame of mind.

Another limitation of the present research is that the sample did not restrict participation in the study based on a student's academic program. It was interesting to

note that half (six) of the participants were enrolled in the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences, while three participants were enrolled in majors in the College of Engineering and Science. The results of the study may have been different if the participants had been more evenly spaced amongst the broad range of majors offered at South. Another possible way to proceed with this type of study would be to either select for particular academic majors, or to use sampling methods to broaden the participants' academic programs.

Future Research

Results of this study suggest further research could look at the areas of connection between two-year and four-year colleges, to provide transition programs that strengthen transfer student skill sets prior to transfer. In the area of information networks, new research could benefit both students and institutions by discovering better ways for students to become connected to the campus environment, perhaps even before transfer.

One possible research opportunity would be to conduct a similar study with two-year college students while they are still enrolled at the two-year institution. If students were identified as potential transfer students to an institution such as South University, a study could be conducted that would investigate their use of information networks at the two-year college prior to transfer. While some research literature has addressed this idea, more research is warranted.

Age was identified by the participants as a factor in their academic and social integration after transfer. Further research studies focusing on age would be beneficial for both two-year and four-year institutions and students hoping to successfully continue

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their postsecondary education after transfer. Nontraditional students who transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution have very unique challenges that set them apart from their younger classmates.

Gender issues as they relate to transfer students was not a component of the research plan for the present study. Given that nine out of the twelve participants were male, it would be a logical next step in research to investigate gender issues related to transfer student experiences. One possible way to extend research further from the present study would be to include additional questions about gender regarding how participants experienced integration after transfer. One possible method for such a study would be to include survey data and look at the different student populations differentiated by race and major.

Participants in the present study were enrolled in academic majors that were predominantly in the science and engineering fields. Another possible research study would include a focus on the transfer student's major at time of transfer. The present study did not investigate major as a factor in the transfer experience, which would make a good project for future studies. It would be beneficial to both types of institutions to learn more about how many students from a particular two-year college transferred to a four-year university by major. A more detailed analysis including the academic outcomes of transfer students by major would also provide institutions with valuable information about their students.

Conclusion

In summary, Chapter Five provided discussion of the study results and reviewed how the results align within the theoretical framework. Participant responses provided new insight into how two-year college transfer students experienced the transition to the larger four-year university campus. The primary and supplemental research questions were reviewed and included discussion of the corresponding themes associated with participant responses. Based on participant responses, additional research studies could be developed that would uncover new ways to help two-year college students develop more in-depth academic skills and learn to navigate the college campus and information systems earlier in the transfer process.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

A1. Institutional Review Board Validation Email

Dear Dr. Havice,

The chair of the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) validated the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on **February 7, 2014** that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as **Exempt** under category **B2**, based on federal regulations 45 CFR 46. The approved consent document is attached for distribution. **Your protocol will expire on August 31, 2014.**

The expiration date indicated above was based on the completion date you entered on the IRB application. If an extension is necessary, the PI should submit an Exempt Protocol Extension Request form, http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/forms.html, at least three weeks before the expiration date. Please refer to our website for more information on the extension procedures, http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/guidance/reviewprocess.html.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately. All team members are required to review the "Responsibilities of Principal Investigators" and the "Responsibilities of Research Team Members" available at http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.

All the best,

Nalinee

Nalinee D. Patin

IRB Coordinator

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APPENDIX A

A2. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Describe your transition to South University during your first semester of enrollment.

2. How did you meet other students?

3. Describe your interactions or experiences with any clubs or groups during your first semester at South University.

4. How did you learn about joining a club or group?

5. Describe your experiences in academic settings at South University during your first semester of enrollment.

6. Describe your experiences or interactions with your instructors or faculty in the classroom setting.

7. Describe your experiences or interactions with instructors or faculty outside the classroom.

8. Describe how you learned about social events, both on campus and off campus.

9. Describe your living situation during your first semester of enrollment at South University.

10. How did you get or find information about academic requirements?

11. How did you get help if you had questions about rules, policies, or deadlines?

12. How did you learn about campus resources?

A3. Instructional Letter for Participants

Information About Being in a Research Study
at Clemson University

**A Phenomenological Study of Two-Year College Students' Transition Experiences
at a Four-Year Institution**

Description of the Study and Your Part In It

Dr. Pamela Havice, Dr. Leslie Gonzales, and Mary Von Kaenel invite you to take part in
a research study. Dr. Havice and Dr. Gonzales are faculty members in the Department of
Leadership, Counselor Education & Human Development at Clemson University. Mary
Von Kaenel is a staff member in the Office of Undergraduate Studies, as well as a student
in the Educational Leadership PhD program at Clemson University. The purpose of this
research is to learn more about the experiences new transfer students go through when
they enroll. By asking new transfer students about their academic and college transition
experiences, we hope to learn about the transition process for transfer students and look
for ways to improve the transition.

Your part in the study will be to answer questions during an individual interview session.

The interview will take about 60 minutes to answer the questions in the interview session.
The interview session will take place on campus and the session will be audio recorded.
You will also be asked to review the transcript of your interview which should only take
15-20 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts
We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

Possible Benefits
We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study.
However, this research may help us to better understand the transition new transfer
students go trough and help to identify where improvement is needed.

Incentives
You will receive a $25 Visa gift card at the end of the interview session.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality
We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not
tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information
we collected about you in particular. Students who participate in the interview will be

given a pseudonym and no distinguishing characteristics will be recorded during the interview session. The audio recording of the interview session will be destroyed immediately after the interview transcript has been reviewed and deemed accurate.

