

8-10-2022

Supporting Adult Transfer Students

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Supporting Adult Transfer Students
by
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August 2022

Master's Project
Submitted to the College of Education
At Grand Valley State University
In partial fulfillment of
Degree of Master of Education

Acknowledgements

I would like to give thanks to my advisors during transfer, Lee Andrews and Karyn Rabourn who helped me beyond measures. I could not have made it to this point or found my passion within higher education without you. Thank you for the continued encouragement and support.

Ellis Derezinski-Johnson

Abstract

Increased demand for postsecondary students to earn a bachelor's degree has resulted in more community college students and an increase in the transfer function of postsecondary education. However, students who transfer from two- to four-year institutions often experience challenges along the way. Furthermore, adult vertical transfer students experience additional barriers, often due to the unique characteristics that they possess. Overall, there are a lack of resources to support these students specifically, and a lack of research examining their experiences. Given that adult learners make up a large subgroup within higher education, it is crucial to provide tools that assist in the transfer of these students. Supported by evidence gathered through a review of literature, this project explores the barriers experienced by the transfer student population, with particular attention to the adult vertical transfer student population and explores a potential intervention program to help alleviate these barriers.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Postsecondary education has become a necessity for many students, especially to respond to the demands of the current labor market. More specifically, the community college sector has seen remarkable growth, almost doubling its enrollment over the past three decades (Gross & Goldhaber, 2009). Further, this sector promotes more enrollment opportunities for disadvantaged and underrepresented students. Many students who enroll at community colleges have plans to transfer to four-year institutions. In fact, nearly three-quarters expect to transfer to a four-year institution to obtain at least a bachelor's degree (Bradburn et al., 2001).

However, vertical transfer students, those who transfer from two- to four-year institutions, face many barriers and challenges during their transition. This is especially true for adult transfer students, or students over the age of 25. Unfortunately, while there is an abundance of literature related to traditional students and their transfer experiences, there is little research relevant to adult vertical transfer students. Developing an understanding of this group and their challenges during transfer is essential to ensure their success, especially as using transfer as a means for bachelor's degree attainment continues to increase (Wellman, 2002). More interventions need to be facilitated to assist this population of students.

Transfer students report academic barriers, challenges related to the transition into a new institution and a lack of access to adequate support and information. Adult transfer students, despite being minimally discussed in research, report the same barriers, and report having specific needs and concerns that can negatively impact their transition. This includes a lack of sense of belonging and a lack of resources and programming for their student group. Additionally, adult students often have unique characteristics that can impact their transition as

well, such as having dependents or being employed full time. These barriers can be addressed through personalized interventions focused on the needs of these students. A smooth transition is essential for transfer student success and degree completion (Lehning, 2000). Intervention strategies can assist in ensuring adult vertical transfer students have a smooth transition and address obstacles that allow for students to be successful long-term at their receiving universities (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013).

Importance and Rationale of the Project

The community college sector has seen remarkable growth in enrollment and has become a popular postsecondary option due to the lower-cost alternative and opportunities for disadvantaged and nontraditional students that it offers (Stern, 2015). This growth, as well as the fact that bachelor's degrees are becoming essential to enter the workforce, makes the transfer between higher education institutions even more critical (Wellman, 2002). Of those students enrolled at a community college, a large number are considered adult students, or over the age of 25. A 2019 report from the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2019) revealed that 10% of student's full-time and 23% of part time students at community colleges were between the ages of 25 to 34. It is therefore essential to focus on interventions that can assist in the vertical transfer process and to increase overall success and degree completion.

Background of the Project

As the current labor market continues to encourage students toward a bachelor's degree, it is important that barriers hindering such attainment are addressed. This project is of special importance as it focuses on Muskegon Community College (MCC). The population of adult students at MCC continues to grow and current programming is not aimed toward the specific needs of these students, nor in assisting with transfer. The orientation program presented in this

project will aim toward alleviating institutional barriers and improving the success of MCC and its students.

Statement of Purpose

The goal of this project is to explore and address specific barriers experienced by adult transfer students as they move from a two- to a four-year institution, such as transitional trauma, lack of resources and support and a lack of information regarding transfer. The project will present an orientation program as an intervention seeking to alleviate these barriers, which is to help promote student success for students enrolled at the community college. The goal of the intervention is to help students feel more prepared and to improve the transition period for adult vertical transfer students transferring out of Muskegon Community College. This orientation program could be adapted to meet the needs of transfer students at other institutions.

The intervention presented will be The Adult Transfer Student Bridge Orientation (TATSBO) program that will provide information about the transfer process, including different degree pathways and graduation requirements, potential transfer destinations and the differences between two- and four-year institutions regarding academic policies and processes, academic rigor, etc. It is crucial that students receive the knowledge necessary to navigate the university and this can be difficult if information is not readily available (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). The TATSBO program will provide the opportunity for students to connect with both starting and receiving institutions, with the opportunity for advising sessions with both advisors from the community college level and from the four-year university level. While this program is not an end all be all solution, it will provide strategies, information and support that will assist transfer students with the transition into their new institution.

