

**AN EXPLORATION OF HOW PREVIOUS COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE
INFLUENCES THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES OF VERTICAL AND
LATERAL TRANSFER STUDENTS AT THE TRANSFER INSTITUTION**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2016

The landscape of higher education is being transformed by the growing and diversifying phenomenon of student transfer (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2006). As a result, it is increasingly important to understand the differentiated experiences of transfer students and the role that higher education institutions have in facilitating successful transfer experiences. However, most current researchers assume a homogenous transfer experience which facilitates enhanced understanding of and bias toward the vertical transfer experience while neglecting the various types of transfer experiences.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students with particular consideration for how previous collegiate experiences influence the feelings, behaviors and perceptions of transfer students at the receiving institution. The hermeneutic phenomenological methodology allowed the researcher to gain understanding of students' lived experience and contextualize students' descriptions and understandings (van Manen, 2014). Thirty eight transfer students, 20 lateral and

18 vertical, were selected to participate using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002); and the researcher gathered data through semi-structured interviews. The researcher coded and interpreted the data using experiential and thematic analysis (van Manen, 2014).

Findings of this study depict four predominant transfer student dispositions among the participants which highlight the various ways students understood and interpreted their transfer experiences. Previous collegiate experiences, including familiarity with two or four-year campuses as well as experiences with commuting to or living on campus, influence students' expectations of their transfer institution. Furthermore, students' disposition influenced their decision-making with respect to their housing and social experiences at the transfer institution. All students in this study experienced some misalignment between their expectations and their social experiences. The various ways that students understood these misalignments distinguishes the multiple transfer student experiences beyond the vertical and lateral categorization. The researcher argues the importance of continuing to seek a broader understanding of the transfer student experience which includes the influence of previous collegiate experience, perception and various transfer dispositions. A model is provided that supports this understanding and provides a guide for future research. Considerations for research and suggestions for higher education practitioners conclude the study.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education is being transformed by the phenomenon of student transfer. At least 60% of students pursuing a bachelor's degree will transfer to a different institution before completing that degree (Adelman, 2006), and students who follow the traditional route of attending one four-year institution are now in the minority (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). Community colleges are specifically delegated the mission of supporting access and social mobility by providing flexible and affordable educational opportunities (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In part because of this mission, the population of students who transfer from two-to-four-year institutions (vertical transfer) is steadily growing (Adelman, 2006). However, within the past 15 years, the population of four-to-four-year transfer students (lateral transfer) has also significantly increased, with close to 38% of students at four-year institutions having previously enrolled at another four-year institution (Peter & Cataldi, 2005). These statistics demonstrate the growing population of transfer students as well as the increase in multiple types of transfer movements. Given this changing population, student transfer is no longer a function of just the community college; instead, all higher education institutions have a role in facilitating and supporting student transfer.

As these transfer populations continue to grow and diversify, scholars must consider how we study and understand this student experience. Researchers should take into account how the transfer student experience is both unique from that of the native students and differentiated by

type of transfer. There is no singular definition of transfer or what the transfer student experience should be; yet, current research has focused primarily on understanding the vertical transfer student experience and how this experience compares to that of the native students. However, researcher's ability to enhance understanding of the phenomenon is disrupted by the many complexities associated with student transfer, including various student enrollment and attendance patterns, tracking of student movements, conflicting institutional missions and varying levels of institutional support for transfer. While these complexities may inhibit understanding they also highlight that it is critical to change the way that researchers study and understand student transfer. This study seeks to add to the body of knowledge on the transfer student experience by examining the differentiated social integration experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students.

1.1 DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

The following section will define a few terms that will be used throughout this dissertation.

Community College: Any two-year, non-profit, public or private associate degree granting institution.

Articulation Agreement: An arrangement between two institutions that outlines the requirements for transfer as well as course equivalents for the purpose of transfer.

Culture Shock: The social and psychological relearning that occurs when a student moves from one educational environment to another (Laanan, 2000).

Fluid Movement: A movement between institutions within consecutive semesters. Students with fluid movement between institutions do not have a gap term or stop out between their enrollments (Goldrick-Rab, 2006).

Gap Term: A disruption in enrollment for one semester (Goldrick-Rab, 2006).

Graduation rate: The percentage of the first-time, full-time degree-seeking students, at a single institution, who complete their degree within six years of matriculation.

Lateral Transfer: Student movement from a four-to-four-year institution.

Native Student: A student who enrolls at a single institution as a freshman and remains enrolled.

Non-Traditional Student: A student who has any of the following characteristics: non-traditional age (25 years or older), commuter student, part-time enrollment, has transferred institutions, does not enroll in post-secondary education in the same year as graduating high school, works full time, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, has a GED instead of a high school diploma (NCES, 2003).

Persistence: The continued enrollment in a higher education institution, including institutions that are different from the institution of initial enrollment.

Receiving Institution: The institution that a student transfers to.

Reverse Transfer: Movement from a four-year institution to a two-year institution.

Relocated Student: A term used by this specific receiving institution to describe transfer students who previously attended one of the regional campuses.

Sending Institution: The institution that a student is transferring from.

Stop-Out: A disruption in enrollment for more than one term (Goldrick-Rab, 2006).

Swirling: Multiple movements between institutions back and forth between two-year and four-year institutions (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; de los Santos & Wright, 1990).

Traditional student: A student with no non-traditional characteristics. A student who enrolls full time in post-secondary education directly after high school who is traditional aged (18-24), does not work full time, does not have dependents and is either now, or has previously, lived on campus.

Transfer Shock: A decline in a student's grade point average during their first semester after transferring to a new institution (Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965).

Transfer Student: A student who enrolls at an institution who has already attended another post-secondary institution after high school.

Vertical Transfer: A student who transfers from a two-year institution to a four-year institution.

1.2 BACKGROUND: CHALLENGES TO THE STUDY OF STUDENT TRANSFER

As study of the transfer student experience advances, there are important considerations that influence how scholars study and understand these experiences. This section will provide a brief overview of some of the main challenges that influence the study of transfer students, including various student enrollment and attendance patterns, tracking of student success, and the influence of institutional mission and culture. These challenges frame the environment in which researchers study transfer student success and are important for contextualizing current study.

1.2.1 Enrollment and Attendance Patterns

One feature that complicates the study of student transfer is the increasing number of students taking non-traditional routes to bachelor degree completion. In this instance, a non-

traditional pathway refers to any enrollment in more than one institution in pursuit of a bachelor's degree. More students are attending community college as a part of their pathway to degree completion than ever before (Adelman, 2006) and more students are choosing alternative routes such as vertical, lateral, and reverse transfer as well as swirling back and forth between institutions (Peter & Cataldi, 2005). Additionally, more students are using dual enrollment as a way to supplement their experience at the four-year institution (Adelman, 2006). As a result, almost 70% of students are considered non-traditional because they have enrollment patterns that are different from first-time, full-time, single institution experiences (McDonnell, 2005).

Time between enrollments is another characteristic that influences the transfer student experience and adds complexity to our understanding. Students who have fluid movement between institutions have a different experience from those who have a gap term or stop-out (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). Disruption in enrollment is often associated with decreased persistence, increased time to degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter 1990) and lower degree completion rates (Eimers & Mullen, 1997; McCormick, 1997). These findings indicate that the collegiate experiences of students with fluid movements and those with disrupted enrollments create a clear difference in their experience. Therefore, time between enrollments is an important factor in the study of transfer student success.

These multiple pathways and time periods between enrollments are important categorizations that differentiate the transfer student experience. Students who transfer use different pathways and timelines, and have significantly different experiences that influence their academic and personal success (Goldrick-Rab, 2006). Because of this, student transfer can no longer be categorized as a singular phenomenon oriented towards the vertical transfer student experience. In studying transfer, researchers need to consider various transfer populations and

account for these unique experiences. Yet, the challenges of tracking and measuring student success make it difficult to provide comprehensive research on different transfer populations.

1.2.2 Tracking transfer students

The various pathways to degree completion, students' movement between institutions and time between enrollments creates a complex system for students and institutions, as well as researchers. Currently, the National Student Clearinghouse is the most comprehensive database tracking student movement (Hossler, Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Chen, Zerquera, & Torres, 2012). However, this data is incomplete because participation is optional for higher education institutions and there are gaps in the data when students transfer to institutions that do not participate in the clearinghouse. For example, students who transfer to non-participating institutions may appear as though they have dropped out. Similarly, students who transfer to a non-participating institution and then transfer back to the original institution may appear to have a stop out rather than a reverse or swirling transfer pattern.

Additionally, there is wide variation in the definition of types of student transfer, how transfer rates are calculated, and how movement is tracked (Townsend, 2002). For example, McDonnell (2005) included students who were dually enrolled as part of the population of transfer students and cited a national transfer rate of almost 70%. However, a recent report by the National Student Clearinghouse on transfer mobility claimed that one-third of students changed institutions during their journey to degree completion (Hossler et al., 2012). McDonnell (2005) and Hossler et al. (2012) provided two statistics that differ significantly from one another. This variation demonstrates that throughout the research there are inconsistencies in researchers' methodologies and terminology being used to define the transfer student population.

Another factor that adds complexity to our understanding of the transfer student experience is that receiving institutions are rarely required to include transfer students in their institutional reports of student persistence and graduation. State regulatory agencies, along with national databases (such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data [IPEDS]), do not account for transfer students and only include native students in the data sets (Cook & Pullaro, 2011). Similarly, national ranking agencies (such as the U.S. News Best Colleges) do not include transfer students or part-time students in their analysis (Morse & Flanigan, 2012). As a result there is a lack of institutional knowledge and accountability relating to transfer student graduation and degree completion rates. This lack of reporting, along with the various enrollment and attendance patterns, makes it difficult to gain a national perspective on transfer student movement as well as a comprehensive understanding of student experiences at the sending and receiving institutions.

1.2.3 Institutional Approach to Transfer

Institutional mission and culture affect the transfer experience, and both the sending and receiving institutions play a role in supporting student transfer. Yet, in many instances, concern for transfer students is relegated to the community colleges. Community colleges are founded with the mission of providing access to higher education and to support degree completion (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2008); therefore, facilitating and supporting transfer is a core function of the community college. However, this is not the case for four-year institutions primarily focused on retention and persistence for the first-year native population. Therefore, there is often a lack of support services available for lateral transfer students (Tobolowski & Cox, 2012).

For four-year receiving institutions, transfer students serve primarily as a mechanism for enrollment management. Transfer enrollment is generally determined by two factors: (1) enrollment supply, i.e., the institution's need for the characteristics of a particular type of transfer student (compared to native students); and (2) enrollment demand, i.e. the number of students of each type that are available (Cheslock, 2005). Enrollment officers and administrators tend to prefer students whose enrollment is the most helpful to the net revenue of the institution; therefore, transfer enrollment increases when the marginal revenue of the student increases in relation to the marginal revenue of a direct attendee. Institutions with higher attrition rates often have more room in upper-level courses because they have fewer upper-class students and are likely to enroll higher numbers of transfer students. Additionally, these high attrition rates make it more likely that the four-year institution is focused on first-year student retention. As a result, transfer student success is not an institutional priority for four-year institutions and first-time, full-time students remain the institutional priority (Cheslock, 2005; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012).

One mechanism that sending and receiving institutions utilize to support and facilitate vertical transfer is articulation agreements (Roska & Keith, 2008). Articulation agreements are negotiated between two institutions (commonly between a community college and a four-year institution in a vertical transfer situation), and outline the requirements that community college students should fulfill in order to transfer to that four-year institution. Articulation agreements are valuable to community college students who plan to transfer because they inform them about which courses will and will not be accepted and what requirements the student needs to gain acceptance at the four-year institution (Roska & Keith, 2008). Many researchers have asserted that articulation agreements streamline the transfer credit process, increase student awareness of transfer procedures and increase acceptance of coursework at the four-year institution (Anderson,

Sun & Alfonso, 2006; Banks, 1994; Eaton, 1994; Ignash & Townsend, 2000; Roska & Keith, 2008; Wellman, 2002). However, it is very uncommon for articulation agreements to exist between different four-year institutions. Therefore, lateral transfer students navigate the transition process without these types of policies and structure.

The result of these institutional approaches is that community colleges are the primary drivers and advocates for transfer student success and have, therefore, been the primary space of current research. Four-year institutions do not track or report on transfer student degree attainment and the facilitation of transfer is not an institutional priority. Therefore, there is a significant skewing of data and research around student transfer, which focuses on the vertical population. Due to the recent increases in the four-to-four year transfer, reverse transfer, and swirling, we must engage four-year institutions in the conversation about student transfer and seek to understand the influence that these institutions have on transfer student success and degree completion.

1.3 PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

The complex environment in which researchers study and assess transfer student success is created by multiple student enrollment and attendance patterns, challenges with tracking student movement, and varying levels of institutional support of transfer create. This complexity reinforces the importance of distinguishing between transfer populations to understand the uniqueness of student experiences. Yet, to date, research on transfer student transition and success has been limited by the primary use of comparison of transfer students to native student populations and a narrow focus on the vertical transfer student experience. By limiting analysis

in these ways, researchers cannot acquire an appreciation for the diversity of experiences within this student population and the influence that varying previous collegiate experiences have on the student integration experience. Researchers have not yet studied transfer students in a way that allows for a distinct understanding of their experience. Instead, the native student population is utilized to provide a normalizing standard to which we compare transfer students. Researchers assume what is known about native student success can be applied to the study of transfer student success. Not only do these methodologies limit what we know about the experiences that benefit transfer students, they also limit how we have distinguished transfer students from one another.

One distinguishing characteristic of the transfer student population is the difference between the vertical and lateral transfer student experience. There is evidence to suggest that previous collegiate experiences are influential in the behaviors, perceptions, and feelings of transfer students at the receiving institution (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Laanan, Starobin & Eggleston, 2010; McGuire & Belcheir, 2013). Furthermore, previous collegiate experiences influence vertical and lateral transfer students in unique ways because of varying rationales for transfer (Eagan, Lorzano, Hurtado, & Case, 2013; McCormick, 1997, 2003; Wood, Nevarez, & Hilton, 2012), different collegiate environments at the two and four-year institutions (Borglum & Kabala, 2000; D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014; Lester, Leonard & Mathias, 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006), varying levels of preparation for transfer (Berger & McGuire, 2013; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Laanan et al. 2010), and different academic and social experiences (Chrystal, Gansemere-Topf, & Laanan, 2013; Kuh, 2003; NSSE, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Yet, given the importance of previous collegiate

experiences, scholars have yet to explicitly examine how previous collegiate experience influences the vertical and lateral transfer student experience at the receiving institution.

This study will expand the understanding of vertical and lateral transfer student integration experiences and illuminate how previous collegiate experience influences students' feelings, behaviors and perceptions at the receiving institution. Specifically, this study will highlight how previous collegiate experience shapes the social experiences and sense of social engagement of vertical and lateral transfer students and how these experiences and engagements may be distinct. The results will highlight the distinct and unique experiences of these populations and inform higher education administrators on how to assist and serve this population.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I developed the following research questions to expand the understanding of the influence of previous collegiate experiences on vertical and lateral transfer students' perceptions, feelings and behaviors and the receiving institution.

1. How do vertical and lateral transfer students describe their social experiences at the receiving institution?
2. How does previous collegiate experience influence the social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students at the receiving institution?
3. How does previous collegiate experience influence feelings and perceptions of social connection for vertical and lateral transfer students at the receiving institution?

1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE METHODS

To explore these research questions, I employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990) with one-on-one interviews. This method is particularly helpful when seeking to describe, clarify, and reflect on phenomena in a conversational way that promotes a sensitive interpretation style (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology is situated as a way to ask reflective questions of the lived experience and as a way to gain insight and knowledge about a specific phenomenon and the meaning within that phenomena.

This research was conducted at a single, research-extensive, mid-Atlantic, urban institution (UMAR) with an undergraduate enrollment of more than 17,000 students. Study participants included students who transferred to the institution in the fall of 2014, were enrolled full-time, and had fluid movement from their previous institution. Interviews with 20 lateral and 18 vertical transfer students captured the essence of individual student experiences and allowed for interpretation and contextualization of these experiences. This interpretation provides insight on how students experiencing a similar phenomenon (transferring) may experience it in different ways.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To create perspective on the transfer student experience, this chapter contains an overview of the experiences that contribute to transfer student success, the current frameworks that shape our understanding of student persistence, and the importance of previous collegiate experiences in the transfer experience. Furthermore, in this review, I discuss how transfer student success is measured and defined and how these current practices may limit our understanding of the transfer student population. One consequence of this limitation is that there is a lack of consideration for the influence of previous collegiate experiences on the transition and integration experiences of transfer students and the ways in which these experiences may be different. Milem and Berger's (1997) model of native student persistence provides a framework to explore the influence of previous collegiate experiences on the behaviors and perceptions of vertical and lateral transfer students.

2.1 TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

Current research on vertical transfer student success often takes a critical perspective on the conflicting missions and roles of two-year and four-year institutions in facilitating vertical transfer and supporting degree attainment (Anderson et al., 2006; Ignash & Townsend, 2000; Roska & Keith, 2008). At the heart of this research is an examination of institutional structures

and policies that influence successful vertical transition such as articulation agreements, credit transfer, and preparation for transfer as well as academic and social integration experiences at the receiving institution. In addition, researchers have considered factors outside of transfer status that influence vertical transfer student degree completion, such as: racial and ethnic background (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Lee, 2001; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003), gender (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003), socio-economic and financial aid status (Anderson et al., 2006; Dowd, 2008; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Li, 2009), environmental factors (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Banks, 1994; Miller, 2013), and individual student characteristics (Allen et al., 2008; Anderson et al., 2006; Kearney, Townsend, & Kearney, 1995). The following sections contain a discussion of how researchers define student success and the experiences that have been shown to influence vertical transfer student transition and integration. Additionally, in contextualizing how researchers defines and measures student success, the scholarly community gains a better understanding of how these existing definitions and measurements limit the research on transfer students by focusing on achievement metrics and behavioral indicators.

2.1.1 Defining Student Success

Studies of transfer student success consider both student achievement and the student experience. Student achievement is generally measured and defined by grade point average (GPA), degree completion, and time to degree (Diaz, 1992; Mullen & Eimers, 2001; Porter 1999). These student achievement metrics are quantitative and are used to indicate how successful a student has been at the institution. Student experiences are generally differentiated by the academic experience and the social experience and are heuristic and qualitative in nature. Engagements in academic activities that have been shown to enhance the academic experience

include involvement with classroom activities, interactions with faculty, and use of academic resources (Kuh, 2003). Social engagement activities that have been shown to enhance the social experience include involvement with outside the classroom activities such as clubs and organizations, social relationships with peers and friends, and involvement with various aspects of campus life (Laanan 2007; Tobolowsky & Cox; 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). These academic and social interactions have been used by researchers to study both native and transfer student populations and are used as indicators of engagement and integration with the campus community. Both student achievement and student experience are important to defining and understanding student success. However, while student achievement metrics are important to identifying differences in student outcomes, the details of the student experience help to explain what causes these differences. Thus, comprehensive study of the transfer student experience requires consideration and comparison of both student achievement and student experience. Particularly important to the student experience is how students perceive their experiences and how those perceptions influence their feelings of success (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Additionally, research findings should be contextualized to represent the transfer student experience and expand beyond comparison to native populations. While comparison between native and transfer students can be helpful, further research is needed on how native and transfer students may perceive and value similar activities and experiences in unique ways.