Choosing to Be in the Study
You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way f you decide not to be in the study or stop taking part in the study.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Havice at (864) 656-5121, Dr. Gonzales at (915) 256-8691, or Mary Von Kaenel at (864) 656-5276 at Clemson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at (864) 656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 8660297-3071.

A copy of this form will be given to you.

APPENDIX B

Figure 5: Themes and Significant Statements

Theme   Significant Statements

Theme	Significant Statements
Age impacted their transition, affecting both social engagement and academic integration	"there is one club that I thought I was interested in, so I attended an open meeting, and then decided maybe it's not for me…..just because I am a little bit older than the majority of students in these groups and organizations….I've got my own life outside of college, that it gets to be difficult especially living some distance away, where I can't really be available, like 'hey we're having a meeting at 8 o'clock'. That's my dinner time and then bed so I can't….it was a bit difficult to find groups to really kind of connect with" *Debbie, 26* "So, through clubs, recreational sports, that's the way I found the best to meet new people. So I know it's been a little harder for me to meet and socialize because I came in as a junior instead of a freshmen, going as a regular student. It was harder for me to connect because most of the people in my age group or whatever had already established a network of friends, and so I found that difficult to break into" *Joe, 22* "I've had to adjust my thinking, because I'm an older student and most of the other students are half my age. I've noticed that I'm not usually perceived as a traditional student so when conversations in class occur, I'm usually the kid picked last or excluded, or what I say isn't respected as much as other things people in the same age group say." "I tried joining an organization last semester and I didn't feel very comfortable because it was thirty 20-year olds and me, so it was harder to stay involved in the group because there seemed to be a lot more communication between the other students than they shared with me. It's been a challenge to stay involved." *Jim, 39*
The academic transition was challenging	"I walked into my Biology class in an auditorium full of 300 people…I hadn't ever been in a classroom with that many people; at Tech we might have 30 or 40 people in a class, it was more personable, more one-on-one. It was kind of intimidating at first." *Gus, 43* "Coming to South, the educational experience, the information you are getting from the course, how hard you have to work to get the better grades in the course but at the same time you were getting a lot more information and you were learning more. So I felt that, one, you are learning more at South, getting a better academic experience, teachers are a lot higher quality, you are given opportunities to be involved in research, and to really make a difference in your education, you can actually use it for something—when you are at a tech school, you are just going to school." *Joe, 22* "It's been a shift in how I approach my classes, there's a lot more self-reliance when you're doing your studies at a major university compared to a small community college. Because when you have so many students taking the classes, there's not as much one-on-one time with

	your teachers. I've kind of enjoyed that because I kind of like relying on myself a little bit more." *Thomas, 22*
Making connections to the new campus was critical to a successful transition	"For myself, personally, it's more just interacting with new people. I consider myself an outgoing person but I'm a little shy at first….getting to meet new people, and still just getting adjusted because it is a new school" *Elliott, 22* "Generally, in the larger classrooms it takes longer to get settled in, whereas the smaller classrooms people can just come in and are more ready to get started, that kind of makes it easier to get to know the people around you. And while it can be awkward on the first day when you have to stand up and introduce yourself in the smaller classes, it actually does help with getting comfortable in your classes. It's all about getting into the groove of things at the beginning of the semester." *John, 22* "I had a great experience at orientation. In fact I met my roommate there and we're really close." "My connections have come through my major—the classes in my major, it's easy to talk to other students in the same program, and we get really close, hang out after class." *Fiona, 21*
Communication targeted to new students was valuable and important for a successful transition	" I took the Business 1010 class, and it had a lot of information. It only met once a week, but I wish it had gone to more days; I learned a lot about so many things." *Holly, 20* "That CU 1000 class I had to take when I transferred in helped a lot; learning about the library and the Academic Success Center and all those sorts of things." *Jake, 22* "Well, there are great web sources at South. OrgSync is a great resource for finding out about clubs; going to meet people face-to-face was great. OrgSync and Tiger Prowl (organizations fair) were the most helpful for me." *Thomas, 22*

APPENDIX C

Figure 6: Examples of Researcher Subjectivity and Bracketing Statements

Researcher thoughts, preconceived ideas, biases	Bracketing statement
Prior to the first actual interview, I am nervous about the first participant's responses. I am worried the student will want to give just basic answers and won't think through the questions.	I realize my nervousness and consciously relax to allow my mind to clear. I am now only focused on the research questions and how I will ask them.
First interview is complete. I am relieved that the student was genuinely ready to discuss his transition experiences.	My relief is important in that I must now continue to think carefully through the upcoming interviews.
Prior to the second participant interview: I wonder about the next participant. I've now had 9 students in the sample population reply to set up an interview. I worry that the other potential participants, those who aren't bothering to reply to my recruitment message, are more typical of what I think is a typical two-year tech student coming to South University. My bias is evident because I think of the large number of new transfer students who've come from a technical or community college, and they just weren't able to keep up with the pace of academic work.	Almost as quickly as I started to think through my biases, I calm my mind to recognize that I can't prejudge students.

Logically I know that there are many successful two-year college students who've successfully transitioned to the four-year university environment. |
| I am bothered, too, that I would so quickly let my mind think that two-year college students are sub-par as students. | Clearly this is not true. I now realize I must be very careful when I phrase my questions during the interviews, so that I do not lead the participant to think that I am looking down on them as a two-year student. |
| After five interviews, I am really starting to see definite similarities between the students. I really wish there were fewer students from the closest two-year college….I am having a hard time getting responses for interviews from students further away from the main campus at South. | I realize that the response I get is beyond my actual control. I am happy to see that I will get the required minimum number of interviews completed. |

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