Objectives of the Project

The objective of this project overall is to meet the specific needs of the adult vertical transfer student population to ensure their success. Specifically, TATSBO will focus on learning outcomes focusing on participants becoming more knowledgeable of the transfer process, able to identify the options available to them and resources that can help them through the process.

Definition of Terms

Vertical Transfer Students: Transfer students are those who move from one postsecondary institution to another. However, vertical transfer students are those who transfer specifically from a two-year institution to a four-year institution (Laanan et al., 2011). For this project, the vertical transfer student population is the focus.

Transition: The period in which a student leaves their previous institution to the point of beginning their first semester at a new institution.

Adult student: Those students over the age of 25. These students are also likely considered non-traditional students in the sense that they may have other unique characteristics different from traditional students (Milheim, 2005).

Scope of the Project

This project will address many barriers experienced by vertical transfer students, and those particular to the adult vertical transfer student population. Specifically, it will focus on addressing barriers such as a lack of institutional support, lack of information available and transitional trauma experienced by the population. While there are many other factors impacting students and their ability to transfer, many are beyond the scope of this project. However, the institutional barriers that impact the success of this student population will be addressed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Students face many barriers and challenges as they transfer from two- to four-year institutions, this is especially true for the adult student population. While there is an abundance of literature related to traditional students and their transfer experiences, there is little specific research about adult students who engage in vertical transfer. There is a significant need to explore this student population and their challenges related to transfer, especially when the number of students acquiring a bachelor's degree continues to increase (Wellman, 2002). More interventions must be facilitated to assist this population in ensuring success and bachelor's degree attainment.

This literature review will begin with a description of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, which will provide a framework for understanding transition and how to assist adult vertical transfer students during a transitional period. Next, the review will focus on prevalent barriers of traditional transfer students, followed by an exploration of barriers specific to the adult learner, with a specific focus on adult learners participating in vertical transfer. Lastly, this review will highlight some interventions which have shown to be successful in the facilitation of transfer. Overall, this review will demonstrate the need for interventions to better meet the needs of this population.

Theory/Rationale

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory focused on periods of transition for adults and can be used as a framework for student affairs professionals to understand and support adult transitions within higher education and to better understand how to assist students during transition. Schlossberg et al. (2012) identified a transition as any event or nonevent that results in

a change of relationship, routine, or role, particularly focusing on the time between two periods of stability. In addition, Schlossberg et al. emphasized that perception plays a key role in how the transition takes place. Therefore, it is not only important to consider the ways transition impacts students as they transfer to and from institutions, but also how their perception of the transfer can impact their experience during transition. This can further be explained by the 4 'S' System explained by Schlossberg. The 4 'S' System consists of situation, self, support and strategies which are the major sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope/adjust within a transition (Schlossberg et al., 2012). In the case of transfer students, these are important considerations of the transition process.

Situation

The *situation* element of Schlossberg's (1981) theory suggests that the transition between institutions should be considered through the mindset of the student. Further, the student should feel that they are in control of the situation, making sure that they know how the transition is going to impact them. For a student to experience a positive transition, the student should fully grasp the pros and cons of the decision and why the decision is a good one for them. In this case, it should be understood why a bachelor's degree may be helpful for them and the pros and cons of deciding to transfer. It could be helpful, then, to have interventions in place prior to one's transfer that provide an overview of degree options, career choices and why transferring could be of benefit to the student. This can help motivate students to transfer and ensure they know the benefits in doing so.

Self

The *self* element of Schlossberg's (1981) theory focuses on the factors that are considered important in relation to oneself and suggests that one's personal and demographic characteristics

affect how an individual views life. This is of special importance when looking at the adult student population and the immediate factors influencing transfer and transition. Schlossberg et al. (2012) discussed how important it is for students and helpers to understand the characteristics one possesses and how they impact one's experience with transitions. In the case for many adult vertical transfer students, their unique characteristics play a large factor. Typically, students within the adult student population are over the age of 25 and have been out of high school for at least a few years. As such, there may be age-related barriers to successful transfer such as a lack of technology skills or overall generational differences. Students may also be married, have dependents, or be employed full time, which may make it dedicating time toward schooling more difficult. These are all considerations of adult transfer students as they make the decision to transfer and further an education. Further, the age of these students may have an impact on the way in which they view life and is likely different than the views of those in a traditional aged college student. Student affairs professionals should be aware of how these characteristics impact transition, and interventions should focus on how to overcome potential barriers related to these characteristics.

Support

Schlossberg et al. (2012) stated that regardless of the characteristics in which students hold, *support* is key to handling stress and going through transitions successfully. Support included within successful transitions could come from family members, friends or the departing or receiving institution. Those who feel more supported by their institution and receive the information necessary to make the best, informed decisions are more likely to transfer and do so successfully (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Strategies

Lastly, Schlossberg et al. (2012) demonstrates that the establishment of good coping *strategies* can assist in helping with a successful transition. Therefore, these strategies should be incorporated within programming to ensure successful coping for this population.