2.1.2 Student Achievement

Student achievement metrics provide qualitative standards that are commonly used by researchers to examine the differences within and between native and transfer populations. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2003) compared the six-year graduation rates of

vertical transfer and native students and concluded that nationally, native student graduation rates are around 19% higher than those of vertical transfer students. Additionally, the researcher concluded that native students graduate 8 to 16 months sooner than vertical transfer students, suggesting that transfer students may experience challenges and take longer to complete their coursework. Single-institution studies from Porter (1999) and Mullen and Eimers (2001) bolster the findings that vertical transfer students graduate at a lower rate than native students. Porter (1999) found that new vertical transfer students persisted at a rate approximately 11% lower than native students. In addition to lower retention rates, transfer student graduation rates were 8% lower than native students. Mullen and Eimers (2001) controlled for credit hours and found a 13% difference in six-year graduation rates between native and vertical transfer students.

Grade point average (GPA) is a common metric used to measure student success. GPA is also used as a proxy for how well transfer students have adjusted to their new academic environment and level of rigor. Many vertical transfer students experience the phenomenon known as *transfer shock*, whereby they have a decline in GPA during their first semester at the new institution (Cejda, Kaylor, & Rewey, 1998; Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965; Ishitani, 2008). Findings from these studies have documented that first semester GPA at the receiving institution is often lower than the student's GPA at the sending institution indicating that transfer students struggle academically at the new institution. Studies that examine differences in degree completion and GPA are relevant here because they demonstrate the gap in student achievement between various transfer and native populations. However, these studies do not explain why these academic achievement gaps exist.

2.1.3 Academic Experience

Current research on vertical transfer students demonstrates that the population tends to be less involved in educationally engaging activities, which have been shown to support academic success and integration (Kuh, 2003). Kuh (2003) used data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and demonstrated that compared to native peers, transfer students were less likely to participate in active and collaborative learning opportunities. These opportunities included working with and engaging one-on-one with faculty members as well as with peers. Examples of such activities include: seeking out research opportunities, attending faculty office hours, joining peer study groups or individual tutoring, and joining group workshops hosted by faculty and support staff. Kuh (2003) hypothesized that this disengagement was due primarily to heightened competition for transfer students' time from activities such as family obligations, commuting, living off-campus, and community activities. These findings highlight that heightened competition for time and level of engagement in these activities differentiated the native and transfer student experience (Kuh, 2003; NSSE, 2004).

While Kuh (2003) demonstrated there are differences in behaviors between native and vertical transfer students, this research does not address how these differences actually influenced the transfer student experience. NSSE benchmarks are one way that researchers attempt to create a standard for comparison between native and transfer students. The activities included as benchmarks have been shown to promote engagement and integration for native students. However, NSSE has applied these benchmarks as a standard for transfer students without consideration to how these activities may influence transfer students in different ways. Lerer and Talley (2005, 2010) analyzed NSSE data for traditional and nontraditional students (transfers included as nontraditional) and found that these two groups respond differently to

NSSE questions and that the questions were generally formulated for first-year native students. Lerer and Talley (2010) stated, “NSSE benchmarks are important indicators of experiences that certain types of students might be seeking and expect from their college” (p.1.). The NSSE survey structure, however, neglects the fact that different student populations may expect or desire different outcomes from their collegiate experience and that not all campus activities have the same influence or outcomes on the student experience. Because of this structure, NSSE data is skewed towards the traditional student and does not provide an accurate explanation of the nontraditional student population experience (Lerer & Talley, 2010). While Kuh’s (2003) findings are significant, they must also be understood within the context and framework of a native student experience. NSSE benchmarks can help the higher education community to understand what activities and experiences different student populations engage in; however, they do not provide understanding of why students choose to engage (or not engage) in them and the effects those decisions have on the student experience.

Laanan (2001) began to explore why native and vertical transfer students make different choices and engage in different behaviors with respect to integrating to a new academic setting. Laanan sought to understand why transfer students experience the transfer shock described by Hills (1965) and Diaz (1992). Laanan (2001) explored the academic adjustment experience of vertical transfer students and coined the term *academic trauma*. Academic trauma is a broad term for the struggle of many vertical transfer students to adjust to their new academic setting which frequently includes a different, often higher level of academic rigor, new classroom environments, teaching styles, and faculty disposition. Vertical transfer students in Laanan’s (2001, 2007) research indicated that, when they matriculated to the receiving institution, they experienced feelings of intellectual or academic inferiority. These feelings resulted from their

perceptions of themselves as different from native students and out of place in their new environment. These perceptions led to students experiencing nervousness and anxiety about being able to compete academically at the receiving institution. As a result, students were less likely to meet with faculty, seek out research opportunities, and engage in classroom-related activities. This finding was especially true when students transferred to a larger institution where the classrooms were bigger and there was less one-on-one contact and interaction with faculty members. Vertical transfer students who transferred to larger more research-oriented institutions believed that the faculty were less dedicated to the student experience and to the quality of instruction, and were more focused on research. Laanan's (2001, 2007) research is also important because he described the feelings and perceptions of transfer students and how those feelings influenced student behaviors.

2.1.4 Social Experiences

In addition to the academic transition, transfer students also transition to a new social environment. The social and psychological relearning that occurs when a student moves from one educational environment to another is referred to as *culture shock* (Laanan, 2000). When transfer students move to a new institution, they must undergo a process of adjustment where they reconcile their previous collegiate experiences and perceptions with the environment at their new campus (Laanan, 2000). Many researchers found that students experienced culture shock when they encountered challenges with meeting new people, making friends, and getting involved in campus activities (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kuh, 2003; Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). As a result of culture shock, transfer students exhibit lower levels of participation in campus activities such as internships, study abroad, and community

service (NSSE, 2012). Some researchers hypothesized that this lack of engagement is due to insufficient orientation programs and services for transfer students (Kuh, 2003; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In many instances, orientation activities provided by campuses focus on the first-year native students and are not designed to include transfer students (Kuh, 2003; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Without proper orientation programming, vertical transfer students are left feeling out of place (Laanan et al. 2010), unsupported by the institution, and less informed about the ways to engage on campus (NSSE, 2012).

Negative stigmatization is another social integration challenge that some new vertical transfer students encounter when trying to meet new people and build relationships at the receiving institution. Examples of this negative stigmatization include: a belief that transfer students are intellectual inferior, experienced a less rigorous admissions process, and the perception that students will not be able to perform well academically because of the academic ease at their previous institution (Alexander, Ellis, & Mendoza-Denton, 2009; Townsend, 2008). Many transfer students experience transfer rejection or the feeling that they need to conceal their identity as a transfer student. These types of feelings can lead students to hide their status as transfer students and not seek out resources that could be helpful during the transition process (Alexander et al., 2009). These types of experiences may also cause students to be shy or disengaged in academic or social settings. While the NSSE data would suggest a level of disengagement, it is the research by Alexander et al. (2010), which describes the experience and allows researchers to understand the cause of this disengagement.

Townsend and Wilson's (2006) work begins to explain mechanisms that support transfer student engagement. Their research found that pre-established social connections at the receiving institution, such as friends or family, positively influenced vertical transfer students'

adjustment to campus. Peer support was another important component to successful student adjustment and integration to university life. Thus, having a previous connection or knowing someone at the receiving institution provided new vertical transfer students with access to a larger group of friends and peers. This connection assisted students in learning and adjusting to the new campus culture. Students who did not have access to this network struggled to make friends and find a peer group. Chrystal et al. (2013) demonstrated that living on campus also assisted in vertical transfer student integration because this housing environment provided students with access to social support systems and to key resources such as campus services and professional staff.

In the examination of the transfer student experience, it is crucial to consider how the scholars' understanding of this experience is primarily shaped by comparison to the native population and how transfer students encounter academic and social integration challenges that are different from native students (Brit & Hirt, 1999; Diaz, 1992; Townsend, 2008). Student achievement data such as GPA and graduation rates, along with NSSE data help inform researchers about the ways that transfer students have different academic and social experiences compared to native students. This type of quantitative research is complementary to the qualitative research, which provides a more complex understanding of the transfer student experience.

However, it seems that much of the current research on transfer students, which seeks to gain understanding of the student experience, focuses on data such as the NSSE benchmarks. This choice is problematic because it only reveals the outcomes of the actions and behaviors of students, but not the feelings and perceptions that contribute to those actions and behaviors. Many researchers who use NSSE data assume that the activities and behaviors that contribute to

a positive native student experience will have that same influence on the transfer student experience. Furthermore, NSSE is an example of how current research does not give consideration to the multiple types of transfer populations and assumes that all transfer students have the same experiences (NSSE, 2004). With this assumption, there is no consideration for the many types of transfer and the diversification within the transfer population. It is important to consider how we use student achievement and student experience data and how our current interpretations may neglect aspects of the student experience. One example of this is the consideration of the influence of previous collegiate experience on vertical and lateral transfer student behaviors and perceptions at the receiving institution.

2.2 INFLUENCE OF PREVIOUS COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE ON LATERAL AND VERTICAL TRANSFER

The preceding literature provides background on transfer student achievement, transfer student experience, and measurement of student success. The following sections include a description of what is known about previous collegiate experience and how it influences transfer student achievement and experience. Furthermore, in this section I explore how students who transfer vertically and laterally have different previous collegiate experiences that are influential in the transition and integration experience at the receiving institution.

2.2.1 Intent to Transfer

Vertical and lateral transfer students differ in their decision-making and motivation for transferring. At the time of initial enrollment, vertical transfer students are more likely to plan to transfer compared to the lateral transfer population (Eagan et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2012). Furthermore, students who intend to transfer may have different expectations about their experience at their initial institution compared to students who do not plan to transfer. In this section, I explore how intent to transfer differs between the vertical and lateral transfer population.

An essential part of the mission of community colleges is to support and facilitate transfer to four-year institutions (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Generally, students who enroll at a community college, with the goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree will do so to complete some or all of their general education requirements (Wood et al., 2012). The 2009 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study demonstrated that of the students who entered community colleges between 2003 and 2004, 56% indicated that they intended to transfer (Wood et al., 2012). Thus, vertical transfer students are likely to begin their collegiate experiences with the knowledge that they will transfer to a second institution. This knowledge may influence their behaviors, perceptions, and choices at the sending and receiving institution.

However, for lateral transfer students, the decision to transfer is generally not established at the point of enrollment. Rather, the intent to transfer develops over time as a reaction to factors that influence this decision while the student is enrolled at the four-year institution. The 2013 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey of American freshmen indicated that prior to the start of classes, only 5.7% of students who enrolled at four-year institutions indicated a "very good chance" of transferring to another college before graduating

(Eagan et al., 2013). The large majority of students who begin at four-year institutions do not plan to transfer to another institution. However, between 1999 and 2000, 47% of students at four-year institutions (including dual enrollment) attended more than one institution, suggesting that the lateral transfer student population is significant (Peter & Cataldi, 2005).

These statistics are important because they demonstrate that for many lateral transfer students there is something that changes their perspective about graduating from the institution in which they originally enrolled. McCormick (1997, 2003) found that students transferred laterally for multiple reasons, including: a desire for increased satisfaction with intellectual growth and faculty instruction, to enroll at a more prestigious institution, to increase student services access, to find a different social experience, and to improve academic performance. This change in decision to enroll also influences transfer students' perceptions, expectations, and experiences at the receiving institution. While we know that the intent and decision to transfer are different between vertical and lateral transfer populations, we do not know how these experiences influence the lateral transfer population because, as demonstrated previously, current research has focused solely on the vertical experience.

2.2.2 Community College and Four-Year Campus Environments

Studies suggest that vertical transfer students experience a collegiate environment that differs from the four-year environment and that the mechanisms for academic and social integration at the community college are also unique. Students at community college often participate less in socially engaging activities such as extracurricular events, student clubs and other peer group activities (Kuh, 2003). Their lack of social engagement occurs for many reasons. For example, community college students who plan to transfer may not spend time

building social relationships. Additionally, community college students have heightened demands for their time and fewer extracurricular opportunities (Borglum & Kabala, 2000; Kuh, 2003). Students at community colleges spend the majority of their time in academic spaces (i.e., classrooms, libraries, etc.) and are accustomed to using the classroom environment as the center for both academic and social engagement on campus (Barnett, 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). The result is that community college students rely on academic settings as well as non-university settings (i.e., family, community involvement, and religious institutions) for their primary sources of social engagement (Lester et al., 2013).

The community college setting creates a conditioning mechanism that teaches students how to interact with their peers in a higher education setting. This conditioning influences the way that vertical transfer students interact with their new academic and social environment at the receiving institution (D'Amico et al., 2014). At a four-year institution there are distinct spaces for academic experiences (i.e., classrooms, libraries, faculty relationships, research, etc.) and social experience (i.e., residence halls, clubs and organizations, dining halls, etc.). Native student models of student success demonstrate that at four-year institutions, participation in both academically and socially engaging activities is influential to student success and persistence (Astin, 1999; Barefoot, 2004; Berger & Milem, 1999; Kuh, 2003; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 1975). D'Amico et al. (2014) considered both the academic and social integration factors that influence vertical transfer persistence and found that academic fit was the most consistent predictor of persistence to the second year. Social fit was not a positive predictor of persistence at the receiving institution. These findings suggest that the vertical transfer students' behaviors and perceptions, related to academic and social engagement

at the receiving institution, were influenced by their environment and experiences at the community college.

Residential life on four-year campuses also differentiates the vertical and lateral transfer experience. Utter and DeAngelo (2015) found that lateral transfer students who previously lived on campus had challenges adjusting to a new campus environment where their living arrangements, both on and off campus, did not provide a center for campus activity and a means of social connection. In this particular instance, students who lived off campus felt isolated and alone because they had not expected to encounter challenges making friends and connecting to campus. At their previous institutions, making friends and connecting to campus was much easier. When they encountered challenges at the receiving institution, many lateral transfer students were frustrated by this experience. These same experiences may not affect vertical transfer students who transfer from non-residential campuses in the same way that it does the lateral transfer students (Chrystal et al., 2013).

These results suggest that the two and four-year campus environments and experiences are distinct from one another (Borglum & Kabala, 2000; Lester et al. 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). These studies suggest that lateral transfer students may have previous collegiate experiences that condition their expectations about the integration process in ways that are unique from vertical transfer students. This conclusion is important because it has three implications: (1) transfer student experiences are unique from native student experiences; (2) transfer student experiences are differentiated by previous collegiate experiences and type of transfer; and, (3) experiences at the sending institution influence transfer student behaviors and perceptions about how they should engage and interact with their new institution.

While the preceding research is important because it distinguishes the vertical and lateral transfer experience, the findings do not address variations that may exist within these transfer populations. Lester et al. (2013) found that vertical transfer students identified their primary sources for social engagement as community and family-based and concludes that engagement with collegiate social activities was not essential for these students. However, this finding reflects the experiences of study participants who were primarily non-traditional aged, adult learners who commuted to campus and had family and work-related commitments. Therefore the findings of this study may not be applicable to all vertical transfer students.

Furthermore, D'Amico et al. (2014) determined that the community college experience influences how vertical transfer students interact with their receiving institution. Findings also highlight that the distance students lived from campus did not influence their feelings related to social fit at the receiving institution. However, D'Amico et al. (2014) limited their analysis to two student groups: students living within 20 minutes of campus and students living further than 20 minutes from campus. Thus, this study does not explain the differences in experiences between students who lived on campus and those who commuted to campus. Differences between living on and off campus have been demonstrated to influence the experiences of lateral transfer students (Chrystal et al., 2013; Utter and DeAngelo, 2015), however this same consideration is not given to vertical transfer students in D'Amico et al.'s (2014) research. Generalizing findings for a specific transfer population without giving consideration to the various types of transfer students within a singular population may limit the applicability of the findings and understanding of the transfer student experience.

2.2.3 Transfer Student Capital

Transfer student capital, according to Laanan et al. (2010), includes the factors that contribute to community college students' ability to navigate the transfer process. These factors include their knowledge of institutional policies and practices as well as experiences that help students learn how to navigate the new environment. The researchers found that community colleges increase transfer student capital by providing programs and services that allow students to acquire tools and skills that help them to transfer. For example, meetings and interactions with academic advisors, financial aid staff, faculty members, admission counselors, and others help students to gain knowledge that will assist them during the transfer process. Participating in activities such as preview days or academic preparatory seminars helps students to build necessary skills.

Receiving institutions can support transfer students by creating orientation and other socialization programs (Townsend, 2008), providing academic advisors who can help students navigate the transition process, articulating credit transfer policies, ensuring the provision of accurate and accessible information about the transfer process, and creating a culture and environment that are supportive and welcoming of new transfer students (Miller, 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). However, many receiving institutions fail to provide these types of services and support, which can inhibit the ability of transfer students to collect this type of capital (Laanan et al., 2010; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). The more services provided by the sending and receiving institutions, the more capital the transfer students have and the more successful they are at navigating the new environment. Thus, Laanan et al. (2010) argued that institutional preparation and services for transfer students relates directly to their ability to navigate and feel successful at the new institution.

Laanan et al.'s (2010) work on transfer student capital provides a framework for understanding the responsibilities of the institution in the transition process. Given what we know about the mission of community colleges and four-year institutions, there are more transition services provided for vertical transfer students than for lateral transfer students. Four-year institutions are generally not set up to support student transfer. Therefore, lateral transfer students have fewer opportunities and resources that prepare them for transfer and provide them with transfer capital. This discrepancy in transition services may influence how vertical and lateral transfer students prepare for and perceive their experience at the receiving institution (Laanan et al. 2010).

2.2.4 Engagement Experiences at the Receiving Institution

Laanan (2007) utilized Pace's (1984) quality of effort model to examine the transition experiences of vertical transfer students who enrolled at a large, research-extensive institution. Students in this study completed the Laanan-Transfer Students' Questionnaire and provided information about their attitudes, feelings, and beliefs as they related to the transfer experience. Laanan (2007) suggested that these pre-transfer characteristics may influence vertical transfer students' decisions, behaviors, and willingness to engage in academic and social activities, and that these characteristics influenced the students' transition and engagement experiences. Particularly in terms of the social experience, vertical transfer students who were more involved with activities such as clubs and organizations had a more satisfying social experience.

Laanan (2007)'s findings are particularly important because they suggest that students' experiences at the receiving institution are shaped by their willingness to engage in social and academic activities. This willingness to engage may be influenced by a student's previous

collegiate experience. For example, students who were active and engaged at the previous institution may be more likely to participate in the same ways at their receiving institution. However, if students were unengaged at the previous institution, they may be more likely to continue in the same manner at the receiving institution. Perception also plays a role because if students perceive a successful integration experience at their previous institution with little engagement they may assume the same level of engagement at the receiving institution will yield the same results. Thus, transfer students' perceptions, based on previous experiences, may influence their engagement and integration behaviors at the receiving institution.

Kirk-Kuwaye and Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) compared the experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students and the influence that the previous institution had on the student transition experiences. One conclusion, which also corresponds to Laanan's claims, is that experiences at the previous institution influenced the students' perceptions of the receiving institution, which influenced student engagement behaviors. Students who perceived that transferring would bring changes to their collegiate experience were more prepared for that change. In particular, vertical transfer students displayed awareness that the four-year institution would be more challenging than the community college and expected higher levels of academic rigor, larger classroom sizes and less individualized attention from faculty. As such, these students took steps early on to assist with this adjustment (i.e., academic support, seeking out assistance, etc.). Meanwhile, the lateral transfer students expected little to no challenges in adjusting to the new academic environment and therefore did not prepare for any difficulties. Lateral students tended to experience more challenges at the new campus because they were surprised when the new collegiate environment was different from the previous environment. Additionally, lateral

transfer students had a harder time making friends, were less satisfied with their experience and demonstrated lower levels of engagement in academic activities.

The findings of Kirk-Kuwaye and Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) are congruent with the findings of Laanan et al. (2010) with regard to the importance of previous experiences and preparation influencing engagement behaviors. Kirk-Kuwaye and Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) stress that if students were aware of significant changes to the collegiate environment, this awareness led to increased levels of preparation for and engagement at the receiving institution. Laanan et al. (2010) inferred that this preparation comes from the institutional support of student transfer that provides the capital needed to navigate and prepare for this experience. Students had more transfer capital and fewer transitional challenges when they were aware of the changes that accompany the transfer experience, and were encouraged to prepare for those challenges. Additionally, this preparation helped students to be more aware of and take advantage of the support services that were available to them at the receiving institution.

2.2.5 Achievement at the Receiving Institution

McGuire and Belcheir (2013) examined the varying enrollment patterns of transfer students and how those patterns influenced student achievement measured by GPA. Findings revealed that the group of vertical transfer group had the highest levels of transfer shock (change in GPA from previous institution) and lowest first semester GPA. The lateral transfer group did comparatively better demonstrating less transfer shock and higher first semester GPAs. Based on these findings the researchers hypothesized that prior experience at a four-year institution contributed to the success of the lateral transfer students. The researchers believed that because lateral transfer students had more experience they were better able to adapt to the new institution

and therefore, experienced fewer challenges in their transition. The assumption by McGuire and Belcheir (2013) is that the lower levels of transfer shock and higher first semester GPAs of the lateral transfer group were indicators of a more successful student experience. For that reason, the researchers suggested that lateral transfer students experienced fewer academic challenges at the receiving institution.

The essential element of the research of McGuire and Belcheir (2013) and Kirk-Kuwaye and Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) is that they exemplify how student achievement and student perceptions of achievement are differentiated. The findings demonstrate that academic achievement, measured via GPA, and feelings of success, measured through perception and behaviors, are not necessarily the same. It is important not to measure student success solely by student achievement metrics or engagement behaviors. Rather, student success should be contextualized by how students perceive their achievement and engagement, and whether or not those perceptions lead to feelings of success. For transfer students, previous collegiate experiences are influential in the ways that students perceive their achievements and experiences at the receiving institution and how those perceptions relate to feelings of being successful.

2.3 LIMITATIONS TO UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Current research and practice assumes that the transfer student experience is homogenous; however, the type of transfer and differentiated transfer experiences influence student transition and integration. These assumptions are prevalent in higher education because of two significant limitations in the way we currently study transfer student success. The first

limitation is that the study of transfer students and measurements of success is often contextualized by how they are compared to native students. The metrics and understanding that we have of transfer student success are based solely on our understanding of native students. We apply that understanding of native student success to the transfer student experience without consideration for how their experiences may be different. This comparative framework is detrimental to the study of transfer students because it assumes that the same experiences and factors that have been demonstrated to support native student success will also support transfer student success.

The second limitation is that most of the current research on transfer students is limited to a singular, often vertical, transfer experience. Thus, the information that we have about the transfer experience and how to facilitate successful transfer is limited to the vertical population. Much less is known about how the experiences of vertical transfer students compare to lateral transfer students or the ways that these experiences are distinct. Furthermore, few scholars consider variation within these transfer populations and the ways that not all vertical or all lateral transfer students will have the same shared experience.

Given these limitations, it is important that research not be limited to quantitative measures of student achievement and engagement. Metrics such as GPA, degree completion and NSSE benchmarks highlight areas of difference between populations; however, to understand why these differences exist we must examine the student experience. Furthermore, examination of the transfer population must consider the multiple transfer populations and how this diversity influences perceptions and behaviors.

The current study uses students' previous collegiate experience as a way to understand how perception influences the social engagement behaviors of vertical and lateral transfer

students. As demonstrated previously, lateral and vertical transfer students transfer for different reasons, have different perceptions of and expectations about their receiving institution, and receive varying levels of preparation for transfer. All these factors contribute to the decisions that students make once at the receiving institution and the ways they engage with their new institution. The following section will provide an overview of the framework that I will use to explore how previous collegiate experiences influence student perceptions and behaviors.

2.3.1 College Student Persistence Model

Milem and Berger's (1997) model of student persistence is a helpful framework for examining the transfer student experience and the role that previous collegiate experience has in the transition experience. This model is based on Tinto's theory of student departure, which postulates that if students do not integrate into the social and academic system, they will not feel a sense of commitment to that institution. Tinto (1975, 1993) argued the level of academic integration is influenced by commitment academic goals, such as: class performance, grades, and intellectual development. Tinto also described the level of social integration as being influenced by interactions with the campus social system, including peer-group and faculty interactions. In this model, student commitment to academic goals and to the institution are directly and separately influenced by the level of academic and social integration respectively. This level of commitment influences a student's decisions to persist.

Milem and Berger's (1997) model describes a cycle of behaviors and perceptions that influence a student's level of academic and social integration. In this model, students enter the institution with a set of norms, behaviors and perceptions that lead to a level of institutional

commitment (IC1). IC1 represents the level of commitment to the institution that student bring with them.

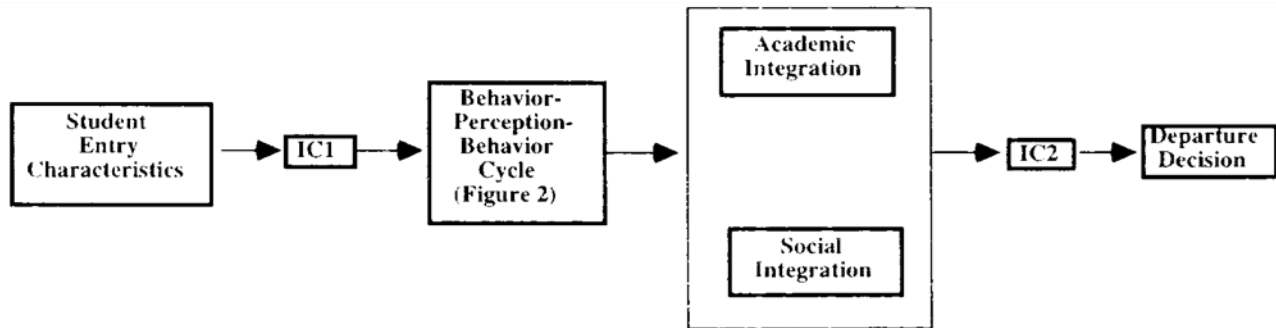


Figure 1. Miley and Berger (1997) conceptual model of student persistence

After enrollment, students engage in certain behaviors that influence their perception of the institution. These behaviors include various interactions with the institution, such as: involvement with faculty and peers; involvement in social, organized, and recreational activities, and institutional and peer support. The experiences that students have on campus either enhance or detract from positive feelings and perceptions about the institution. Students who have negative interactions with campus are likely to form negative perceptions. These negative perceptions then alter the ways in which the students engage with the campus, which ultimately leads to lower levels of integration. For example, if a student has a negative interaction with a faculty member, this experience may lead to a negative perception of that class, which may alter the way the student engages with the class and the faculty member. The initial negative interaction can set in motion a cycle of disengagement and negative perception. However, if students have positive interactions with the campus environment, they are likely to have more positive perceptions, which lead to higher levels of engagement with the community. For

example, if a student joins a social organization on campus and has a positive interaction with the group at the first meeting, this positive interaction may encourage the student to continue to engage with the group, leading to further connection and engagement with campus. These positive or negative behaviors and perceptions continue, and contribute to feelings of being socially and academically integrated. Furthermore, this level of integration either enhances or detracts from the student's institutional and goal commitment (IC2).

While the perception and behavior cycle is cyclical in nature, at the end of each semester the student must decide whether to continue enrollment or depart. Milem and Berger (1997) suggested that there are two stages of this transition and integration process that occur during the first and second semesters, respectively. If students have positive experiences in the first semester, this experience will enhance their perception and lead to more positive behaviors and experiences in the second semester. Thus, positive involvement behaviors in the first semester are likely to lead to positive perceptions that continue through to the second semester. This cycle continues in the second semester and ultimately leads to retention.

Milem and Berger's (1997) model is a helpful framework to use in exploring the transfer student experience because it gives consideration to the importance of student perceptions in the integration experience. Previous collegiate experiences alter students' perceptions and expectations about their new institution which influences their behaviors and the ways that they choose to engage or not engage. This influence may alter initial student behavior and how a student perceives an interaction as being positive or negative. Thus, perception is critical to the ways that students engage with their collegiate experience and can vary by types of previous collegiate experience.

2.3.2 Integration and the Importance of Perception

The concept of student integration is critical to many retention and persistence models; yet, integration is hard to define and measure. Tinto (1975) and Spady (1970) theorized about the importance of integration as part of the student retention model. Spady believed that students' interactions with the academic and social environment would influence their level of integration and that integration was a normative process. This normative process consisted of students learning the culture and norms of their new campus environment and adapting to them. Therefore, Spady postulated that successful integration is dependent on students conforming to the culture and norms of the people around them. However, integration is not a simple construct; it is hard to define because it is subjective and non-cognitive in nature. Integration is a psychological dimension of the student experience, which includes an individual student's sense of belonging, "fitting in" on campus, and feelings and perceptions about campus. These non-cognitive components of the student experience shape how students interact with their social and academic environments.

What remains unclear about the construct of integration is the difference between the behavioral and psychological components. While a student may demonstrate behaviors that have been shown to promote integration (i.e., involvement in campus activities, peer networks, etc.), these behaviors do not necessarily contribute to a psychological sense of integration, such as feeling a part of a community and feeling of "fitting in" (Cabrera, Castafieda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). Because it is difficult to measure integration, many researchers have relied heavily on a subjective interpretation, which stresses the formal and informal activities and behaviors that are believed to support integration, such as involvement in clubs and organizations, living on campus, and others (Astin, 1975; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1993). While these activities have a

strong correlation with persistence, they may not actually provide information relevant to a student's psychological sense of integration (Cabrera et al. 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Solely focusing on the behavioral aspects of integration negates the influence of environmental contexts, individual student characteristics, and other factors that contribute to or detract from the psychosocial feelings of integration.

As the population of college students becomes more diverse and differentiated in experiences, this traditional concept of integration does not account for the varied ways that a student may or may not experience integration on campus (Cabrera et al. 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For instance, Sedlacek's (1998) research examined cognitive and non-cognitive variables that influence native student success. The researcher found that non-cognitive variables such as motivation and student perception were equally important to students' academic performance. Further research demonstrated that these non-cognitive variables were especially significant in the college departure decisions among women and students of color (Sedlacek, 2005).

Wawrzynski and Sedlacek (2003) expanded on Sedlacek's (1998, 2003, 2005) research with native students and examined non-cognitive variables (i.e., perceptions, academic behaviors and attitudes) of transfer students (vertical and lateral were left undefined and undistinguished). Findings indicated differences by race and gender in student expectations, academic behavior and learning outcomes. In particular, not all transfer students had the same expectations of, and experiences at, the receiving institution. Specifically, women and minority student groups displayed differences in the ways they connected to the campus community and the importance they placed on social relationships. For example, both Asian-American and African-American transfer students placed more emphasis on the importance of interacting with faculty as

compared with white transfer students in the same cohort. The findings of Wawrynski and Sedlacek (2003) are significant because they support the notion that transfer students' integration experiences are influenced by non-cognitive variables, such as perception, and that not all transfer student populations have the same experiences.

2.3.3 College Persistence Theory and Transfer Students

Milem and Berger's (1997) model is important to our understanding of student integration because it represents how both behaviors and perceptions are influential in the integration process. While Milem and Berger's (1997) model expands our understanding of integration beyond a set of behaviors and activities, it still does not account for a diverse student population. This model assumes that if students demonstrate certain behaviors and engage with certain activities, over the course of time, their perceptions will shift and they will integrate on campus. What is unknown is if the same activities and behaviors that have been shown to promote positive perceptions and feelings of integration for native students will influence transfer students in the same way.

To move beyond this model, further research should focus on exploring the experiences that influence various and diverse transfer populations. While studies such as that of Wawrynski and Sedlacek (2003) contribute to our understanding about how diverse transfer student populations experience transition in different ways, type of transfer is often ignored as a factor that influences this experience. Even though Wawrynski and Sedlacek focused on examining the differences in the transfer experience by race and gender, the researchers did not provide any data on the breakdown of type of transfer. Type of transfer was not ever mentioned in the publication. While the authors acknowledge and appreciate the differentiation in transfer student

experiences and perceptions, they are ignoring a key variable that influences these experiences. As future research considers the diversification of the transfer student population and the varying perceptions and experiences that result from that diversity, type of transfer must be given consideration.

2.4 SUMMARY AND KNOWLEDGE GAP

The population of transfer students is growing and diversifying (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; McCormick 1997, 2003; Peter & Cataldi, 2005). Due to this phenomenon, higher education administrators need to know how these populations will transform our current understanding and constructs of student achievement and student success. In order to respond to these demographic changes, both researchers and practitioners need to recognize that student success is a complex concept that incorporates both academic success in the classroom and personal success through satisfaction with the integration and engagement experience. As researchers study the experiences that contribute to engagement and integration for transfer populations, we must challenge the assumption that what is known about native students is also true for transfer students. In addition, this assumption neglects the experiences that transfer students have at their previous institutions and the ways that those experiences shape perceptions, feelings and behaviors at the receiving institution. By discounting these experiences, we are missing the opportunity to provide support and programming that is most helpful to these distinct populations. Limiting our knowledge to the vertical transfer population ignores how vertical and lateral transfer students may perceive and interact with their new campus environment in different ways (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; McGuire &

Belchair, 2013, Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). Additionally, the study of transfer student success should consider both cognitive and non-cognitive factors that influence the transfer student experience and how those influences are unique for a diverse transfer student population (Wawrynski & Sedlacek, 2003).

Milem and Berger's (1997) model is a helpful framework to the study of transfer students because it provides a broader understanding of student integration experience and places emphasis on student behaviors and perceptions. This model allows us to consider the relationship between behavior and perceptions, using the behavior-perception-behavior cycle and how this cycle and the influence of this on the student integration experience. The current study uses the Milem and Berger's (1997) model to examine the influence of previous collegiate experiences on the behaviors and perceptions of vertical and lateral transfer students at the receiving institution. In particular, I focused on the behavior-perception-behavior cycle and how previous collegiate experiences influence this cycle and ultimately influence students' perceptions of social connection.

3.0 METHODS

To investigate is how perceptions and behaviors of vertical and lateral transfer students are influenced by previous collegiate experiences at the receiving institution, I used one-on-one interviews in the framework of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Students described their social experiences at the receiving institution and the ways that their engagement on campus and feelings of social connection were shaped by previous experiences (van Manen, 2014). This study provides an understanding of how the experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students are similar to and distinct from one another. The purpose of the study was to expand the understanding of the transfer student experience, their adjustment and integration process, and how higher education institutions can better assist and serve this population.

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do vertical and lateral transfer students describe their social experiences at the receiving institution?
2. How does previous collegiate experience influence the social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students at the receiving institution?
3. How does previous collegiate experience influence feelings and perceptions of social connection for vertical and lateral transfer students at the receiving institution?

3.2 HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY AS A RESEARCH DESIGN

Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition that is rooted in the study of psychology, sociology, and anthropology (van Manen, 2014). Currently the use of phenomenological research has expanded to include many human sciences such as education, nursing, medicine, and counseling. One requirement of phenomenological research is that scholars who utilize this methodology should have a strong background in the discipline that they are studying. This requirement is key to phenomenology because the researcher must be able to provide context to the analysis. The goal of phenomenological study is to gain an understanding of a lived experience and provide meaning to how study participants describe and understand this lived experience (van Manen, 2014).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is an approach to research that uses a reflective and descriptive process to describe lived experiences. This method seeks to describe, clarify, and reflect on phenomena in a conversational manner that utilizes a sensitive interpretation style (van

Manen, 2014). The focus of phenomenological research is not on a person or an object; rather, it is on a phenomenon and the meaning that participants make of events and experiences. Phenomenology is focused on the prereflective experience defined by van Manen (2014) as “an ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence” (p. 28). Our everyday experiences are considered prereflective.

The lived experience of vertical and lateral transfer students to an urban, Mid-Atlantic, research institution (UMAR) is the focus of the current study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is appropriate for this area of study because it allows for complex contextual description and for the researcher to provide context based on personal and professional knowledge. In particular, the research questions for this study have been designed to explore the events and experiences within students’ lived experiences that influenced feelings of social connection. The analysis takes into account both the participants’ and the researcher’s experiences to explore the core essence of this lived experience (van Manen, 2014).

3.3 REFLEXIVITY, RESEARCH ROLE AND RECIPROCITY

My interest in this area of research stems from my experiences as a practitioner and a scholar. At the time of this research, I was Assistant Director of Student Life at UMAR, and I specifically worked with retention initiatives and focused on assisting new and transfer students with their transition to the institution. Upon assuming this position, one of the first challenges I discovered was that transfer students at the university were an underserved population. As part of my practitioner role, I led the effort to create a transfer student programs office. As we provided more orientation and transitional services for these students, I spent more time learning

about their experiences and started to recognize that students from difference types of sending institutions were having different experiences at our campus.

These experiences were the foundation for a pilot study in the spring of 2014. With this exploratory study, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to interview 36 lateral transfer students. Prior to undertaking this research, I performed an extensive review of literature on the topic of transfer student success. Through this process, I discovered a gap in the current understanding of the lateral transfer student population and realized that most of what is known about transfer student success was based on the vertical experience. The discrepancy in research on vertical and lateral populations was particularly troublesome for me in my practitioner role because my institution enrolls equal numbers of both populations. Therefore, it was important to me to understand how these students differ from one another.

The pilot study revealed the following themes on the integration experiences of lateral transfer students: the importance of housing in facilitating social integration experiences (Utter & DeAngelo, 2015), the challenges of reconciling a new collegiate experience with previous experiences, and students feeling as if they have the knowledge and social capital of a first year student while having sophomore standing. In the interviews, many of the lateral transfer students described the differences between their previous campus experiences and their current experience and how they had expected the transition experience to be different. These findings perpetuated my interest in this population of transfer students and increased my passion for gaining a better understanding of the way that these students differ from vertical transfer students.

While I am not a transfer student, I am a part of a community of transfer students at the institution where I serve. I spend significant time engaging one-on-one with students and

advocating for additional programs and policies that will better serve the transfer population. This experience provides me with a unique understanding about the transfer environment and institutional context that the students encounter as transfer students. I have a proficient understanding of the transfer process, the programs and services available to transfer students, as well as the institutional policies and practices that influence the transfer experience. This knowledge comes not only from my practitioner experiences but also from the findings of my pilot study. The experiences I have had with this population reaffirm the information I have gathered through reviewing literature and provides me with the knowledge needed to contextualize the current research study.