Overall, Schlossberg et al (2012) claims that adults in transition are often confused and in need of assistance. However, when they can develop a plan and understand the transition fully, they are able to cope effectively. Using Schlossberg's theory and the 4 'S's, student affairs professionals can understand the factors impacting the transfer experience for students, particularly affecting those within the adult vertical transfer student population. Interventions that consider these factors should be implemented to better assist students within this transitional period.

Review of the Literature

Most literature surrounding transfer students focuses on that of traditional students, however these barriers are prevalent throughout the transfer process and are important to highlight. This section will first review these major barriers of transfer students. Next, there will be an exploration of barriers experienced by the adult student population, as well as those by adult transfer students. Lastly, intervention strategies that have shown to be helpful in the facilitation of transfer will be presented.

Transfer Student Barriers

Current research presents barriers experienced by transfer students, and certain barriers appear to be more prominent than others. The barriers most prominent in literature are those surrounding academics, transitions and institutional support. Interventions should address these barriers to be most successful for this student population.

Academic Barriers

When transfer students arrive at their new institution, academic difficulty often occurs. Transfer students may experience transfer shock, a phenomenon that typically results in a lowered GPA the first semester on campus (Townsend, 2008). Some academic barriers that often lead to transfer shock are a difficulty with credits and course selection, and differences among two-year and four-year institutions.

Unfortunately, many transfer students frequently have trouble when transferring over credits between institutions. Walker and Okpala (2018) found discrepancies when transferring over credits, as those within the same major and the same community college received different transfer equivalences at the receiving institution. Therefore, not only is there an inconsistent transfer of credits, but these students may also lose credits toward their major or have to retake courses, causing distress (Ellis, 2013). Additionally, because many transfer students have completed a majority of required general education courses, they are often ready to begin courses in their major of choice upon arrival to an institution (Townsend, 2008). This may increase stress for students as they have little time to take classes outside of this major or explore other career options. Regarding major choice, some majors and academic programs at universities are competitive and require higher GPAs or prerequisite classes for acceptance. Because many community colleges are open access, transfer students are not fully aware of the competitiveness of some programs. Therefore, arriving at an institution without open access, and experiencing competition may be a culture shift and an unanticipated obstacle. When confronting the challenge of not being accepted into their major of choice, transfer students may feel rushed in choosing something else, causing them to make a less informed decision (Musoba et al., 2018).

Other factors that may influence transfer shock may be characteristics of the new institution, including institutional size, faculty attitudes toward students and academic expectations. Townsend and Wilson (2009) concluded that community college transfer students find success but may not experience as much success as native students with persistence and time to degree and final cumulative GPA. The transition from a community college to a four-year university may be related to these academic difficulties, especially in the first semester.

New College Environment

Along with academic difficulties, the transition from the community college environment to the environment of a four-year institution may cause additional challenges such as adapting to their new institution. Though transfer students from community colleges have experience in an academic setting, they must develop a new understanding of higher education institutions upon arrival to a four-year institution. Even before transfer students apply, they may encounter fears about their ability to succeed at a four-year institution. (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). However, once they do apply, the process is typically more difficult than the open access programs at community colleges that they are used to, often requiring higher requirements or an essay.

Transfer students may also experience stress related to financial aid. Students expressed frustration about the amount of financial aid they would receive, the minimal scholarships available to them, and the difficulty of accessing aid through the university's system (Townsend, 2008). Along with the financial aid system, the new institution may differ in the software and technology they use, forcing transfer students to learn these new programs.

Transfer students may also experience a difference in academic rigor between community colleges and four-year institutions, including increased coursework and study time and different teaching styles in the classroom (Townsend & Wilson, 2009). In a 2006 study examining the

challenges experienced by transfer students, findings demonstrated these students felt it was more difficult to earn an 'A' at the university compared to the community college (Flaga, 2006). In addition, students may find larger campuses and class sizes daunting, making it more difficult to build relationships with faculty and other students (Townsend, 2008). Transfer students in general have a difficult time making friends, as they typically put in a position to try and make friends in a setting where many students have already formed friendships in previous years, often making transfer students feel isolated on campus (Townsend, 2008; Walker & Okpala, 2018).

Transfer students must begin the process of transitioning into a new institution, learning their way around campus, figuring out where to park, where to eat, the location of resources on campus, etc. In many ways, transfer students may feel like a first-year student again with their lack of knowledge about their new institution (Townsend, 2008). Transfer students may also experience transitional trauma, referred to as the level of alienation a student experiences when unfamiliar with some of the norms, values and expectations that predominate in a school community (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990 as cited in Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). It is possible that transfer students felt comfortable at their community college in which they developed an understanding of the campus culture and built relationships with others there. These students may need more interventions that make them feel a sense of comfortability on the new campus as well.