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I continually evaluated my personal experiences and biases by using appropriate methodologies such as bracketing. Using these analysis techniques allowed me to maintain distance from the participants and the subject matter and to keep my personal biases distant from my analysis. At the same time, my institutional and personal knowledge enabled me to provide an enhanced contextualization of the data.

This research provides reciprocity by contributing to the scholarly work on transfer students and also by providing institutional knowledge that will influence policy and programming for this student population. This study adds to the body of knowledge on transfer student success. Higher education institutions are seeking this type of information to inform their practices as the landscape is changing to include more diverse populations of transfer students. The findings of this study will help institutions to enhance opportunities and support for the transfer student population, which will in turn improve the student experience and student success. On an institutional level, the knowledge gained from this study will be used to implement programs and services at the institution these students attend. As a practitioner in

transfer student programs, I will be able to directly shape not only the programming offered to these students but also the way in which our office approaches and interacts with these distinct student populations.

3.4 SITE INFORMATION

This study was conducted at a mid-Atlantic, Research 1 University (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015). Henceforth, this institution will be referred to as UMAR (Mid-Atlantic Research University). UMAR is a four-year, primarily residential campus located in an urban area. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2015), research universities are those that offer a full range of baccalaureate programs and give high priority to research. UMAR has a full-time enrollment of 17,483 students at the main campus with an additional 5,975 students at various regional campuses. Full time graduate enrollment is 7,586. Each year, the institution enrolls approximately 3,900 new first-year and 1,000 new transfer students. The transfer student population consisted of internal transfer students from regional campuses as well as students from two-year and four-year institutions.

The campus is primarily residential with a 3-year housing guarantee for native students. Housing for transfer students is not guaranteed. Approximately 97% of incoming first-year students and more than 9,000 students live on campus each year. In 2014, first-year retention was 93% and the six-year graduation rate was 82% for the 2008 cohort of native, first-time students.

3.5 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Participant selection for hermeneutic phenomenology dictates that the participants be selected based on criteria that they have lived the experience that is the focus of the current study, they are willing to participate and talk about their experience, and there is sufficient diversity among participants to provide for individualized unique experiences (van Manen, 2002). Participants in this study included 20 lateral transfer students and 18 vertical transfer students who were enrolled full time at UMAR.

Students excluded from the study include students who had attended more than one previous institution, swirled between institutions, or had stopped out between enrollments. These student populations were excluded because current research suggests that students with these characteristics have experiences that are unique from the vertical and lateral transfer student experience (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; McCormick, 2003). Excluding these populations allowed for findings that are relevant to the target populations of vertical and lateral transfer students. Additionally, part-time students were excluded from the study because their experience has been shown to be distinct from students who enroll full-time (Peter & Cataldi, 2005).

Students who transferred from UMAR's regional campuses were excluded from the participant sample. There are four regional campuses, three four-year and one two-year, from which students could transfer to the main campus. Students who transfer from the regional campuses did not identify as transfer students and are labeled by the institution as "relocated." Given this dynamic, these students are likely to have transfer experiences unique from other vertical and lateral transfer students.

I used criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) to obtain study participants that best match the criteria of the study. Students received a notification via email about the study from the Transfer

Student Program Office (see Appendix A for participant solicitation email). This message was emailed to transfer students who enrolled in the fall 2014. Approximately 762 students were solicited for this study. While students self-selected to participate, they were pre-screened prior to their inclusion. This pre-screen questionnaire asked questions to confirm that participants match the criteria of the study (i.e., transfer student, fall 2014 full-time enrollment, fluid movement, and only one previous institution) (see Appendix B for participant pre-screening questions).

To manage participant solicitation, I divided students into seven groups using a random number generator. Students were solicited by group and this solicitation continued until the desired number of participants were selected and interviewed. Maximum variation selection was used as a method to promote a diversified sample of minority students. To do this, all minority transfer students were included in the first three groups to be solicited. The goal of this maximum variation sampling was to increase the heterogeneity among the sample of participants which was necessary due to the low number of minority students within the transfer population (Patton, 2002). The 2014 pilot study did not use maximum variation sampling and yielded only two minority participants out of a total of 36 participants.

Due to a low response rate, participants were solicited via email on two occasions. During the first round of solicitation, there was a low number of male respondents compared to female. Therefore, with the second round of solicitation, maximum variation sample was used to increase the number of male participants (in addition to continued maximum variation for minority students).

Once selected, participants were invited to schedule a 60-minute interview. Interviews took place in the student union on UMAR's campus. Participants received a UMAR t-shirt and souvenir cup for their participation in the research.

3.6 PARTICIPANTS

The study sample included 38 participants, 20 lateral transfer students and 18 vertical transfer students. All participants were full-time enrolled students at UMAR who transferred in the fall of 2014. (See Appendix C for a participant profile table). Despite the use of maximum variation sampling, the participants were predominantly white females. Participants included eight males and 30 females. Twenty-eight of the participants identified as white/Caucasian while 10 identified as non-white, including one bi-racial student, two Asian students, one American Indian, one Caribbean student, and three black/African American students. All but two students were of traditional age.

3.6.1 Previous institution type

The vertical transfer students in this study all transferred from large public community colleges. Of the vertical transfer students, three attended community college in a different state than UMAR and three were from in-state institutions but in a different regional area. Twelve of the vertical transfer students attended community college in the same regional area as UMAR.

Among the lateral transfer student populations, there was more variation in previous institution type. Institutional type was determined using the Carnegie Classification System. Ten

lateral transfer students attended private institutions while 10 attended public institutions. Eight students attended large institutions, five attended medium size institutions, and seven attended small or very small sized institutions. Six institutions awarded doctoral degrees while nine were master's level, and five were baccalaureate only. All students, with the exception of Christian, attended institutions that were smaller in size by enrollment compared to UMAR (See Appendix D: Primary Residency and Previous Institution Information).

3.6.2 Vertical transfer students

Nearly all vertical transfer students were junior standing with only two sophomore students and no seniors. Of the 18 vertical transfer students, 15 were female, three were male, and all but two were of traditional age. Twelve of the vertical transfer students had primary residency in the same region as UMAR, three students had primary residency in the same state as UMAR and three students had primary residency in a different state. Students' previous enrollment at the community college followed this same pattern with 12 students who attended community college in the same regional area as UMAR, three students who attended community college in the same state as UMAR and three students who attended community college outside of the same state. For all the vertical transfer students, their primary residency was the same location as their previous institution. (See Appendix D: Primary Residency and Previous Institution Information)

3.6.3 Lateral transfer students

Of the lateral transfer students, there were 12 with sophomore standing, seven with junior standing and one with senior standing. This senior was enrolled as part of a joint three/two year engineering program with the previous institution and had enough credits to be considered a senior but would be enrolled at UMAR for two years. There were five male lateral transfer participants and 15 female, all traditional aged. Seven lateral students had primary residency in the same region as UMAR, eight had primary residency in the same state as UMAR and five students had primary residency in a different state as UMAR. Two students were previously enrolled at an institution that was in the same regional location as UMAR, seven students previously attended an institution in the same state as UMAR and 11 students attended a previous institution that was in a different state as UMAR.

Only one of the lateral transfer students had primary residency and previous enrollment at an institution in the same region as UMAR. Seven students had primary residency in the same region as UMAR but attended an institution in a different region from UMAR. Seven students had primary residency in the same state as UMAR and attended a previous institution in a different region from UMAR. Five students had both primary residency and previous enrollment in a state that was different from UMAR. (See Appendix D: Primary Residency and Previous Institution Information).

3.7 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval with a category exemption for the study prior to data collection and all participants were given an informed consent agreement prior to the beginning of the interview. The IRB approved this consent form. By signing the form, participants acknowledged their voluntary participation in the study (see Appendix C for Example Consent Form and Appendix D for Interview Introductory Script).

3.8 DATA COLLECTION

The interview protocol for the one-on-one interviews was consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological method (van Manen, 2014) and consisted of semi-structured interview questions that asked participants to describe and interpret their experiences. The protocol provided a set of guided questions and possible follow-up questions with the goal of addressing the main research questions of this study (Creswell, 2003; Laverly, 2008). The main interview questions invited students to reflect on their experiences at their previous institution, their decision to transfer, and their experience at UMAR. In particular, the interviews focused on feelings of social integration and connectedness and students' perceptions and behaviors at UMAR as compared to their experience at their previous institution. Follow-up questions provided additional contextualization and information from the participants. In addition, throughout the interviews, I took notes observing the times where participants were quiet and there was silence. Such observations were necessary because the absence of speech can also

signify meaning (van Manen, 1990). (See Appendix G for Description and Rationale of Interview Protocol and Appendix H for Interview Guide).

Interviews occurred over a six-week period between March and April of 2015 prior to the end of the academic term. They took place in the conference room in the Student Life Office within the student union. The interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length and consisted of a semi-structured protocol that provided a script of questions for each student as well as questions for follow-up. This semi-structured format allowed participants to communicate their experience in an individualized way while ensuring that each participant responded to a standard set of questions.

The interview protocol aligned with Seidman's (2006) interview protocols of phenomenology, which focus on the participant's history, experiences and reflections to bring meaning to those experiences. This methodology also allowed participants to recount and remember their experiences in ways that promoted reconciliation of past events that were most relevant to their current experience (Seidman, 2006). The interview protocol was designed to explore the students' lived experiences as transfer students in four stages which included; students' experiences at the previous institution, their decision and process of transferring, their experiences at UMAR and finally their reflections on their entire experience (see Appendix G). Parts of the interview protocol were focused on reflection and asked participants to link their experiences together with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of how previous experiences influenced current experiences. These reflective questions were designed to explore the role that previous experience had on students' behaviors, perceptions, and feelings in regards to their social experiences.

Important to the hermeneutic methodology is the context that the researcher provides throughout the interview and analysis (Finlay, 2012). Since I am a practitioner in the area of transfer student programming and student success at the institution where the research was conducted, this position allowed me to provide context for both the questions being asked and the information provided by the participants. This context provided for a richer understanding of the student experience (Bazeley, 2013; Finlay, 2012) because it allowed for mutual understanding of institutional policies and programs that influence transfer students. This mutual understanding meant that I had knowledge of many people, places and programs to which the students referred in their interviews. Additionally, because of this knowledge, my follow-up questions were targeted to highlighting the student experiences instead of an explanation of content.

Interviews were audio recorded and I used professional transcription services to transcribe all recorded material. To check for accuracy, I reviewed all transcriptions prior to analysis, made corrections, and filled in omissions as needed prior to data analysis (Creswell, 2003).

3.9 BRACKETING, EPOCHE AND REDUCTION

Analysis of data using a phenomenological approach involves the use of epoche and reduction to make sense of the data (van Manen, 2014). Epoche and reduction occur simultaneously and are two movements, which provide insight to the transcendental being and sense of the world. This method involves removing personal perspective, which may block the researcher's ability to access the phenomena followed by re-engaging with the phenomena.

Epoche is the act of stepping away from or abstaining from something. During the epoche stage, the researcher engages in bracketing or the removal of his or her personal understanding and biases. Phenomenological reduction is the process of bringing understanding to the phenomena and re-engaging the data to make sense of it (van Manen, 2002).

To engage in the epoche and reduction process, I used bracketing during the memo writing process whereby I identified my own bias and subjectivity within the coding and analysis. The individualized experience memos included both a summary of the participant's experiences as well as a separate section that included my thoughts and impressions about their experience. Included in the bracketed sections were any contextualization that I contributed to the memo writing process including information that may have been inferred from the interview transcripts, but not directly stated. This process enabled me to include my contextualization for consideration during analysis but also kept this information separate from the description of the students own experiences. This process allowed for self-reflection whereby I identified how my biases, subjectivities, preferences, inclinations, and motivations may have affected the way that I interpreted the data. Doing so enabled me to shift back and forth between the participant's experiences and my personal perspectives on the research subject (van Manen, 2002).

This bracketing process is one example of the contrasting methodologies between a phenomenological approach and a heuristic phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach focuses on describing the phenomena whereas heuristic phenomenology seeks to interpret that phenomenon to provide context and additional meaning. With other phenomenological methodologies, the bracketing process is a method of separating out and putting aside the researcher's personal perspectives and bias. In heuristic phenomenology, the bracketed information becomes a part of the interpretive process and is embedded in the analysis

instead. Thus, the final interpretations of this research include my personal understanding and assumptions (Laverty, 2008).

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Prior to coding, I read through each individual transcript and took notes on the interviews with the purpose of identifying emerging themes from the data (Patton, 2002). I then coded and created memos based on reflective and thematic analysis (van Manen, 1990). Dedoose was used as a software tool to assist with coding. Coding was both chronological (previous institution, transition process, and UMAR) and based on experiential themes. The codes included both descriptive data and interpretive data as well as recurrent and emerging themes or concepts (Bazeley, 2013; Finlay 2012). Coding placed data into categories or families that were then organized into larger groupings of themes (Cresswell, 2003). These categories included textual and structural codes, which when combined provided a description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Textual codes were specific examples of what the participant experienced in relation to the research questions (i.e., events that occurred, things that happened, etc.). Structural codes provided descriptions of how the participants described the experience (i.e., feelings, reactions, perceptions, etc.). These codes were combined to provide a full description of the essence of the individual experience (van Manen, 2014). After the initial coding and identification of themes, I reread all the transcripts to enhance the coding and review for any missed themes.

Once the initial coding and review was complete, I utilized memo writing as a way to build content around the data (van Manen, 2014). Van Manen suggests five types of draft

writing that are used in phenomenological analysis. In this study, experiential and thematic memos were the primary modes of analysis because they aligned with the research questions, allowed for identifying commonalities and differences among student experiences and provided for emphasis on the students' interpretation of their lived experiences. Experiential draft writing transformed the stories and anecdotes of the participants into concrete examples of the phenomena being investigated. Thematic draft writing highlighted themes within the participant experiences and converted them to narrative passages. The first step in this reflective writing was to read through all of the transcripts of the interviews and personal research notes to identify significant statements, emerging themes and concepts (Bazeley, 2013). This process helped me to get an overall sense of the information and begin to identify themes. After completing this process, I began writing memos around each personal experience as well as interconnected themes. The experiential memos summarized the individual experiences and provided additional context to the individual stories through the bracketing process. These experiential memos identified quotes that gave examples of the lived experiences for the individual participants and also those that represent larger themes. These individual experiential memos were then sent to the participants as part of the feedback process.

Thematic memo writing included information from all the participants and identified examples of emerging themes. These memos included both the structural descriptions of the experiences along with the underlying and contributing influences that explained how the student experienced the phenomena (Bazeley, 2013). This process was inductive, and common themes and the relationships between themes emerged from the coding and memos; these themes will be described in later chapters, in order to provide understanding of the student integration experience (Finlay, 2012).

The thematic and experiential memos formed the basis of the findings and explained and described the themes in the data. Once the primary themes had been established, I reread the original transcripts and initial memos to ensure that throughout the data analysis process the findings were consistent with the participants' experiences. Participant quotations were pulled to bring specificity and examples to the themes.

After the initial coding and memo writing, I began the process of describing the themes and findings of the study. During this process, additional analysis was needed in order to clarify and fully understand the unique experiences of the lateral and transfer populations. To do this, I re-coded the individual memos of each of the students and separated them by type of transfer. This process allowed me to focus on the lived experiences of each of the unique populations. It also provided for a deeper understanding of the themes discovered in the initial analysis and revealed distinctiveness within the student's experiences.

3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Member checks occurred after the initial draft memos had been written. These memos included some representation of emerging themes and analysis within context. I asked the participants to review draft memos and provide feedback on their thoughts, opinions, and perceptions of my initial analysis. This process helps to build a consensus between the participants and the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, this review served as an important step in the member check process because it allowed participants to check for accuracy and respond to initial impressions of their experience (Creswell, 2003).

After participants had received their summary memo, they were asked to provide additional feedback via a follow up interview. The goal of this interview was to ask participants about the accuracy but also to receive any additional information that they may have forgotten or left out from the initiation interview (see Appendix I for Follow-Up Interview Script). However, of the 38 participants, only 16 participants responded to the request for a follow-up after receiving the summary memos. Five of the participants did provide clarifying information about details of their personal information. Only two respondents agreed to and completed a phone interview, and the other 14 responded via email. Overall, there was no significant information added to the original summary memos. However, this follow-up ensured that details of the student's experiences were accurately captured in the interview and initial memo process.

After the themes were established, I reviewed each individual transcript. This review included re-reading each individual transcript to ensure that the student experience aligned with the findings including student's assigned transfer disposition. Additionally, after the themes and transfer dispositions were identified, I re-read and reviewed the student experience and thematic memos and verified that the student experiences were appropriately portrayed and that the findings aligned with the interview data. While the data analysis process was inductive, I continually referred to original data sources to ensure that the analysis was accurate and representative of the student experience.

3.12 ETHICAL ISSUES

In addition to participant feedback as a method of ensuring trustworthiness, it is important to note the significance of maintaining confidentiality. Confidentiality is especially

critical to this study because participants were current students enrolled at the institution and they disclosed information about staff, administrators, and faculty who currently worked at UMAR. It was important to protect the participants from any backlash that could occur from revealing information about the institution or its personnel. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. These pseudonyms were assigned at random and serve to safeguard the participant's real identity. Additionally, any quotes or other information that could uniquely identify participants was excluded from the final manuscript. For example, the names of other individuals mentioned in the interviews, specific campus buildings or locations, any specific organizations or club names, and the name of their previous institution were all excluded. All data that includes the actual name of the participants is and will continue to be kept confidential and in a secure location, in locked file cabinets and password protected computer files. This confidential data includes email communications with participants, consent forms and original transcripts.

3.13 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The setting and scope of the study are significant limitations. This study took place at a single institution during a distinct period of time. Thus, the findings of this study are not generalizable for all institutions or all periods of time. Additionally, UMAR does not provide easily accessible data on the transfer student population. Because of this, information regarding the number of transfer students currently enrolled and their degree completion rates is not available. Data that is available focuses on enrollment factors such as type of previous institution, credits transferred, and academic plan (major). There is no post-enrollment data

currently available on this transfer student population. This type of data would help to contextualize student success at the institution.

There are limitations to the sample of participants for the study. Selection criteria included consecutive enrollment which eliminated students with stop out or gap terms. Additionally only vertical and lateral transfer is considered, whereas swirler and reverse transfer were not. This selection criteria was necessary for the purpose of addressing the research questions and maintaining some consistency within the sample. However, this sampling method lends itself to the selection of a traditionally-aged transfer students and the sample lacks consideration for students over the age of 25 years of age. This limitation is important because findings and discussion of this research do not relate to all transfer experiences and represent a sub-population of students who transfer.

Although maximum variation sample was utilized, study participants were mainly female and majority white/Caucasian. Therefore, the findings and interpretations may not be applicable to a more diverse group of transfer students. When interpreting the findings and applying the recommendations for practice, these issues need to be taken into consideration.

While there is diversity in the class standing of the participants in the study, it is important to note that the majority of vertical transfer students were junior standing while the majority of lateral transfer students were sophomore standing. This is important because the composition of the two groups could influence the experiences of the students. Students with an additional year of college experience may have different maturity and perspective than those with less years of experience.

Given the nature of hermeneutic phenomenology, interpretations of the data focus on the uniqueness of the lived human experience as well as my contextualization of the phenomenon

and are therefore open to alternative interpretation. Additionally, my interpretation is situated in a specific environment and point in time (Creswell, 2003). The participant experiences are fluid and evolving and this study is a snapshot in time. As I examine the experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students, their own interpretation of their lived experience may shift and change throughout their lifetime.

Additionally, the data provided by the interview process is filtered through the perspective of the participants and their perceptions may be influenced by various factors. The participants' representation of the experience is contextualized within themselves and is limited by their memory and ability to recall and conceptualize their experiences (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the product of this research, which employs a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, is a description of rather than a conclusion about the transfer experience (van Manen, 2014).

4.0 FINDINGS: TRANSFER STUDENT DISPOSITION

Chapter four presents an overview of the student experiences that emerge from this hermeneutic phenomenological study at a mid-Atlantic Research University (UMAR) related to vertical and lateral transfer students. In this chapter, I introduce four predominant groups of transfer students, highlighting the various dispositions and characteristics of the students in this study. This chapter is significant because it distinguishes the students' experiences beyond vertical and lateral transfer and provides a foundation for further analysis in Chapter Five.

The students in this study had multiple depositions which are demonstrated by their attitudes towards and expectations of their experience at UMAR. Students decided to transfer and enroll at UMAR for specific reasons; these reasons inform what students were hoping to achieve during their time at UMAR. Prior to enrollment, students made a series of decisions related to their decision to transfer, selection of the receiving institution, and their selection of housing. These decisions reflect the expectations and assumptions that students had about their experience at UMAR. There are four sub groups that categorize the predominant types of student dispositions among the participants; completion-focused, new beginnings, second chance, and social-completer transfer students. It is important to note that this finding highlights four different transfer dispositions from the students in this study and may not be inclusive of the dispositions that were not represented in the study sample population.

One element of the students' disposition was their self-identification as college students and whether or not this was their primary identity. For the completion-focused students, their role as students was often secondary to their role as a family members and employees. On the other hand, for the other students in the study, being students was their primary commitment. This distinction is important because it helps to contextualize the dispositions and why the students may or may not have been seeking to engage in the social aspects of college life. For those with significant non-collegiate commitments, such as the completion-focused transfer students, engagement in social activities was not a high priority.

The social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students are differentiated by their dispositions which influence their decision making and ultimately their social experiences. The role of students' disposition is important to understanding the student experience beyond the distinction of vertical and lateral transfer students and provides the foundation for understanding how students perceived their social interactions and experiences at UMAR. The four groups distinguished in this chapter will be used throughout the findings and discussion.

4.1 COMPLETION-FOCUSED TRANSFER STUDENTS

The first student group included the completion-focused transfer students. This group comprised both vertical and lateral transfer students whose decision to transfer was founded on the desire to pursue a specific academic goal. These students were not concerned with the social aspects of their college experience because their identity as students was secondary to their other family, community, and employment commitments. For that reason, the completion-focused transfer students made decisions that were driven by academic, financial, and logistical elements

of their experience. One decision that was important to the experience of this group was the decision to commute to campus and to live at home with friends or family members.

Table 1. Completion-focused transfer student profile

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Transfer Type</i>	Standing	Housing at UMAR	Gender
Fiona	Lateral	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Keaton	Lateral	Sophomore	Off Campus Apartment	Male
Lamar	Lateral	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Male
Valerie	Lateral	Senior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Aiden	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Male
Aisha	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Crystal	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Janelle	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Kiki	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Quinn	Vertical	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Ria	Vertical	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Sabrina	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Tobias	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Male
Vera	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Whitney	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Yolanda	Vertical	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female

Within this group are 12 vertical transfer students and four lateral transfer students who made the decision to transfer and to live off-campus, so that they could focus on achieving their academic goals. These students shared the sentiment that enrolling at UMAR was a necessary decision in order for them to continue their college careers and graduate with their desired degree or their desired field of study. For students at the community college, vertical transfer was the only way to obtain their bachelor's degree. For the lateral transfer students, the decision to transfer was based on a specific financial or academic need. Both vertical and lateral transfer students cited financial considerations related to the selection of UMAR and the decision to commute.

These students had commitments outside of their college experience which meant that being a college student was a secondary component of their lives. Their primary focus was obtaining their degree in the quickest and most cost-effective way, so that they could move on from the collegiate experience. A few students did identify primarily as a student, without significant outside commitments. However, even with identifying primarily as a college student, their academic pursuits were their primary concern and they were uninterested in the social aspects of college life. For all the completion-focused students, enrolling at UMAR was a logical decision, not an emotional one, and the decision to transfer was “easy” and “straightforward.” Because of this mindset, the way that these students described their social experiences and expectations was different from the other transfer students in the study.

The decision to transfer was somewhat differentiated between the vertical and lateral transfer students. Vertical transfer students had finished their coursework at the community college and had no choice but to transfer. Quinn, a vertical transfer student, stated, “I was there [previous institution] for about a year and a half to two years. And then I, you know, I had gotten

about as far as I could there, so I decided to transfer here [UMAR].” The vertical transfer students knew from the start of their enrollment at the community college that they would transfer to a four-year institution, and it was not a decision that was significant to them. Janelle stated, “I knew I was gonna come here from the beginning and finish my degree.” Aiden discussed his satisfaction with enrolling at UMAR, because it allowed him to continue his academic pursuits while also supporting his family:

[UMAR is] number one in PA in the top ten. Ah, it’s close to me cause I like . . . if I go far away like my parents aren’t gonna have like that support anymore. . . So, [UMAR] was just, it was just the ideal school like . . . my family, it was just commuting so much easier.

The experience of Quinn, Janelle and Aiden demonstrate the disposition towards transfer for the vertical students in this subgroup and how this decision was their only option in order to continue their educational careers.

However, for the lateral transfer students, the decision to transfer varied and was based on a specific academic or financial need. Lamar, a lateral transfer student, described his decision to transfer as follows: “I realized it would be a thousand times cheaper to come back to [city of primary residency], plus the [UMAR’s] program is a lot better . . . that was a big influential part about me transferring back. Was definitely the price and the credibility of the program.” On the other hand, Keaton transferred because of a change in his academic pursuits which made UMAR a more affordable options. Keaton stated, “As soon as I transferred from the Department of Art into English and writing, I thought that it was a bit silly to be going to an art school, especially with how expensive it was and how far away it was.” For the lateral completion-focused transfer students, transferring was optional but logical in order to continue their academic pursuits and spend less money.

The decision of vertical and lateral transfer students to attend UMAR was not motivated by a desire to find a social community or to develop a sense of belonging to the institution. Instead, transfer was a means to an end. Yolanda, a vertical transfer student, stated, “I do not consider myself as being a part of that [campus community] . . . as opposed to like your traditional like people all around the university.” This disposition meant that social experiences to this group were secondary to academic achievement, balancing commitments, and affording daily expenses. Keaton, a lateral transfer student, clarified, “[Socializing] feels like a waste of time, to be honest. Because if I’m not spending my time studying or getting work done ahead . . . then I just really don’t think I’m succeeding.” This group of transfer students was not interested in participating in the social activities offered, including the residential experience and participation in non-academic extracurricular activities. Fiona explained how transferring changed her perspective on college life: “my college experience is kind of different, like I feel like am an adult student. . . just because I have to go home, I have to make dinner, like do laundry, like I have a normal life.” For completion-focused transfer students, attending college was one of many responsibilities and aspects of their lives.

Because the social aspects of college life were secondary and commuting to campus was a cheaper option, all of these students were comfortable with the decision to commute. All of the vertical transfer students had previously commuted from home, and the decision to continue to do so was one that “made the most sense” (Kiki). Living off-campus provided these students with a “familiar” and “comfortable” environment. Tobias, a vertical transfer student, shared his perspective on commuting: “I figured why not stay at home, you know, get my laundry done for free and everything.” Students explained that living off-campus enabled them to maintain “familiar surroundings” at a time when many things about their experience were becoming

“uncomfortable,” “nerve-racking,” and “new.” Additionally, these students did not identify with what they perceived as the traditional college lifestyle. Aisha lived at home while attending community college for the following reasons:

I very much appreciate living with my parents. I don't like the idea of like sharing, the freshman dorm's kind of weird, you know, just being in such a small space. I have my own car. We have a big yard. It's just a lot of things I'd be doing. I do my laundry in a comfortable space. I don't find other hairs in my clothes. But like the whole idea of being so close to people, all the time nonstop . . . like leave me alone, I just wanna have privacy.

For lateral transfer students, the decision to commute altered their experience from their previous institution. All of the lateral transfer students who commuted to campus had lived on-campus at their previous institution. Therefore, their decision-making was based on lived experiences in the residence halls. For example, Fiona had negative experiences at her previous institution living on campus and did not desire to be in that situation again: “I didn't even think about living on campus or having another roommate because of my experience there [previous institution]. I was just like, ‘I'm done with roommates. I don't want to have like another random roommate or anything again.’” While these students did not transfer because of deficiencies in their previous experience, they were not seeking to repeat that same experience.

Regardless of their vertical or lateral transfer status, the completion-focused transfer students decided to transfer for academic and financial reasons. They also commuted to campus and lived with family or friends. Their disposition was such that the social or extracurricular elements of college life were secondary to their academic pursuits and non-collegiate commitments.

4.2 SOCIAL-COMPLETER TRANSFER STUDENTS

The Social-completer transfer students represent the subgroup of students who decided to transfer solely for academic reasons but also wanted to engage in the social aspects of UMAR. These students transferred because of a specific academic program and/or financial need, not because of a deficiency in their previous institution. For that reason, they share some characteristics with the completion-focused transfer students. However, what distinguishes these students from the completion-focused group is that, once at UMAR, they reacted differently to the social isolation they experienced as commuters. These students desired to feel connected to campus and to meet new people. Unlike the majority of the completion-focused transfer students, being a college student was the primary identity of the Social-completer transfer students. These students did not desire to be disconnected from the social and extracurricular elements of college life.

Table 2. Social-completer transfer student profile

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Transfer Type</i>	<i>Standing</i>	<i>Housing at UMAR</i>	<i>Gender</i>
Robert	Lateral	Junior	Commute from Home (1 st) / Off Campus Apartment (2 nd)	Male
Zoe	Lateral	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female

While only two students are included in this group, it is important to note that the experience of these students was sufficiently distinct within their interviews. Of the lateral transfer students who commuted to campus, these students differed from the completion-focused

students. Furthermore, previous research by Utter and DeAngelo (2015) identified differentiated student experiences that support the findings of the Social-completer student experience among lateral transfer students.

Similarly to the completion-focused transfer students, these students transferred because they needed to enroll at UMAR to continue their academic pursuits and to lessen the expense of their degree. Zoe was pursuing an academic program that required transfer whereas Robert needed an institution with lower tuition rates. Both had positive experiences at their previous institution; however, circumstances required them to move on. Zoe shared that she had no desire to leave her previous institution and stated: “it was sad in a sense that like I did really like the school . . . I did make really good friends, and I liked the small school.” It was hard for these students to leave, but it was necessary, and they did not have other options. UMAR provided them with the best alternative and allowed them to continue their academic pursuits.

What distinguishes these students from the completion-focused transfer students is that they were, in fact, seeking to feel connected to the institution. Robert stated, “at [previous institution] I definitely felt like I belonged to a community of students . . . I’d say socially I knew pretty much like everyone . . . so I wanted that here, but it was definitely a little different . . . I could go a day without talking to people.” Having lived on campus at their previous institution, these students knew what the residential experience was like. Both Robert and Zoe decided to live off-campus; however, once they made that decision they longed for the type of experience they had at the previous institution and struggled with the lack of connection that they had commuting to campus. When asked what she would change about her experience, Zoe replied, “Looking at my options for it, I could live on campus and like what would happen if I chose that option.” While their reason for transferring was related to academic and financial need, these

students wanted to feel a part of their campus community and desired social connections. Because of these dispositions, these students differed from the other transfer groups.

4.3 NEW BEGINNINGS TRANSFER STUDENTS

The third distinct transfer disposition is that of New Beginnings transfer students who had enrolled at community college but anticipated their transfer to UMAR for many years. These students were unable to attend UMAR directly after high school due to financial and academic considerations. However, once they were able, these students jumped at the chance to attend. These circumstances resulted in their high expectations and desire for a “typical” experience that they had been longing for. For these students, enrollment at UMAR was a long-awaited achievement, and they wanted to have every opportunity and experience that they felt they had missed in their first two years of college. In order to make the most of their experience at UMAR, these students decided to live on campus, an experience that differed from their previous experience at the community college.

Table 3. New Beginnings transfer student profile

Pseudonym	<i>Transfer Type</i>	Standing	Housing at UMAR	Gender
Bria	Vertical	Junior	On Campus - Double	Female
Damon	Vertical	Sophomore	On Campus - Single	Male
Deena	Vertical	Junior	On Campus - Single	Female
Gina	Vertical	Sophomore	On Campus - Single	Female
Maddie	Vertical	Junior	On Campus - Single	Female
Tess	Vertical	Junior	On Campus – Double	Female

This group of vertical transfer students differed from the completion-focused transfer students because they were transferring not only for academic reasons but also to become part of a larger college community. They were seeking a college experience that included the social and extracurricular elements that they did not have at the community college. These students had always planned to transfer, and their selection of UMAR was specific and related to factors outside of just academics and finances. Their enrollment at UMAR was a long-awaited achievement that they had been looking forward to since enrollment at the community college.

Deena stated:

I had wanted to come to [UMAR] since I was in middle school probably. I loved everything about it . . . And like the city atmosphere really got me, but it was like right outside of the city and just everything about it I loved. And the nursing program was ranked so highly so that made a difference. . . . The visit made me love the school even more. Like I fell in love with it.

Deena and other students described a passion for UMAR not based solely on academic, convenience, or financial reasons, but on their beliefs that it was the best place for them to enroll.

Similarly to Deena, Tess had always wanted to attend UMAR since high school. Tess stated:

I was like, I want to go, and I'm willing to put the work in. . . . I want to go to [UMAR] . . . I had like big family history here, um my great, great, great grandmother went to [UMAR] . . . I grew up like walking around [UMAR] and always being here. And I just remember like, "I want to be here so bad, I'm willing to work for it.

For these students, UMAR represented a successful achievement, and attending the four year institution was something that influenced their perceptions of themselves. There was a sense of pride in the accomplishment of being accepted to and enrolling at UMAR.

With enrollment, students were looking for a new beginning and took pride in their affiliation with the institution. This sense of pride was something that had been missing from their time at the community college where they felt different from their classmates. Gina stated, "a lot of the people that were there [community college] just didn't care about their classes or their grades. Um, so that was kind of a real deterrent and for me, and I just I wanted to like go to class and actually learn and then I get out of there as quickly as possible." These students were looking forward to building relationships with other students at the four-year institution. Damon shared that "not to say people in community college are bad, but . . . there was no community there." Additionally, Damon felt different from his friends from high school who attended four-year colleges and stated, "I kind of felt like I was just going to college . . . and everybody else was having an experience . . . I really wanted to too." Damon and Gina emphasized that New Beginnings students did not identify with the culture or environment at community college and they believed that they would find the type of experience they were looking for at the four-year institution.

Their desire to attend the four-year institution was also based on the perception of what a “typical” experience was: one that four-year institutions provided. These students believed, as Gina did, that they would have an experience that would “be like freshman year.” This belief supported their expectation that they would feel a part of a community, and as Tess stated, “fit in with everyone else.” Students were “anxious” and “excited” for this four-year college experience and had many expectations about what their experience would be like.

For this group, living on campus was a way to ease the anxieties about not having any pre-established friendships on campus and fear of not having friends. Maddie stated, “I don’t know anyone here; I didn’t think it would be a good idea [to live off campus]. I felt like I needed to be on campus.” Tess had a similar rationale for living on campus: “If I’m living in a dorm and I have a roommate that’s going to be an easy way to meet people.” These students also expected that living on campus would provide them with the community and sense of belonging that they did not have at the community college. Deena stated, “I wanted to make like long-term friends . . . I wanted to settle in . . . I definitely wanted to stay on campus because I knew that spending that much time with people right there, that you would have an opportunity to make friends.” As a result of their decision to live on campus, students had high expectations about the social life that the residence hall environment would facilitate and the sense of connection and belonging that they would have as a member of that community.

What made the disposition of this group unique is that they did not have any previous experiences at a four-year institution, yet they felt strongly about what their experience should be like. Furthermore, these students selected UMAR because of an emotional attachment to the institution founded in an understanding that their experience would be different from the

community college. As Maddie pointed out, the community college was a “stepping stone” to achieving her goals of enrolling and graduating from UMAR.

4.4 SECOND CHANCE TRANSFER STUDENTS

The last transfer disposition is that of lateral transfer students who transferred to UMAR because their previous institution was not a good fit. This group of second chance transfer students had negative experiences at their previous institution which influenced their decision to transfer. Because of these negative experiences, students carefully selected UMAR because they believed it would provide a better institutional fit. These students also had high expectations about their social experiences at UMAR and the extracurricular activities that would be available to them. All of these students lived on campus at their previous institution and decided to continue living on campus because it was comfortable and known to them. Additionally, they viewed the residence halls as a primary space where they would meet other people and develop social connection.

Table 4. Second Chance transfer student profile

Pseudonym	<i>Transfer Type</i>	Standing	Housing at UMAR	Gender
Addie	Lateral	Junior	On Campus - Double	Female
Christian	Lateral	Junior	On Campus - Suite	Male
Ella	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Single	Female
Hazel	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Suite	Female
Jade	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Jay	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Male
Krista	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Double	Female
Lacey	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Leigh	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Marisol	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Nadia	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Single	Female
Nora.	Lateral	Junior	On Campus - Suite	Female
Shelia	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Double	Female
Tamika	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Double	Female

These 14 lateral transfer students transferred due to a lack of social connection and because they felt “out of place” and “unwelcomed” at their previous institution. Students cited various reasons for their dissatisfaction with their previous institution but their experience was unsatisfactory to the point that they believed transferring was the best option for them. Ella described her experience at a mid-size state school and explained:

After a year I was like still looking for something more to be a part of, I mean, I just, I really wanted to thrive . . . I wanted to make connections and like, um, it just, it just wasn't happening as fast as I would hope, I'm like in college for 4 years . . . I went to so many different clubs and stuff that I didn't like or, you know, I didn't feel were right for me.

Lacey attended a private college in a rural setting and was also looking for an institution with more diversity and opportunities. Lacey states:

There was like no diversity and like I'm an atheist, so there were like 10 clubs about being a Christian, and I don't think there was even like a Jewish club, like let alone like a secular club or any, or like, like Islam or anything like that. So in that sense, you know, it felt very confining, and I think the biggest issue was I've always wanted to go into research and then I kind of looked at what they offered there. And it didn't end up working.

Ella and Lacey provided two examples of the rationale for transfer, but all the students in this group had reasons that related to institutional fit.