Advising/Student Support

The student support available to transfer students during stages of the transfer process is often not helpful. Often, the support and resources on campus are relevant to first-time, full-time, and traditional first-year students (Townsend & Wilson, 2009). In addition, while some transfer students expressed a positive experience with academic advising, an overwhelming majority

expressed frustration over receiving inadequate counseling at the community college level (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Counselors or advisors may provide inaccurate information regarding the classes in which students should enroll. This can lead to students taking courses they do not need or that do not transfer. Transfer students who do not fully understand how transferable credits work may be required to spend additional time at the community college (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Similarly, Musoba et al. (2018) found that “when students sought advising about majors at their community college, they were almost universally dissatisfied” (p.722). In addition, participants in Ellis’s (2013) study stated that advisors were not helpful regarding transfer, gave the wrong advice, did not understand core curriculum, and could not provide direct answers about transferring. Advisors may provide information that is unnecessary and focused more on required prerequisites at the community college. In addition, very little assistance was given related to career choice and development (Musoba et al., 2018). This poor advising has the potential to lead to confusion about requirements for admission into colleges or into academic majors.

Poor advising may also lead students to find information on their own, resulting in many transfer students seeking information from college websites, a lot of which have inaccurate information. Musoba et al. (2018) found that transfer students utilize the internet as their main source of information about their intended majors and careers. In fact, some felt that personal research was superior to seeking help from advisors (Musoba et al., 2018). However, there is often ineffective information present on these platforms. Ellis (2013) found that sources regarding university information were not up to date with relevant and accurate information. If transfer students are unable to find information about university programs, transfer student

policies/procedures, or resources available, they may fall behind or experience increased challenges before, after and upon transfer.

Adult Students

Many adult students are attending postsecondary education. Of those enrolled in community colleges, a large percentage are adult students, over the age of 25. In a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2019), 10% of full-time and 23% of part-time students were ages 25 to 34. Despite this relatively large subgroup of learners within institutions, adult learners are often neglected from resources available on campus. Adult students have different needs, concerns and preferences and would benefit from different interventions than those currently offered (Rosenberg, 2016). Compared to traditional-aged students, adult learners typically have unique characteristics (such as being married, being a parent, working full time) that serve as additional considerations during postsecondary education. In addition, they may have different life goals and challenges than their younger peers (Rosenberg, 2016). A lack of resources available to these students, as well as a lack of extra-or co-curricular activities that cater to the adult learner, leads to an overall lack of sense of belonging for these students. With adult learners being more prevalent on college campuses, institutions need to be more active in planning interventions to assist with this population and their needs.

Adult Transfer Students

Despite the immense research that exists about traditional vertical transfer students, and the literature that discussed how adult students differ from traditional, there is a lack of research and literature related to adult vertical transfer students. This makes the focus on this group particularly important.

While interventions need to be more suited to the needs of adult learners, these students should not be disclosed from interventions surrounding transfer. In a study by Schwehm (2017), it was shown that variables typically associated with the lack of transfer, such as family and work responsibility, were not found to have a significant impact on the adult vertical transfer students. Therefore, the characteristics often held by adult learners may be non-traditional, but do not determine the success of the student. In addition, there are often assumptions that a student's intent to transfer decreases as a student gets older. However, Rosenberg (2016) found that it was dependent on transfer student capital, rather than age. Transfer student capital (TSC) consists of having clear goals, appropriate academic support services and timely and accurate advising. TSC was shown to have a significant influence on the intent to transfer to a four-year institution, regardless of age. It also played a role in the overall success at a new institution. Rosenberg (2016) also found that as students age, they take advantage of fewer resources and sources of information. Therefore, they often begin the transfer process late and don't receive enough information to be successful. This suggests this population needs more assistance in transferring to avoid these barriers.

Additionally, interventions must cater to these students' specific needs. A study examining the academic and social integration of transfer students concluded that social integration may not be an important factor in the persistence of most community college transfer students (Townsend & Wilson, 2009). In other words, community college transfer students persist through their journey to their bachelor's degree in other ways than through social integration. This could be due to their focus on academics and path to degree, or a previous role of being a commuter student at a community college. However, this suggests that the social aspect of the college experience may not be as important for success of transfer students and

therefore current efforts toward helping with transfer student success may not be focusing on the right things in meeting the needs of these students.

Overall, adult transfer students do not receive adequate assistance or resources to assist them with the transfer from two-year to four-year institutions. Further, the population is often not considered in terms of transfer at all. It is essential that institutions focus more attention on the success of this population.

Successful Institutional Practices

There are some efforts and suggested interventions that have shown to make an impact on the success of vertical transfer students. It is important to include these suggestions into interventions to successfully meet the needs of adult vertical transfer students.

Commitment to transfer students

Fink and Jenkins (2017) found that one effective practice in supporting transfer students is having a strong commitment to transfer students and their success, which can be implemented in several ways. First, institutions can work to build and sustain transfer culture by infusing the topic of transfer into discussions, including about policies and resources and in welcoming transfer students to campus. Additionally, institutions should work toward educating faculty and staff around the transfer process and develop means of communication with current transfer students to see how they could best be served. In addition, focusing on data related to transfer students could help institutions gather information essential for assisting in alleviating barriers. Additionally, it is important that four-year institutions have a commitment to supporting students before, during and after they transfer to ensure a successful transition into their institution (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Schwehm (2017) found in their study that a dedication to assisting transfer

students from community colleges overall helps to improve and/or maintain GPA and that those who succeed at the community college level are likely to have an easier time transitioning.