Due to their previous unsatisfactory experience, these students carefully selected the receiving institution because they believed it could provide them with the experience they were seeking. Jade described her feelings about the receiving institution as follows: "I just had a good feeling about it like being in the city and like I knew that, um, I thought their program was good." Krista admitted that she had not looked at a lot of institutions the first time she enrolled; therefore, transferring was her second chance to research and find an institution that was better suited to her. Krista stated, "I started really looking into [UMAR] and I wanted to make sure that like I did it right this time and you know, I wouldn't have like regrets again." Leigh only applied to UMAR and stated, "I just knew [UMAR] was it. I don't know if it because of where I was at [previous institution] before . . . but [UMAR] was what I wanted now." Transferring to UMAR gave students a second chance at selecting an institution that would be a good fit for them.

Once they decided to transfer and intentionally selected UMAR, these students had high expectations for the type of experience they would have. Their decisions were highly influenced

by previous experiences. The decision to live on campus was a specific example of the influence of previous collegiate experience on students' decision making. Ella stated, "I wanted to live on campus. . . . I thought it would be a better way to meet people." Lacey decided to continue to live on campus because it would be "easier" and more like the "college experience." Shelia decided to live on campus because she "thought that would be a better community and it's just easier . . . I know some transfers who live off campus. . . . It's hard to just generally get acquainted because you don't have your community in the building." This group of students decided to live on campus because they viewed it as an easy way to meet other people and get adjusted to their new college environment. Additionally, these students had never lived off-campus and they gravitated toward the "comfort," "ease," and "walkability" of on campus living.

These students had a similar disposition to the new beginnings transfer students because they were seeking a new and enhanced social experience at UMAR. However, these students used their previous experience to make informed decisions at UMAR. Their expectations were based on an understanding of how they might be able to improve their experience. Ella stated, "[previous institution] wasn't the school for me . . . [UMAR] was it . . . I was sure of it." However, with this understanding also came high expectations and a standard for comparison. These students were seeking something "better" and different from their previous experience and their satisfaction was dependent upon these expectations being met. In many ways, they were expecting that their experience at UMAR would be like their first-year experience, only enhanced.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The four distinct transfer dispositions presented in this chapter are important because they demonstrate the transfer students' varied attitudes towards and expectations about UMAR (see Appendix J for Participant Disposition and Related Campus Information). Not only do they highlight the varied characteristics of transfer students, they also demonstrate how those variations lead to differentiated decision-making related housing and social experiences at UMAR. This differentiation is critical to the study because it describes the transfer student population beyond the vertical and lateral experience. Additionally, in the subsequent chapter, I demonstrate how these dispositions and experiences continue to shape and influence the student's social experiences at UMAR.

5.0 FINDINGS: EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

This chapter presents two themes related to the social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students. The first theme emphasizes how previous collegiate experiences influence student's expectations about their social experiences at UMAR and how those expectations are often misaligned with their lived experience. The second theme highlights how students' perceptions and attitudes influence the ways they reconcile and understand their social experiences. The findings related to these two themes highlight the commuter and residential experience and how vertical and lateral transfer students understand these experiences differently

5.1 PREVIOUS COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE AND THE MISALIGNMENT OF EXPECTATIONS AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Previous collegiate experiences inform the expectations and understanding that students have of their experience at UMAR. Previous experiences include the time students spent at their previous two or four-year institution and also their experiences with commuting to and living on campus. Findings suggest that the decision to commute to or live on campus at UMAR was reflective of the type of experience students were seeking, predictive of the types of social experiences they would have access to, and influential to their expectations and understanding of their lived experience. Thus, previous and current decisions related to commuting to or living on

campus influenced the student experience and distinguished the transfer experience beyond vertical and lateral transfer movement.

5.1.1 The Commuter Experience: Contentment and Consternation with Social Isolation

Both the completion-focused and social-completer transfer students transferred to UMAR for reasons related to academics and finances and both groups decided to commute to campus. Once enrolled, the completion-focused and social-completer transfer students' experienced social connection in the classroom which was their primary space for social interaction on campus. While both completion-focused and social completer transfer students commuted to UMAR, their experiences are distinct in the ways these two groups understood this commuter experience. Because of their varied previous collegiate experiences, commuting to or living on campus at two or four-year institutions, the completion-focused and social-completer transfer students had similar experiences relating to commuting to UMAR, but they interpret and understand those experiences differently.

There are two key student experiences which highlight the influence of previous collegiate experience on the commuter experience at UMAR. The first is a realization of the vertical completion-focused transfer students that the classroom environment at the four-year institution was different from the community college in terms of their relationship with peers, classroom dynamics, and managing a class schedule. Second is the experience of lateral completion-focused and social-completer transfer students who, because of their previous experience living on campus, did not anticipate the social isolation that accompanied the commuter experience at UMAR. These two groups had the shared experience of commuting to UMAR, but their descriptions, reflections, and understandings of those experiences were

different. This difference relates to the ways that previous collegiate experiences shape students' expectations of their social experiences at UMAR. Thus, the findings in this theme delineate the experiences of the vertical and lateral transfer students within the completion-focused and social-completer transfer student groups.

Vertical Completion-focused Experience. Vertical completion-focused transfer students in this study had previously experienced an environment where social connection and relationship building occurred within academic spaces. Ria described her social life as a commuter student at the community college:

There were some people in my classes I talked to and we would like talk about things and like be friends on Facebook or whatever. But other than that, it didn't really go anywhere because a lot of them were living . . . an hour away. . . So, there was no point in this like trying to do anything, unless we were like hanging out in between classes or something like that.

Similarly to Ria, the students who attended community college in the completion-focused group described experiences at the community college where they "knew people" and "had acquaintances" at school but had few, if any, people that they would consider "close friends." Quinn described the community college social experience: "You tend to see the same people over and over again . . . so you just know them . . . and we're all from [regional area] and have that in common." Students like Quinn described a sense of shared experience with their peers because they had similar types of commuter and home-life situations. At the community college, being a commuter student was a commonality that was shared among classmates and served as a unifying experience.

Sabrina explained that although there were few formalized clubs at the community college, there were informal ways that students came together. Sabrina described the atmosphere at lunch time: "everyone just hangs out in [cafeteria] the entire [lunch] time because it is in the

middle of nowhere. So, if you have a class at 1:00, and you have a class until 6:00 you're almost likely going to be there, because like the buses take forever." Since all of the students commuted to campus, everyone congregated in the cafeteria at lunch and this provided time and space for students to develop relationships with one another. Sabrina clarified that it was during these communal meals that she developed a "core group of friends at school." While these types of interactions were social in nature, Sabina claimed that "we were not friends outside of [community college]." The relationships formed while at the community college did not extend beyond the time spent at the community college.

Crystal described an experience similar to that of Sabrina: "I met people, like a couple of friends." Crystal also mentioned that those relationships did not extend beyond her time in class. Tess shared "I had no one that I felt close to . . . because everyone is from a different area, you have to drive to go find them . . . and it's not a campus, to like stick around in. . . I didn't really stay on campus." While Tess and other vertical completion-focused transfer students were able to have casual acquaintance relationships at the community college, these relationships did not become close friendships. Thus, students did not feel "close to" their peers as they would with friends from high school or home life. The relationships students had at the community college were not meaningful or significant to the student at the time. However, once students were enrolled at UMAR, their perceptions of those relationships changed, and they recognized that they had shared experiences with their peers at the community college which did provide some sense of community. The casual acquaintance relationships at the community college, while not close friendships, were better than having no relationships at all.

Once at UMAR, being a commuter student was something that differentiated the vertical completion-focused transfer students from their classroom peers. Unlike the community college,

where everyone in class was a commuter, students did not identify others in their class who shared the commuter experience. Additionally, there was no shared space outside of the classroom where students from their classes spent time socializing. When a class ended, students left campus and did not see one another until they were in the classroom again. With different schedules and no easy way to identify other commuter students, many of the vertical completion-focused transfer students did not build relationships or friendships with others in their classes. According to Aiden,

It is something that a lot of um, transfer students who commute have shared with me that sometimes it's hard. Because even then when you do meet people and you make friends, and you have group projects like people don't just understand like I have a home at the end of the day. Like I have responsibilities at home, I have things I have to do. And that can sometimes like drive a wedge, I guess, in terms of building relationships. . . You won't make best friends commuting because you just, the times when those people bond like that are at night, when everybody is done with their work and hanging out. By that time, it's time for you to go home.

Commuting from home made it difficult to establish lasting or meaningful relationships. As Aiden stated, commuting to and from UMAR acted as a “wedge” between him and his peers because when they were spending time together after class, he was commuting home. This was a common observation among the vertical completion-focused transfer students who felt that their commuter lifestyle inhibited them from developing friendships at UMAR.

The experiences inside the classrooms were different from what these students had previously experienced at the community college and they were surprised that they did not form any casual acquaintance relationships with their classmates. Janelle described her perception of the difference between her and her classmates who live on campus: “I felt like everyone knew each other in my classes . . . It was a little hard. . . I wasn't expecting that . . . living on campus makes a huge deal.” Even though these students had not expected to develop many meaningful friendships at UMAR, they did want to have some amount of connection with their classmates.

They wanted to have casual acquaintance relationships with their peers at UMAR similar to the relationships they had experiences at the community college. Yet, because their interactions with their classmates were limited to time inside the classroom, they found it difficult to meet other people and establish the casual acquaintance relationships they were seeking.

In addition to the challenges with building relationships and adjusting to the disposition of their classmates, vertical completion-focused transfer students remarked on the challenges of adjusting to new classroom schedules. For example, Whitney underestimated the challenge of having extended time periods in between classes where she did not have anywhere to go or people to spend time with. She stated, “I had to be in [UMAR] before 8 am which meant that it was an extremely early start to my day Then there would be like gaps in my schedule, like I’d have like an hour or two hours in between classes . . . I absolutely hate it.” The class schedules at UMAR were different from what Whitney experienced at the community college and were not designed for a commuter schedule. As a result, Whitney and other vertical completion-focused transfer students found that they had a lot of down time on campus, and without being able to go home in between classes, the days were very long.

Because students’ class schedules were not conducive to a commuter schedule, students described feeling fatigued and tired at the end of the day. Consequently, these vertical completion-focused transfer students wanted to get home as soon as possible after their classes were done for the day. As a result of the fatigue and desire to get home, students did not participate in many of the social activities that took place after classes in the evenings and on weekends. Whitney describes this experience: “I’m at home like it’s I don’t like to come down unless I absolutely have to, to like come all the way here . . . I’m not able to take advantage of like the social aspect that you guys offer.” In other words, because these students spend a lot of

time on campus and had to spend time commuting, they were unlikely to come back to campus for the extracurricular activities which often occurred at night or on the weekends.

In addition to difficult class schedules, their peers who lived on campus were not as aware of the challenges of commuting and did not always accommodate their commuter schedules. Aisha stated, “Like there is going to be group projects where people are like, well, we’re going to meet up at 9pm when everyone is done with night class. It’s like I don’t wanna drive back, you know, kinda second time.” Learning to navigate class scheduling and group work outside of class was an adjustment for many of the students in this group.

Vertical completion-focused transfer students commuted to UMAR just as they had done at the community college. However, their social experiences were distinctly different at UMAR, and this difference was due primarily to the changes in the class schedule and the disposition of their classmates. These students were used to spending limited time on campus and not socializing via extracurricular activities. However, in their experience, the notable difference was that at the community college they were able to build casual acquaintance relationships inside of class which provided them with a sense of connection and shared experience. At UMAR their peers in the classroom did not have these same shared experience, and they were not accustomed to building relationships with their classmates inside classroom spaces. Furthermore, unlike community college, UMAR did not provide a singular space, such as a central cafeteria, where students would spend time in between classes.

Lateral Completion-Focused and Social Completer Experience. Lateral completion-focused and social-completer transfer students who commuted to campus also struggled to find social connection in the classroom. Unlike their previous experiences when they lived on campus, commuting made it difficult to see the same people on a regular basis in order to

establish relationships. Valarie, a lateral completion-focused transfer student, described her experience as follows: “I hang out with people like between classes and stuff, but I think living off campus, I usually don’t hang around you know like after class I go home . . . I think living on campus I would have made more friends, like in the dorms.” Without residence halls and with less time spent on campus, these students did not have consistent interactions with other people in ways that allowed them to build relationships.

Previous collegiate experiences at the four-year institution contextualized the commuter experience for these lateral completion-focused and social-completer transfer students, and they were able to compare their experience at UMAR to their experience at their previous institution. Fiona, a lateral completion-focused transfer student, observed that “it’s kind of harder to like get to know people or talk to them ‘cause you only see them like once or twice a week and then next semester you like you don’t have classes with them anymore.” Commuting to campus was different from their previous experiences where they lived in the residence halls and lateral completion-focused students, like Fiona, had to adjust to this new routine. As commuters, these students were leaving campus when classes were over and were not spending time in the dining halls, lounges, or other communal spaces. Therefore, their only interactions with their peers occurred while they were in class. Without contact outside of classes, the people they met in class remained acquaintances rather than friends.

Keaton, a lateral completion-focused transfer student discussed his previous experiences living on campus and how his experience at UMAR was different from his previous experience. When Keaton transferred to UMAR, he decided to live in an apartment off campus: “I was lonely . . . very little social interaction. I met a few people in classes, but they didn’t seem too interested in getting to know me anymore than like texting whenever there were assignments to

do that we needed to collaborate on and stuff . . . it was kind of difficult.” His experience at UMAR was a significant contrast to his experience at his previous institution where “The majority of my friend group came from meeting my roommate . . . I just hung out with them [floor mates] and my roommate.” At his previous institution, Keaton had a community on his floor which was his primary source of socialization. While Keaton described himself as “not super social,” he desired to have some interaction with his peers outside of class and struggled with building relationships in class that extended beyond that environment. Not living on campus or having a residence hall community and feeling as if he was “just wanting to go back to my apartment after class,” Keaton had to adjust to the new norms of his social experience that included being disconnected from a community.

Both the completion-focused and social-completer transfer students experienced social isolation as commuter students at UMAR. Zoe, a lateral social-completer transfer student, had lived on campus at her previous institution and was involved in many extracurricular activities. She described her previous experience as more socially conducive: “I met a lot of friends. . . in the dorm everyone had their doors open. . . so all you had to do is walk down the hall, and you like met more people.” Living on campus, Zoe previously had access to a residential community whenever she wanted to socialize with other people. However, once at UMAR, Zoe felt disconnected from campus and its social life: “I knew that I would be driving to class and I knew that I would be driving home after class. It’s not like during class, I have a lot of time to meet people and talk to them and get to know people.” Zoe observed what many lateral completion-focused and social completer transfer students described: at their previous institution they had access to a residential community that had provided them with socialization during

downtime between classes and on evenings and weekends. However, as commuters at UMAR, they did not have that central space to congregate and spend time with their peers.

Robert, a lateral social-completer transfer student, was actively involved on campus at his previous institution and described the isolation he felt at UMAR when commuting to campus:

It's something that I think about probably, almost daily, because like, some days I'll get throughout the day without like ever actually talking to someone that I know, like personally . . . like sometimes I just want to see anyone that I know, and so I mean it's a lot different than those days like I'll go back to my room at night and I'll just feel like, it's weird, I didn't see anyone or talk to anyone.

Students felt isolated by the fact that they commuted and had to leave campus each day. Not having consistent interactions as they were used to in the residence halls and not having the time or ability to participate in extracurricular activities limited their ability to make friends.

While the completion-focused and social-completer transfer students described similar experiences with social isolation, the Social-completer transfer students presented a unique understanding of their experience at UMAR. The social-completer transfer students enrolled at UMAR with a disposition that was similar to the completion-focused transfer students, however, after experiencing the social isolation that accompanied their commuter experience, they described higher levels of distress and confusion about their social experiences. These students were used to living on campus where they were able to establish meaningful friendships and relationships with their peers. Once at UMAR, these students desired the ability to establish similar types of relationships. However, without access to residence halls and with a commuter schedule that did not allow for participation in extracurricular activities, these students had no venue or space to interact socially with their peers. Not only were they not able to establish meaningful friendships, they were not able to establish even casual acquaintance relationships.

The description of the social-completer transfer student experience is important because it provides a contrast to the completion-focused transfer student experience. While both groups enrolled at UMAR with similar dispositions, their attitudes changed and diverged as they experienced the social isolation of commuting to campus. Completion-focused transfer students were more accustomed to or expectant of that social isolation the accompanied the commuter experience compared to the social-completer transfer students. As a result, the completion-focused transfer students reconciled and understood their experiences differently from the social-completer transfer students. The ways that these two groups of transfer student reconciled and understood their social experiences will be explored in the subsequent section.

5.1.2 The Residential Experience: Disappointment and Delusion with Social Connection

Both new beginnings (vertical) and second chance (lateral) transfer students decided to live on campus as a way to facilitate their social connectivity to their new campus environment. The new beginnings transfer students viewed their on campus living experience as a mechanism for achieving the type of collegiate experience they had desired, but never experienced. The second chance transfer students were living on campus for a second time and hoped that continuing to do so would help them acclimate to their new campus and to meet other people. Both groups of students were disappointed with their social experiences and pinpointed their residential experience as the root of this disappointment. Previous collegiate experiences had shaped these students' understanding and had highlighted the ways that students formed expectations and the standards they used to describe their current lived experiences at UMAR.

New beginnings and second chance transfer students living on campus expected that living in a residence hall would provide them with “lots of friends” and a convenient way to

meet other people. As a result, students were disappointed when they experienced closed-off communities where they were unable to interact with their peers and to establish relationships that were fulfilling to them. Students were “surprised,” “shocked,” and “frustrated” by their residence hall experience. However the ways that students described and responded to their disappointment with the residence hall experience were influenced by previous experiences and misinformed expectations.

New Beginnings Experience. The new beginnings transfer students were disappointed with their residence hall experience because it did not fulfill their expectations for campus life. Bria described her expectations of a robust community where people would go “in and out of each other’s rooms” while Deena believed that people would “hang out at night time and watch TV or go to events.” Students thought the other students on their floor would welcome them, become “instant friends,” and immediately “accept them” as a part of their friend group.

Yet the realities of living in an upper-class residence hall were very different from what they had expected. Deena described her actual residence hall community as an isolating one: “everyone keeps their doors closed. It’s like very isolated . . . that really surprised me. I mean, I had a lot of friends in high school and it’s not like I ever had like issues making friends . . . it’s very isolated here. I had different expectations.” It was especially difficult for the new beginnings transfer students to reconcile their expectations and their lived experience given their excitement about enrolling at UMAR and their desire for the “typical” experience which they had associated with the four-year residential experience. Gina pointed out that during the first few weeks on campus she did not connect with anyone in her residence hall:

A lot of the girls lived in the same residence hall last year, so they are relatively familiar with each other. So a lot of people already have friends, so it’s very quiet, and everyone keeps to themselves . . . everyone’s door is closed; it’s very

shut off. But I think that's part of living in an upper-class dorm . . . I didn't wanna be living like that . . . and I kind of wanted to be with freshmen.

The experience of feeling out of place on the residence hall floor was common. Many students stated they felt like the other people living on their floors did not want to get to know them. Maddie was placed in a building that had all single rooms and mentioned, "I don't feel like a sense of community . . . No transfer students should live in a single by themselves . . . I feel like in the dorms they should have like a floor with just transfers . . . that way I would have developed friendships with some people." Students were surprised with the environment in their residence halls and that they did not feel a sense of community. While they had not previously lived in the residence halls, they had expectations that the environment would be different.