Clear transfer pathways

Hayes et al. (2020) found that one of the most useful tools provided to transfer students was a clear plan for transfer, outlining which classes would and would not transfer. It is important to have regularly updated and current course requirements and degree pathways into four-year institutions (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Fink & Jenkins (2017) also found that beyond outlining sequence of courses that will successfully transfer, students should also understand how institutional rigor may vary to prepare students to meet expectations of four-year institutions.

Berger and Malaney (2003) found that the degree to which community college transfer students have actively prepared for and been able to learn about the transfer process is crucial to their ability to be satisfied with and academically successful in the university environment. Particularly, students who know about the graduation requirements of the receiving institution prior to transferring, were more often successful in their transition. Fink & Jenkins (2017) found that high performing institutions that were successful in transfer student success provided information regarding the admissions process, financial aid, cost of attendance and course requirements. In addition, it is important that interventions providing such information occur earlier in transfer student's college journey, as the earlier an intervention occurs, the more likely it will have a positive impact (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

It is crucial to have specific interventions in place that target this student population, including information on how associate degree programs link to eventual bachelor's degrees, as

this would allow for adult learners to plan effectively, balance multiple roles and facilitate long-term planning.

Tailored Academic Advising Practices

Fink and Jenkins (2017) found that tailored transfer advising can help students to navigate the transfer process and offer encouragement along the way. Hayes et al. (2020) findings supported this notion, showing that advisors were able to help transfer students be successful by providing them with knowledge and tools to navigate the transfer process. Some of these tools included the development of transfer student capital (TSC) and self-efficacy, defined as an individual's beliefs about capabilities to organize and execute course of action requires to accomplish a task (Hayes et al., 2020), so that they were able to later navigate the transfer process on their own. Berger & Malaney (2003) also found that students benefit from self-awareness that they are prepared for transfer and getting advice from faculty and staff about transferring is a significant predictor of satisfaction with academic progress. In addition, advisors were able to set realistic expectations about the transfer process (Hayes et al., 2020).

Collaboration of two-year and four-year institutions

A largely discussed intervention strategy was that of the collaboration between two-year and four-year universities. In fact, Berger & Malaney (2003), state that administrators and educators at four-year universities have the responsibility to work with two-year colleges, providing information and resources that help students prepare for transition. This collaboration can allow for clarity regarding the transfer process, easily up to date articulation agreements and can allow both institutions to play a role in advising practices (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Hayes et al., 2020). Campus leaders at both types of institutions should make sure to provide information regarding requirements of transfer (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Summary

Currently, transfer students overall are dissatisfied with the current academic support provided (Musoba et al., 2018). In addition, there are many barriers experienced when making the transition into the new institution, such as academic barriers, barriers related a new environment/institution and barriers surrounding support available. Even more so, adult transfer students experience an overall lack of sense of belonging, lack of available resources and a difficult time transitioning due to their unique characteristics they hold. Further, few colleges and institutions offer orientation programs that prepare transfer students to their new institutions. This is especially true with the limited resources available to adult students in general.

Interventions should be put into place that address not only the institutional barriers, but considerations of adult learners as mentioned by Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transition. The literature demonstrates the need for intervention and provides strategies that have shown to be successful for the transfer student population in which should also be integrated into interventions. It is important to focus on this population to ensure their success during their transitional period between institutions, and in their attainment of a bachelor's degree.

Conclusion

The transfer process causes a lot of barriers for students, including challenges with academics, transition into a new institution and a lack of institutional support. Adult vertical transfer experience further barriers, often due to their unique characteristics and a lack of sense of belonging through the transfer process. There are little interventions that focus on the needs of adult learners, and even less that focus on the adult vertical transfer student population. Providing an intervention that supports this population is essential in helping ensure their success.

Chapter 3: Project Description

As indicated through the literature review, transfer students are often neglected from resources and programming. Faculty and staff often expect transfer students are already well versed in higher education and, therefore, necessary resources are not provided to increase their chances for success (Grites, 2013). This is especially true for adult vertical transfer students because there are limited resources and support available to this population, particularly in the process of transferring. The lack of transfer student support programs and resources may add challenges for some students which can impact their retention and persistence to degree (Young Walker & Okpala, 2017). These students can also experience transitional trauma, where they feel unfamiliar with the norms and expectations of the new institution (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013).

An important factor that impacts the successful transition of adult vertical transfer students is whether community college students receive basic information about transfer to a university (Ellis, 2013). Students must acquire the knowledge necessary to navigate the university before they transfer which can be difficult if resources are not readily available (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). This is of special importance to the adult student population. As indicated in Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, adults must have enough information available to decide the right decisions. In addition, the success of a transitional period is related to the institutional support provided to them (Schlossberg et al., 2016). Therefore, it is essential that these students are well-informed which in term may result in higher grades and increased success at the receiving institution (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Orientation programming offers many benefits such as providing relevant information about academic services and resources to support student success and helping students to begin

building supportive communities on their new campus, increasing persistence and graduation rates (Jacobs, 2010). An orientation program designed to meet the needs and alleviate barriers for adult vertical transfer students, including presentations, advising sessions, activities and reflection opportunities, will help during the transition period for these students and in preparing them to succeed.

The Adult Transfer Student Bridge Orientation program (TATSBO) will be facilitated annually at Muskegon Community College. Students will be encouraged to engage in this opportunity early in their community college experience, as approaching students earlier in the process can help in the decision-making process surrounding transfer. As presented in the review of the literature, collaboration between two-year and four-year institutions, tailored advising sessions and a commitment to transfer students within institutions were shown to be beneficial toward transfer success. Therefore, these elements will be implemented into this program. The program will also allow students to receive the information they need to be successful in their transfer from community college to their four-year institution by both introducing resources to use in their second year to prepare for transfer and for the transition itself.

This chapter will describe the TATSBO program, including an introduction of the program, its overall design and how this program may be assessed and improved for continued use. It will conclude with an overview of the ways in which this orientation program can be implemented and implications for adoption at other institutions and further practice. The TATSBO program will take place at Muskegon Community College (MCC), a community college located in Muskegon, Michigan. However, this orientation program can be replicated at other two-year institutions after making context-specific accommodations and alterations.

Project Components

Muskegon Community College

To better understand the design of the TATSBO orientation program, it is important to provide content about Muskegon Community College (MCC). MCC has several locations, with its main campus located in Muskegon, Michigan. MCC offers over 80 degree programs and certificates and serves about 3,000 students annually. As of 2021, approximately 27% of MCC students transfer, a significant number of students (MCC, 2021). In addition, 197 students or about 6% of the overall student body enrolled in the Winter 2022 semester were considered adult learners (MCC, 2021). Further, the adult learner population within Michigan community colleges will likely continue to grow in Michigan, in part because of the creation of the *Michigan Reconnect* program which enables students over the age of 25 who have not previously earned a degree to complete an associate degree or certificate tuition free (State of Michigan, 2022). The growing adult learner population in Michigan and at MCC demonstrates a need to focus on supporting these students as they prepare to transfer.

Currently at MCC, the only orientation programming provided is fully online, offers limited interaction with other students or resources on campus, and is available only to students beginning at the institution. In addition, these orientations are conducted the same way across student populations, meaning that adult students and traditional students receive the same information, rather than being population specific. Further, there are no programming efforts focused on students after their first year. MCC must provide additional resources to support the unique circumstances of adult transfer students by providing programming that allows for increased success academically and successful transition for those who transfer to four-year institutions.

The TATSBO orientation program would be essential for students at MCC, providing more opportunities for adult learners to engage with one another and campus, and prepare for a possible transition to a four-year institution. This program can be implemented at other institutions with the appropriate accommodations.

Description of Project

The Adult Transfer Student Bridge Orientation program (TATSBO) will be facilitated annually and will be an in-person and day-long event. Students will be encouraged to attend after the completion of 30 credits, equivalent to about halfway towards an associate's degree. The program should be offered once each semester, within the first few weeks of the term. The orientation will provide a space for students to increase their knowledge on the transfer process and an opportunity to speak with advisors from both MCC and four-year university partners. TATSBO will also offer the opportunity for students to meet and build community with peers in similar situations and form relationships with faculty and staff. The implementation of TATSBO will serve to provide early interventions for adult transfer students and will seek to mitigate academic and social barriers experienced by these students.

TATSBO will seek to meet the following learning outcomes:

1. After participating in the TATSBO orientation program, the student will be able to demonstrate multiple paths to transfer.
2. After participating in the TATSBO orientation program, the student will be able to identify at least two resources available to them at the community college level and at least two resources available to them at the four-year level to help with the transfer process.

3. After participating in the TATSBO orientation program, the student will be able to identify at least one benefit of how a bachelor's degree could aid them in their career plans.
4. After participating in the TATSBO orientation, students will be able to identify at least two ways that they can prepare for a four-year institution.

Project Design

Collaborators

In terms of the implementation at Muskegon Community College, the program will be a collaboration across campus. The offices that will collaborate on this programming will be the Office of Student Success, the registration team, and the Counseling and Advising Office. Each of these offices is an essential part of the TATSBO orientation program because of the role it has on the transfer process for students. The Office of Student Success assists students to reach their educational goals and provide programs and resources to assist in doing so. Specifically, they oversee the Transfer Services, Career Services and College Completion Coach resources, key elements of the TATSBO program. The registration team and the Counseling and Advising Center help to ensure that students make progress toward graduation and meet the requirements for transfer. For students who are looking to transfer, this is an important component of degree completion. All collaborators will play a role in the implementation of TATSBO, but the primary facilitator will be the Manager of Transfer and Career Services.