What made the experience poignant for the new beginnings transfer students is that this was the first time they were living away from home. Students were comparing their experience in the residence halls with what they had previously experienced while living at home with family. This comparison distinguishes them from the lateral second chance transfer students because the former had never lived on campus and were adjusting to life outside of their homes for the first time. For instance, Bria described the difference between how she felt at home with family compared to her experience as a transfer student:

I don't feel like I have a community anymore like in my family and friends, to like constantly rely on and just be there . . . sometimes I just feel like I don't know these people as well, so I can't just like open up to them . . . I remember calling my mom and just saying I didn't like it here and I wanted to come home.

For Bria and other new beginnings transfer students, living on campus at UMAR was the first time they lived away from home and they experienced feelings of missing home and adjusting to living away from family. Maddie described how she missed home because it was familiar:

Back home like it's different, the environment 'cause you know everything . . . and then here, this big place, this big campus with all these students . . . in a sense

I was very lonely . . . I'm very independent person, and I feel like I don't need friends, but it would be nice to, just, for my social wellbeing just to have people to talk to and do things with, so yea, it was different.

Students expressed surprise with their experience living in the residence halls because they did not anticipate feeling lonely. Tess described this disparity when she realized that her experience would be different from her expectations: "I just remember sitting there and like I had met people but I don't feel close with any of them yet. I don't even know if they like me." These students realized that the quality of their relationships in the residence halls was not the same as the quality of their relationships at home. Their experiences at the community college of coming home each day, visiting with family, and eating meals together provided them with a secure social space. These students had a social safety net each day, so that even without social connection at college, they could still rely on social interaction at home.

These students were experiencing what many students experience their first time living in a residence hall, but because they were living in upper-class buildings, the community and support systems were not in place to assist them with this transition to college-life. Because their floor mates and roommates were upper-class students, they were not relying on the residential environment to provide them with a sense of community and a social support system the way that the new beginnings transfer students were.

Furthermore, the comparison to their life at home demonstrated that these students were struggling with living away from home for the first time. Their description of not finding a community or feeling at ease was a result of previously being comfortable in their home and not finding that same comfort in the residence halls. The home environment was the conditioning mechanism for these students. Instead of comparing their social experiences at UMAR to their classroom experiences at their previous institution, they were using their home life. These

students described experiences similar to first-year students who were living away from home for the first time, but they did not have the benefit of living with other students who were having the same experience. Thus, there was a lack of social support and community to help them navigate this new living environment.

Another aspect of the residential experience for new beginnings transfer students concerned their expectations and perceptions of extracurricular activities and student clubs. Extracurricular activities and clubs were an alternative option for students who were seeking social experiences outside of the residence halls. While new beginnings transfer students were interested in clubs and activities they did not have previous experience with extracurricular activities and were hesitant to get involved early on in their enrollment. Students claimed that they had not gotten involved in extracurricular activities at the community college. Tess stated, “they didn’t really have extracurricular stuff,” while Damon stated that he “wasn’t really that into anything.” Clubs and organizations were not part of these students previous experience at the community college; therefore, the vertical new beginnings transfer students were not as aware of the potential value of getting involved in extracurricular activities.

Once at UMAR, the majority of these students did not get involved in clubs and organizations because they had no prior experience with clubs and organizations, and they were “anxious” and “nervous” about the academic rigor at the four-year institution. Bria, for instance, described being worried about her academics: “I took bio and chem and that was just, that was overwhelming. . . I couldn’t handle clubs. Like being here, adjusting and taking both those sciences was too much.” Deena shared a similar sentiment: “There is not a lot of free time . . . I did sign up for things, but never followed through . . . because first semester had a lack of time, that’s pretty much just it, so I didn’t get to do like a lot of clubs.” Clubs and organizations were

a new aspect in their collegiate experience and one that students were unsure about. For this reason, students hesitated to get involved in these types of activities and were not able to utilize them as an alternative mechanism for meeting other students.

During the interviews, these new beginnings transfer students explained that they regretted not getting involved on campus sooner. When asked what they would do differently, students believed that getting involved sooner would have improved their overall experience. Gina stated, “I definitely would probably have gone to more of those things that I signed up for and joined more clubs and spoken out to people . . . ‘cause like having stuff to do would probably have been better than not doing anything for the first semester.” Similarly, Tess had a tough first semester but in the second semester decided to join a club. She stated, “this semester I feel like I finally found my place . . . I just think it’s important to get involved. If I hadn’t joined [service fraternity], I can’t say that I would have felt super at home yet . . . I definitely have friends here but it takes time.” Managing a new college environment and a rigorous course load, these students were hesitant to dedicate time to these activities. Because these new beginnings transfer students needed to adjust to their new institution, they were hesitant to immediately get involved with extracurricular activities and did not realize their potential value as a way to build social connections.

Lateral Second Chance Experience. The second chance transfers also experienced residence hall communities that did not provide a space for social connection. These students had misconceptions about what they believed their social experience would be like within the residence hall. This misunderstanding was based on the previous experiences living on campus and the expectation that their experience would be similar and/or enhanced. Tamika described her first year at her previous institution:

The eight girls I was closest, like close to were on my floor . . . lot of the girls that I was close to, lived on my floor. I think it was just 'cause it's convenient that when you are in your room they are always like around. You don't have to leave the building to go hang out with them and that kind of stuff.

These students decided to live on campus primarily because they had anticipated doing so would provide them with social connectivity. Hazel stated that at UMAR, "I thought it would be easier to like get involved with stuff and like, meet people."

However, students found that their experience at the receiving institution living in upper-class housing was much different from their experience at their previous institution. Addie described what her floor was like at UMAR: "[the residence hall] floors were more closed off . . . um, they kind of already have like their friend group." Nora echoed this sentiment, "there is no community, not at all, no RA, so like there is no one like forcing us to do stuff." Leigh described her floor: "it stays pretty quiet on the floor . . . I will just talk with people for a minute about casual stuff, like if you are passing each other, but you don't like go get a meal together . . . I think that's more a first year thing." This was a different environment compared to their experience as first year students at their previous institution.

Second chance transfer students compared their experience at the receiving institution to their lived experience at their previous institution which led to their reflections on the difference between being a first-year student and being a new transfer student. Krista lived in the residence hall her first-year of college and made most of her friends through that experience; however, living on campus in upper-class housing at the receiving institution, she did not have the same sense of community that she had previously experienced. Krista reflected on her expectations and difficulties of the transition:

I kind of anticipated that like being a transfer student that it probably wouldn't be as easy as it was, 'cause like you know, I kind of knew that the whole like making friends with everybody was specific, you know, to that freshman experience. So

like I kind of knew that, in a sense, but like I didn't think it would be like as difficult like to make friends I guess.

Leigh echoed this sentiment and shared her perspective on her struggle to “break in” to previously established friend groups.

It is a lot of effort to be accepted by a group of people . . . it takes more effort as a transfer, to make friends. And I think even more than a freshman because as a freshmen . . . you can make friends with other freshman easily . . . transfer experience with making friends, because it, it does seem difficult . . . people already have their own friend groups . . . and if you are a transfer coming in as a junior, it's different with freshmen because like with them it is 'you are welcome here' but with juniors you are almost at the end of things.

These experiences in the residence halls were significant for these students, and it was often the first experience they described when asked about their social life on campus. These students' previous experiences informed their expectations that residence halls served as a primary place for socialization. Unlike the new beginnings transfer students, second chance transfer students already had experiences in a residence hall, and they had given little to no consideration of the fact that their experience may be different at UMAR. The assumptions made by students resulted in feelings of “frustration” and “loneliness” when students had to reconcile their expectations with their actual experience.

To adjust to this experience, students sought social relationships outside of their residence halls and engaged with their peers in class and other activities. The second chance students recognized that student organizations and clubs provided a mechanism for supplementing their residence hall experience. For some of these students, extracurricular activities proved to be a helpful mechanism for facilitating social connection. For example, Jay knew from his previous experience that clubs and activities were an important form of social engagement. Thus, prior to arriving on campus he investigated the clubs and organizations. Jay stated, “I sort of had an idea of like what I wanted to get involved with, I made a lot of friends

from like student groups . . . I made friends that way.” Nadia, too, was satisfied with her social experiences with her on-campus job even though she found the residence halls to lack community. She stated, “I really feel a sense of like bond, bonding with them like much more than I do with my hall mates, um, my floor mates and my friends really. I just like, like knowing in that world there I feel like a better purpose kind of really. . . I really enjoy it.” Jade explained that clubs were helpful to her because they provided her with access to people with similar interests. Jade stated, “if you are in a club, it’s obviously because you like whatever club that is, so you are probably going to be able to make connections with people easily.” Second chance transfer students used clubs and extracurricular activities as a way to meet other people and used these activities as a way to build social connection. Because of their familiarity with extracurricular activities, students got involved, and this helped them to adjust and transition to UMAR.

The ways that the new beginnings and second chance transfer students described their social experiences were different from one another. Both groups were experiencing the same type of phenomena due to their isolation and lack of connection in the residence halls. However, their experiences were described differently because the students were using a lens for comparison that incorporated their previous living situations. New beginnings students compared their experience to their previous living experiences at home whereas second chance transfer students compared their experience to their previous residence hall experiences. In both instances, students had to reconcile their expectations about living on campus and the realities of their lived experience.

These two groups of students also had different expectations about extracurricular activities with regard to the perceived benefits of being involved. The second chance transfer

students were quicker to engage in extracurricular activities because their previous experiences informed them of their social value. However, new beginnings transfer students were hesitant to engage in these activities due to concerns that they would be time consuming and distracting from their academic work.

5.2 ATTITUDES, PERCEPTIONS AND RECONCILIATION OF LIVED SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

The second theme in this chapter addresses the ways in which the various groups of transfer students perceived and reconciled their lived experiences at UMAR. The psychological components of the social integration experience, including various feelings, perceptions, and attitudes, are critical to our understanding of the student experience (Cabrera et al. 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Thus, it not just the behavioral aspects of and participation in social experiences that influence a sense of integration; rather, it is the combination of behaviors and perceptions. In particular, with regard to transfer, research demonstrates that the social integration experiences of transfer students vary and are influenced by non-cognitive variables such as expectations and perceptions (Wawrynski & Sedlacek, 2003). My findings within this theme suggest that the ways that students understand their experience are just as influential as the experiences themselves. Thus, the reconciliation of their expectations with their lived experiences relates to the social and psychological relearning that occurs when students transfer between institutions (Laanan, 2000). Part of this relearning process for students in the study was reconciling their lived experience with their expectations and assumptions about life at UMAR.

The reconciliation of expectations and lived experience is demonstrated in the four distinct types of transfer experiences among students in this study and the different ways in which these students understand their commuter and residential experience. All students in this study described feelings of and experiences with social isolation and disconnection from their peers. However, the ways that students described and reacted to these feelings and experiences varied. This variation in understanding of similar experiences is due to the ways that students understand their experience as influencing them in negative or positive ways, and as being expected or unexpected. These findings are important because they highlight the differentiated experiences of transfer students and the ways that student's understand and reconcile their experiences at UMAR.

5.2.1 Commuter Social Experiences

The completion-focused and social-completer transfer students reacted differently to their social experiences as commuter students at the receiving institution. Their varied reactions highlighted their different perceptions and attitudes about their college experience. Members of both groups had to reconcile their experiences in the classroom setting and the lack of social connection provided by that setting. The varying levels of importance that students placed on their social experiences distinguishes these student dispositions from one another. For the completion-focused transfer students, regardless of vertical or lateral transfer, the isolation they felt as commuters was present but unimportant in their descriptions. Instead, these students were more concerned with their academic adjustment to UMAR. In comparison, the social-completers had strong feelings and perspectives about their social experiences and their interviews reflected the importance they placed on social connection. Thus, the descriptions that Social-completer

transfer students provided of their overall transfer experiences were dominated by the significant impact that their feelings of social isolation had on their overall experience at UMAR.

Completion-focused. Completion-focused transfer students commented on the misalignment of their expectations and their lived experiences at UMAR. However, throughout the interviews, they focused on their long-term goals of completing their coursework and graduating in a timely and cost-effective manner. When asked about their social life and making friends, they formulated their answers to restate why the social elements of college were unimportant. Their social experiences remained in the background of their college experience. When asked about her social life, Valerie, a lateral transfer student stated, “I don’t hang around you know like after class. I go home. But I don’t feel like it has negatively affected me or anything.” Aisha, a vertical transfer student had a similar disposition: “It just takes 200% to be able to do this. So I don’t have deep connections with people . . . I broke up with my boyfriend, just cause, I mean nobody has got time for that. Like you’ve got to study.” These students rationalized their experience by demonstrating that they were focused on academics and did not have time for the social aspects of college.

Another way that both vertical and lateral completion-focused transfer students reconciled their experience is by differentiating their experience from that of their non-transfer peers. Doing so enabled these students to explain their disposition towards their collegiate experience. These students believed that other non-transfer UMAR students did not have to experience the same challenges and struggles they did in order to attend UMAR, and they believed they would be unable to relate to them given their lives outside of college. Students described their native peers as “immature,” “different,” and “sheltered.”

This perception of difference often inhibited them from trying to interact, relate to or build friendships with other students. Both vertical and lateral completion-focused transfer students differentiated their experience from their non-transfer peers because they believe that they were focused on academic achievement. Valerie stated, “I think I’m just like a little different, because I am here to like get an education, get a degree and like get out. I’m not here to like party and have a great time you know like, ah, I did have fun like at [previous institution]. But now I’m just like okay, now I just wanna graduate.” Fiona echoed this sentiment: “in class you like hear people talking and there see people and it’s just like, that’s immature . . . They are talking about like parties over the weekend and stuff and it’s just like, ‘Oh I don’t do that’.” These students enrolled at UMAR with a focus on graduation and academic achievement, and they perceived the social elements of the collegiate experience as secondary. This approach shaped their perception of their peers who they believed were prioritizing the social aspects of college.

As a result of their critical view, completion-focused transfer students were trying to understand why their non-transfer peers had the luxury of prioritizing social experiences. In particular, the vertical completion-focused transfer students made assumptions that non-transfer students had more capital and belonged to a higher socio-economic class than they. Aisha described feeling different from native students: “I feel like the typical student concerns and my concerns are very different . . . I think it is a class thing . . . the people that go here have a lot more money than my family.” Aiden describes how he felt that socio economic status created a barrier between him and other students:

One thing that was weird coming here is my social status is not like the best and a lot of people here are like, to put it in a kind a blunt kind of rude way, rich kids. And so, that was like kind of a culture shock too, because just the way they act,

the way they talk, you know, there perception of things, how much they take for granted just blew me away.

Having attended community college and having to struggle financially to pay for their education, it was hard for vertical completion-focused transfer students to relate to others whom they viewed as “spoiled” and “entitled.” Janelle demonstrated how this experience was different from the community college:

it's almost like people here are kind of like sheltered and then at community [college] you get all walks of life coming in 'cause it's cheap and convenient. . . . A lot of people were just more open and um, willing to get social and active and also study. . . . So the hardest thing, is just that, because of a lot of people don't relate to me at [UMAR].

The financial implications of college also influenced the mindset of lateral completion-focused transfer students. Keaton, a lateral transfer student, shared his perspective that college was a business transaction:

I look at college or any university, I look at them like a business and the classes that I take are the services that I'm paying for. I haven't gone, I've not gone to one party; I've not really socialized a lot because I just sort of look at college life is so often experienced where for young people to get to know each other than it is to get something out of it, so that I can have a career later. So that is really the biggest difference between me and other students . . . [Socializing] feels like a waste of time to be honest. Because if I'm not spending my time studying or getting work done ahead of time to be a step ahead, then I just really don't think I'm succeeding, and that I'm spending my money, or I'm working hard for what I've already spend my money on well enough.

As a result, Keaton and other completion-focused transfer students remained unconcerned about their extracurricular activities or their connection to his peers.

Even when the classroom environment failed to provide a space for social connection, most of the completion-focused transfer students continued to abstain from on-campus social activities. Fiona, a lateral completion-focused transfer student, stated “My college experience is kind of different, like I feel like I am an adult student.” Because of this feeling, Fiona believed

that coming to campus for extracurricular activities was “silly.” Ria, a vertical transfer student, tried attending a club meeting and described her experience: “I just thought the kids there were kind of immature . . . I didn’t really relate to any of them.” Ria and other completion-focused transfer students believed that non-academic activities were a waste of time. However, some of these students were interested in extracurricular activities but only when they were related to their academic area of study. Ella, a lateral completion-focused transfer student, stated “I joined a professional business fraternity. I like that aspect better than social sororities that I tried out at [previous institution]; I want to get something out of the organization. I would not join just to socialize.” Tobias, a vertical completion-focused transfer student, also joined a fraternity related to his major: “it’s all engineering . . . that way you always have someone to help you with your homework.” The completion-focused transfer students were interested in extracurricular activities if they benefitted them academically or were related to their academic pursuits. Activities and clubs that were only social in nature were not of interest to this group.

Social-completers. The social-completer transfer students had a different reaction to their social experiences. Instead of justifying how they were different from their native peers, they expressed discontentment that their commuter experience was different from what they had expected. Being isolated from the campus community, these students struggled to find their place and to adjust to the commuter experience. Robert described how the lack of social interaction was something that he had a hard time adjusting to:

I miss being able to see, it’s something that I miss cause I’m a social person so I enjoy these interactions and it’s something that I do think about often here at [UMAR]. . . there is not really social interaction that I liked at [previous institution] it’s a lot different that way.

Zoe shared Robert’s sentiment that it was hard to be so removed from her peers and that commuting to campus did not allow her to spend a lot of time on campus. She stated, “if I think

that I got an opportunity to meet people . . . I wouldn't be able to keep the relationship going because we are just so busy, but, I mean I would like to talk to people." Having people to talk to and spend time with is something that social-completers missed about their previous institution.

Upon reflection, Robert shared how living on campus at his previous institution made his transition there easier than at UMAR:

If I could have [lived on campus] I would definitely have preferred to live on-campus rather than dropping back and forth, it would have been a lot easier. . . I think it would have been easier to get involved, I would have had more opportunities. I'd have been just been able to, instead of having to drive down to meet a club, I could've just walked over to meet a club.

To reconcile their experiences, Robert and Zoe made changes to their social environments. After his first semester commuting, Robert moved to an apartment closer to campus. He stated, "First semester I just didn't have time, I was commuting and I was running back and forth . . . now instead of having to drive down to meet a club, I just walked over." In her second semester, Zoe decided to get involved with clubs within her major so that she could meet other people. She stated, "I knew that was probably gonna be my only opportunity to talk to people . . . I knew that was gonna get me to like force myself to talk to people."

While there were only two social-completers in this study, their experiences were distinct and important. Their experiences demonstrate how students may enter the receiving institution with one set of expectations and assumptions only to have experiences that alter their perspective of what they want from their time at the receiving institution. Their experience highlights the process or cycle of experiences that shape student expectations and perceptions.