Along with collaboration among departments at MCC, this orientation program will require collaboration between two- and four-year institutions. This is especially important as this is a major intervention strategy shown to help the success of transfer students. Berger and Malaney (2003) argued that administrators and educators at four-year universities have the

responsibility to work with two-year colleges to provide information and resources that help students prepare for transition. This collaboration can increase clarity regarding the transfer process, enable regular review and updates to articulation agreements and can allow both institutions to play a role in advising practices (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Hayes et al., 2020).

Logistics

The TATSBO will take place on the Muskegon Community College campus. Though the orientation programming will be strongly encouraged and incentivized, organizers recognize adult students often have unique characteristics that may not allow them to attend in person. This also demonstrates the need for multiple offerings of the program, in each semester. To provide flexibility and accommodations for those who need it, childcare will be provided by the Early Childhood Development students at MCC throughout the duration of the program.

To successfully facilitate TATSBO, the physical space should be accessible and include appropriate technology (e.g., projector, screen, microphone) and tables to encourage engagement between participants. In addition, for the purpose of breakout sessions, three additional rooms with the same accommodations will be provided.

For the implementation of this programming, it is important to have someone to facilitate, creating a timeline and agenda that works best for each institution. It is also essential that prior to this orientation, there is a training session of academic advisors to ensure they are aware of their roles in the process and can bring materials they find necessary to include in the sessions. An overall info session should also be provided for all those helping with the programming to ensure that the goals are being met throughout the entire orientation.

Course Outline

A full course outline and schedule can be found in the Appendix B.

Presentations

The orientation program will consist of four presentations. The first presentation will be facilitated by the Student Services team and the College Success Center staff at MCC. This presentation will include the resources available to students at Muskegon Community College that participants can utilize to assist them through the transfer process. The Manager of Transfer and Career Services will address how transfer and career services can assist students with the transfer process in a manner that aligns with students' career preparation. The College Success Center will share how the writing center can be helpful in the application process and as a resource for strengthening writing skills. The Counseling and Advising Center staff will provide information about their services and how they can assist in choosing transfer courses. This will also be a great opportunity for the students to meet their assigned College Completion Coach, who works to address the specific needs of the student, including goal setting, transitioning to college and balancing college with other life responsibilities, such as work and family. This is especially important for adult students planning to transfer, as they often have unique characteristics that require them to balance a lot of responsibilities, such as having dependents or working full time.

The second presentation will consist of local employers who can discuss the benefits of a bachelor's degree at the employment level. These employers will be contacted by the Manager of Transfer and Career Services, as they already have established relationships with employers looking to hire MCC students. As stated previously, it is crucial to include this as part of the orientation so participants can link together a bachelor's degree and a career, facilitating long-term planning. The employers will discuss how a career may differ for different levels education, including responsibilities, pay range, potential for promotion, etc.

The third presentation will be from admissions staff from different institutions local to MCC, such as Grand Valley State University, Davenport University, Cornerstone University, Western Michigan University and Aquinas College. It is important to focus on local four-year institutions, as the unique characteristics of adult students may require them to stay local. The admissions staff will discuss what the transfer process looks like for students at their institution, providing a checklist of what should be included in a smooth transition process. High performing institutions successful with transfer students provided information regarding the admissions process, financial aid and cost of attendance (Fink & Jenkins, 2017), therefore, this will be information provided during this time.

The last presentation will consist of professors from four-year institutions who will provide information about the difference in academic rigor and how to prepare for classes at the four-year level, such as longer study times and the increase in coursework. This is another crucial element to the orientation program, as getting advice from faculty and staff about transferring is a significant predictor of satisfaction of the transfer process and with academic progress (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Collaborative Activities

As a part of the orientation program, students will engage with two collaborative activity sessions. During these sessions, participants will be encouraged to collaborate with one another to feel supported by other students in similar situations, which is the key to going through transitions successfully (Schlossberg et al., 2012).

The first collaboration activity focuses on time management and requires students to brainstorm and discuss best time management practices. Adult learners typically have unique characteristics that may require them to play multiple roles, such as student, parent, employee,

etc. Therefore, it is important that students plan out how to manage time to accommodate multiple roles while meeting the expectations and increased demands of four-year institutions.

The second will be an activity related to degree programs and completion. Students will be asked to compare two-degree programs and determine the number of classes needed for both, job opportunities for either and whether it would be a good fit for them as individuals. According to Fink and Jenkins (2017), exploring potential transfer destinations and fields of study early on ensures that students will complete courses that will transfer. Further, Hayes et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of a clear plan for transfer. Therefore, it is essential to demonstrate the ways in which different career paths and academic programs fit into a student's transfer plan.

Breakout Sessions

Another element of the programming will be breakout sessions. The goal of these breakout sessions is for participants to be involved in the conversation surrounding these topics. However, there will be a facilitator in each session to facilitate conversation. In the first session, staff members from MCC who identify as those serving in multiple roles (such as employee, mom, student, etc.) will serve as facilitators and will share their experiences managing varied responsibilities. Participants may have been feeling overwhelmed when doing the time management activity, so this could help make the balance feel more manageable. Faculty and staff play important roles in the success of students, offering depictions of their successes when they may have faced similar circumstances may help students feel part of a greater community. In the second session, a counselor from MCC's Counseling and Advising Center will offer an opportunity to learn about coping strategies for those in transition. Schlossberg et al. (2012) demonstrates that the establishment of good coping strategies can assist in helping with a successful transition. Therefore, these strategies should be incorporated within this programming

to ensure the success of the population. Lastly, a member of the Student Success team will facilitate the final session for Building and Finding Support, in which participants will identify those who may support them as well as the ways in which the institution will support students through the journey. This is another opportunity for the College Completion Coach to explain their role in assisting with degree completion and success. Those who feel supported by their institution often have a better time in transition (Schlossberg et al., 2012).

Advising

Academic advising is a crucial part of this orientation program. Fink and Jenkins (2017) identified that tailored transfer advising helps students to navigate the transfer process. In addition, students who know the graduation requirements of the receiving institution prior to transferring, were more often successful in their transition (Berger & Malaney, 2003). Therefore, the advising session included in this orientation program will allow students the opportunity to talk with both an advisor at the community college and advisors from different four-year institutions. Participants will be able to discuss progress made in their current degree program, requirements for graduation at both institutions and what credits would directly transfer. Students will also be able to consider different career paths, examining current and future courses available and how they fit in to their career goals.

Project Evaluation

The TATSBO program will be evaluated with a short-and long-term assessment plan. In the short term, the program will be evaluated utilizing surveys immediately upon conclusion of the TATSBO program. The assessment will focus on the overall familiarity and comfort with the transfer process before and after the orientation program. A sample of the pre and post survey is available in the Appendix A. The long-term plan includes evaluation of participants' transfer into

four-year institutions. MCC will follow up with TATSBO participants to see whether they transferred upon the completion of 62 credits, or an associate's degree. At MCC, this will be completed with assistance from the Institutional Research team. The student success team will also track how students utilized resources and how they engaged with their College Completion Coach while enrolled. Two assessment plans are necessary to determine the immediate and long-term impacts of the orientation program on the transfer of adult students and what should be improved to continue to support these students.

Project Conclusions

Previous chapters have described barriers of transfer students, including lack of resources targeted for transfer students as well as challenges in transitioning into a new institution. Additionally, adult vertical transfer students often have unique needs that are often not met. Institutions must do a better job at supporting this group to ensure a successful transition and in alleviating barriers.

Students can feel more supported in their transitional experience when institutions make their transfer students a priority (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Schwehm, 2017). This can be demonstrated by hosting an orientation program set to meet their needs. The TATSBO program explained in this chapter demonstrates ways in which to do so, including using the strategies shown to be successful in chapter two, such as tailored academic advising and the collaboration of two-year and four-year institutions. Providing this orientation program will aid in the preparedness and success in the transitional period for adult students.

Plans for Implementation

This project can be utilized by community colleges/two-year institution's seeking to better support their transfer and adult student populations. With the creation of the Michigan

Reconnect program, it is especially important that institutions in Michigan provide more robust orientation programming for these students. Schools implementing similar programming on their campus should make sure to find presenters in which are relevant to their participants. The timeframe of this program may interfere with the adult student population's work schedule. This event could take place on a weekend to avoid a loss of participants or could be condensed into a shorter program conducted virtually or during evening hours. It is essential that childcare is provided as an option for students to accommodate students with children. Further research and considerations may be required if there are specific needs at other two-year institutions.

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Appendix A

Orientation Pre/Post Survey

1. I can identify two resources available at MCC that can assist me with the transfer process.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Please list two:

- 1.
- 2.

2. I can identify two resources available at the university level that can help me in the transfer process
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Please list two:

- 1.
- 2.

3. Please indicate on the scale below how comfortable you feel about transferring

0 _____ 10

4. What are two ways you can prepare for the transfer process based on what you know about two-year vs four-year institutions? (If unknown, put N/A)

a.

b.

5. Please circle the statements below in which you agree with: (Select All That Apply)

I am capable of getting a bachelor's degree

There are benefits in getting a bachelor's degree

I can identify the resources available to help me get my bachelor's degree

I can identify multiple transfer options for me

Appendix B

Course Outline/Schedule

See below.

	Activity	Office	Learning Outcome
8:00	Registration/Breakfast		
8:30	Welcome/Introduction		
9:00	Presentation I	Student Services/ College Success Center/ College Completion Coach	2 & 4
9:30	Presentation II	Local Employers	3
10:00	Collaboration Activity		
10:45	Presentation III	Admissions Staff from different institutions	1
11:30	Lunch		
12:30	Presentation IV	Professor(s) from different institutions	4
1:30	Collaborative Activity II		
2:00	Breakout Sessions 1: Balancing Work, School and Families 2: Coping Strategies During Transition	Three breakout sessions for 30 minutes each, groups rotating.	4

	3: Building and Finding Support		
3:30	Advising Sessions	Credit Equivalency Forms	1
5:00	Closing Remarks		