Their observations also demonstrate the influence of previous collegiate experience. Having lived on campus and attended a four-year institution, these students were acutely aware of the difference between their current and previous experience. After their first semester, these

students recognized that their lived experience deviated from their expected experience, and they made changes to their social environments in order to alleviate this consternation. Furthermore, they had the knowledge and experience to know that moving closer to campus and joining extracurricular activities would have a positive impact on their social experiences.

5.2.2 Residential Social Experiences

Both new beginnings and second chance transfer students compared their experiences to those of their native peers and expressed a desire to have an experience that was similar to other UMAR students. In many ways, the native students at UMAR and their experience are what these students perceived to be the “traditional” or “typical” college experience. New beginnings Transfer students often compared themselves to their native peers and the types of experiences they expected to have within the residence hall settings whereas second chance transfer students were using their previous experiences and relationships at the four-year institution to inform the quality and type of relationships that they had hoped to form at UMAR. The two types of experiences highlight how students react when their expectations do not align with the realities of their experience. Both groups understood their experiences in relation to their native peers but they understood their experience differently. Furthermore, each group used different mechanisms for adjusting to their experience in order to achieve their desired outcome.

New Beginnings. New beginnings transfer students understood their experience in relation to their previous experiences at the community college and their expectation of their experience at UMAR. When describing their experiences, students shared that they were not having the “typical” experience they thought they would have. These students reconciled their

experiences by differentiating their lived experience from their perception of the experience of native students. Maddie stated:

I feel like it's harder for transfer students more than anything. Because it's like when you first come to the school as a freshman, you develop your friendships then because you guys are all in the same class, you are all coming in together and you keep that throughout the whole time that you are here. And when you are coming in as a transfer student, you are basically trying to ask people 'can I be a part of you know, your group.

Students believed that if they had started as a first year student, they would not have had such a hard time making friends. Tess described, "It's definitely easier coming and making friends freshman year and I think people don't realize, you know, like that's where you meet all your friends you know. And people, that's when you start making connections and you start feeling at home here."

Tess and the other new beginnings transfer students described their frustration because they were not aware or prepared for what their experience would be like. In particular, these students were under the impression that, by living on campus, they would be able to have the same social experiences as other college students. Deena stated:

I feel like if I came in as a freshman, I would have been able to make friends like everybody else . . . and I would have been settled in by now. . . I wouldn't suggest [transferring] to anybody 'cause it was terrible . . . I would definitely tell them what it was like so that they have better expectations, because that definitely influenced it a lot, knowing what happened this year, if they have to transfer.

Deena and other students described a sentiment that they were not able to have the same experience as other college students. Furthermore, the misalignment between their expectations about their experience and the realities of their lived experience resulted in their discontentment. These students shared that had they known what their experience would be like, they might have made different choices and participated in different social activities.

Deena emphasized that she still did not feel as if she had the experience she was seeking: “when I come back in the fall, I’m going to get more involved . . . I still want to meet other people and get more involved and do things.” Gina also felt as though she was still struggling to find her place but was hopeful that the following year would be better. She stated, “it’s hard for people to understand . . . I was just struggling like not having my parents and brother close by . . . everything was harder . . . I had to work harder . . . but, hopefully with [UMAR club] it’s not gonna be that way . . . hopefully, I’ve figured it out.” The new beginnings transfer students expressed that their experiences at UMAR were very different from what they expected and they believed they had a “harder time” compared to other students around them. By the time these interviews occurred, towards the end of the spring semester, students were still reconciling their experience and thinking about what they could do differently. While they were hopeful that their experience would improve, they were still frustrated with their first year at UMAR.

The new beginnings transfer students relied on the residence halls to provide them with a space for social connection and community. When their experiences deviated from their expectations, these students were “confused” and “frustrated.” This sentiment was rooted in their misunderstanding about the four-year institution and their lack of knowledge and experience to guide them. Their feelings of social isolation were compounded by their observations of other UMAR students, and they felt as though they were “cheated” out of an experience that they desired. Thus their contextualization of their experiences were founded in frustration, confusion, and dissatisfaction.

Second Chance. There was a unique perception among the second chance transfer students about their relationships with their native peers that only this group described. These students contextualized their experience in comparison to their previous experience at a four-year

institution and perceived the quality of their relationships by comparing them to the quality of their previous relationships. Students provided descriptions of having friends whom they spent time with during the week in structured activities without having those same friendships carry over into evening or weekend socializing. As students got involved on campus and started meeting people in classes, they found that making friends was different from their previous experience. In other words, these students had casual acquaintance relationships but not meaningful friendships. Tamika described this experience:

But I think because we are not freshman, most people like I said will meet me, we talk. We become really good acquaintances, I will sit by them in class, but they are not someone who is gonna text me on a Saturday to ask me to go get lunch and see a movie. It's just kind of like well see you next Monday kind of thing. . . . Like it makes me not wanna, like I'm kind of nervous to like go out of my way to ask people, like would you wanna hangout outside of class.

Students had a perception that they were unable to build relationships that extended beyond structured classroom or extracurricular activities. This distinction is important because the quality of the relationships and what students define as meaningful is contextualized by their perceptions of their experience in relation to their previous experiences. Krista had a similar experience to Tamika and described her experience with building relationships:

I found friends like I go to lunch with, I go to dinner with and stuff like that. But like the thing that's hard is um, I guess finding friends that like need you as much as you need them . . . I have all these friends that like I, you know, study with and you know, you know, I go to lunch with and all that stuff. But like they already have their established friend groups, you know, like they have, they already have like weekend plans with like who they're gonna hang out with . . . they made all those like strong friendships like their freshman year that like carried over . . . Cause like during the week like I have, you know, I have friends that I talk to in my classes, like I have friends that I like go to lunch, to dinner with. It's just like on weekends . . . they're hanging out with . . . friends from last semester.

These perceptions were based on their personal experiences at the four-year institution and on their understanding of friendship. This distinction is interesting because these students

had people to interact and socialize with, yet the quality of their relationships was not satisfactory to them. Other transfer students in this study were longing for the types of social connections that these students had; yet, because these experiences were misaligned with their expectations, they were somewhat dissatisfied. This example highlights how transfer students experience and interpret the same experiences in the different ways and illustrates that attitude and perceptions can influence the way that students understand their own experience.

Second chance transfer students also presented a unique perspective on their experience at the receiving institution related to the negative experiences they had at their previous institutions. While they were disappointed by many aspects of their social experiences, they felt “appreciative” of the “independence,” “open-mindedness,” and “opportunities” offered to them at UMAR. Jade stated, “I feel like I appreciate more than other people do because they don’t have that experience of hating the school that you are at.” This sense of appreciation for UMAR contextualized their negative experiences because, as Jade mentioned, “at least it isn’t as bad as before.” Marisol also had an appreciation for UMAR: “I was more independent here . . . I wasn’t really as fine like going to get something to eat by myself, like going to the dining halls by myself last year and like now like I don’t care.” Tamika shared this sentiment: “it’s forced me to not rely on friends . . . it’s made me realize that you don’t need anybody besides your family, and like I’m strong enough to like figure things out on my own.” Thus, these students were able to understand their experiences relative to their previous institution, and even though their social experiences may not have been what they expected, they were happy that they felt “self-confident” in their daily lives.

Because of this contextualization, students were able to come to terms with their social experiences. While their experiences were different than what they expected, they were able to

find a balance. Hazel reflected on her overall experience and stated, “I didn’t get involved with a lot of there [previous institution] and so like I didn’t do anything . . . when I got here I like wanted to do stuff and then like be more outgoing . . . I guess I thought it couldn’t be worse . . . but it worked out . . . even if it was different from what I thought.” Lacey reflected on her reconciliation of her experience of not having as many friends at UMAR as she did at her previous institution: “I feel really good about my friend group right now . . . I feel like I belong with them, but it’s kind of different like I belong with only my couple of friends . . . I’m not that stressed . . . its fine.” Christian reflected on the difference between his first and second semester:

originally it was just getting to meet everybody ‘cause like I would just go hangout with people I wouldn’t know anyone, and I would have to meet them, and then I wouldn’t see them again for a little while and . . . at the beginning it was tough ‘cause nobody knew me and I didn’t know anyone . . . now I know more people so I’m not like the outsider.

The second chance transfer students had to adjust their expectations about the quality of their relationships and the ways that they would make friends. However, they appreciated UMAR because it was better than their previous institution, and although their experience was not ideal, they were able to make it work for them. Unlike the new beginnings students, second chance students understood that while their situation may not be ideal, it was “better” than it was before. Upon reflection, they noted the differences between their expectations and their lived experiences and expressed their “frustration” and “confusion,” but ultimately they did not seemed bothered or troubled by this experience. Instead, these students appreciated UMAR for the opportunities it offered and accepted their social environment.

5.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Upon enrolling at UMAR, students had expectations and perceptions about what their experience would be like and based on those expectations and perceptions, students made decisions related to their social experiences. The four student dispositions highlighted in Chapter Four provide the basis for understanding the differentiated social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students at UMAR. Thus, the completion-focused, social-completer, new beginnings and second chance transfer student experiences are distinct from one another not only in their disposition but also in their social experiences and their interpretation of those experiences.

The first theme in this chapter showcases the ways that these four groups of students describe their lived experiences at UMAR in ways that are contextualized by their previous experiences and expectations. The theme highlights the differences between the commuter and residential experiences and how previous collegiate experience influenced the ways that students described those environments and their experiences within them. The second theme explores how students perceived and felt about their lived experiences. While students from all four groups experienced differences between their expectations and their experience, their reactions, reconciliation and feelings about those experiences were distinctly different.

These findings are significant because they highlight the ways that students can have similar experiences yet interpret and understand those experiences differently. Furthermore, this interpretation is important because it influences their perceptions of connection to and satisfaction with the social aspects of collegiate life. These findings are helpful as researchers and practitioners work to understand the transfer student experience and how to best support transfer student success.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature and discourse on student transition and success by exploring the social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students. The results of the study illuminate how previous collegiate experience influences the feelings, behaviors, and perceptions of students at their receiving institution. This type of research is important because the population of transfer students continues to grow and diversify (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2006). However, as shown in the literature review, many current researchers focus only on exploring the ways that the transfer student experiences compares to the native experience and often include only vertical transfer students. Furthermore, the transfer student experience is complex, and there are many challenges to studying student transition, including multiple attendance patterns (Adelman, 2006; McDonnell, 2005; Peter & Cataldi, 2005), disruptions in enrollment (Eimers & Mullen, 1997; McCormick, 1997), different methods of tracking transfer rates and movements (Hossler et al., 2012; McDonnell, 2005; Townsend, 2002), as well as varying levels of institutional support of transfer (Townsend, 2008; Roska & Keith, 2008; Tobolowski & Cox, 2012). These complexities need to be represented and contextualized in research because they frame the environment in which we study and support student transition and success.

This study was designed with these complexities in the foreground; accordingly the findings highlight the differentiated social experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students in

ways that that do not rely solely on the type of transfer or comparison to the native student experience. This hermeneutic phenomenological study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 20 lateral and 18 vertical transfer students. My analysis of the interviews revealed the importance of contextualizing students' experiences at the institution to which they transferred. Furthermore, the findings highlighted not only the behavioral components of the lived experience but also the role that perceptions and expectations have in shaping the ways that students understand those lived experiences. This chapter contains a review of the major findings and their implications for research and practice.

6.1 MAJOR FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1.1 Gaining understanding of student transfer beyond transfer type

As stated previously, the majority of current research relating to student transfer focuses on the vertical transfer experience. Furthermore, only a few studies focus on alternate types of transfer, particularly lateral transfer (see Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; McGuire & Belcheir, 2013, Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). This continued emphasis on a singular transfer experience limits our understanding in two ways; first, little is known about the experiences of non-vertical transfer students and second, we only understand transfer as it relates to the type of movement such as, vertical or lateral. Generalizing the transfer experience in this way or reducing it to vertical transfer only does a disservice because it fails to acknowledge the different student experiences that exist within and among the various types of transfer populations. Four unique transfer student dispositions emerged from the analysis which demonstrate the

importance of distinguishing beyond the vertical and lateral transfer movement because the distinctions in their experiences are not bound or defined by those movements. The discovery of these four dispositions implies that researchers should not examine transfer students' experiences based solely on their type of transfer because there are multiple unique student experiences that exist within each type of transfer population.

The experiences of the completion-focused, social-completer, new beginnings, and second chance transfer students highlight the variation of transfer experiences and provides new ways of understanding student transfer. For students in this study, their disposition towards transfer and their attitudes about their transfer institution influenced the decisions they made once they enrolled at UMAR. Their transfer disposition was informed by multi-faceted experiences and desires including their rationale for transfer, their selection of the receiving institution and their competing non-classroom commitments. Furthermore, students in this study had varying expectations related to their social experiences at UMAR which depended partly on whether or not non-classroom activities were a priority for them. These expectations and their priorities influenced their decisions related to their social lives and specifically their decision to live on or off-campus.

The findings support the notion that different student populations may expect or desire different outcomes from their collegiate experiences and that not all campus activities have the same influence or outcome on the student experience (Lerer & Talley, 2005; 2010). Students' individualized disposition and attitude towards their collegiate experience influences how they understand and reconcile their experiences. Thus, as researchers continue to examine the transfer experience, we must consider the ways in which narrowly defining or differentiating transfer by type of movement may limit our understanding of student transfer.

Scholars and practitioners should be critical of how previous researchers have identified and defined transfer populations. Studies that defined transfer in a singular way generally portrayed the transfer student experience as a singular experience. We must consider how we apply the findings of such studies and the ways that this limited portrayal influences our understanding. For example, D'Amico et al. (2014) and Lester et al. (2013) identified vertical transfer student populations and described and analyzed the social experiences of those students. However, both studies included specific types of vertical transfer students that consisted primarily of commuter students and adult learners; however, findings were generalized so that they seemed to portray a singular vertical experience. By limiting the analysis and making assumptions that homogenize the vertical populations, previous research may have oversimplified the transfer experience; the findings cannot be generalized so as to represent all vertical students.

The four dispositions identified in this study highlight variations in student experience and suggest that those variations often occur within a singular type of transfer movement. This study showcased two unique transfer experiences: completion-focused and the new beginnings transfer students. These types of distinctive dispositions demonstrate the complexity of the transfer experience and the need to refrain from overgeneralizing transfer experiences. While all transfer research does not need to include an equal representation of all types of transfer student experiences, it is important to recognize that placing generalized labels on student experiences is detrimental to how we understand transfer. The findings of Lester et al. (2013) and D'Amico et al. (2014) are not invalid but demonstrate an application that is too broad; scholars should recognize that what is true for some transfer students is not true for all even if those students have the same type of transfer movement. In this instance, the findings of Lester et al (2013) and

D'Amico et al. (2014) may have only represented the experiences of completion-focused transfer students and not the experiences of the new beginnings transfer students. As the number of students utilizing multiple pathways to degree completion increases and the transfer population continues to diversify, understanding these various experiences becomes critical to supporting student success.

6.1.2 Commuter and residential experiences as a form of transfer capital

The findings related to the commuter and residential transfer experience are important because they further our understanding about the influence of transfer capital (Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010) on students' experiences with culture shock (Laanan, 2000) at the transfer institution. One way I distinguished between the types of transfer student experience is by differentiating between the experiences of students who commute to and live on campus. The results revealed that decisions related to housing are indicative of the type of experience students were seeking and also influential in the types of experiences they had. Students' expectations about commuting to or living on campus influenced how they understood and reconciled their transfer experiences.

Students who were more familiar with commuting to or living on campus were better able to navigate unexpected elements of their social experiences at the transfer institution. Findings suggest that experience and familiarity with commuting to or living on campus served as a form of transfer capital that influenced students' experiences with culture shock. These findings relate to previous research which has demonstrated that transfer capital and preparation for transfer can influence students' expectations at the receiving institution (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010; McGuire & Belcheir, 2013).

The current findings differ from the previous research (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; McGuire & Belcheir, 2013) because they expand our understanding of the influence of previous collegiate experiences in two ways. First, while earlier research has identified how previous collegiate experiences influence the academic experience, this study illustrates how previous collegiate experiences influence students' social experiences at the receiving institution. I found that previous collegiate experiences relate to students' experiences with culture shock or the social and psychological relearning that occurs when they move from one educational environment to another (Laanan, 2000). Thus, previous collegiate experiences do not just influence students' academic success but are also influential to students' social integration.

Secondly, previous research focused primarily on type of institution as a way to understand and categorizing types of previous experiences. In this study, I expanded on this categorization and depict how previous collegiate experiences such as, living on or commuting to campus, influence the student experience. Previous experiences commuting to and living on campus as well as familiarity with two and four year campuses were influential in the students' transfer experience. Students who had previous experiences commuting to or living on campus and maintained those experiences at UMAR had more transfer capital including the knowledge and experience they needed in order to be successful in navigating those elements of their experience at UMAR. For example, for the social-completer and new beginnings transfer students the change in their living environment was more influential on their experience at UMAR than their previous experiences on two and four-year campuses. Thus while current research is beginning to address the importance of previous experiences, this study explores this concept beyond experiences with two and four year campuses to include commuting to and living on campus. This is an important consideration as previous collegiate experiences

differentiate the native and transfer student experiences and are important to understanding the unique experiences of transfer students. Furthermore, these findings lend to further research that could explore what types of previous experiences are influential on students' experiences at the transfer institution both academically and socially. Thus could include familiarity with certain classroom settings, teaching styles, student organizations and more. Thus, the findings of this research support the notion that previous collegiate experiences need to be understood and explored in ways that extend beyond type of previous institution.

As researchers continue to seek to understand how to support and serve the transfer population, consideration of how previous collegiate experiences influence both the academic and social integration and adjustment of students is important. Furthermore, our consideration of previous collegiate experiences should not be limited to the type of institution the student attended previously. We must also consider other experiences, such as commuting to or living on campus, that influence students' academic and social experiences at the transfer institution.

6.1.3 Importance of perception

Important to the experiences of students in this were their perceptions of their social interactions and the ways that expectations and previous experiences influenced those perceptions. The findings of this study compel researchers to think about how we define, measure and understand student engagement and integration. As described in the findings, students entered UMAR with different expectations about what their experience would be; students' perceptions and attitudes in turn influenced their decision-making and the ways they understood their experiences. Furthermore, the findings of this study support previous research

which indicates that both the behavioral and psychological aspects of the student integration experience are important to the student experience (Cabrera et al., 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Sedlacek, 1998).

While there is a growing body of research that places emphasis on the role of student perceptions in understanding integration (Sedlacek, 1998, 2003, 2005; Wawrzynski and Sedlacek, 2003), only a limited amount of research is devoted to how perceptions and attitudes influence transfer experiences and may vary among transfer populations. Wawrzynski and Sedlacek (2003) conducted a seminal study on the influence of perception on the transfer experience. However, the focus of their study was variation in experience by race and gender and the researchers did not note what type of transfer population (vertical, lateral, or otherwise) they were studying.

This study gives credence to the various behaviors and perceptions that contribute to students' sense of social connection within the multiple transfer dispositions. With this understanding that perceptions and attitudes are important to the student experience, these findings contribute to the body of research which emphasizes that engagement cannot be measured or understood by students' participation or lack of participation in socially-oriented campus activities (see Cabrera et al. 1992; Laanan, 2007; Lerer & Tally, 2005, 2010; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Using traditional indicators of social engagement may lead researchers to ignore the fact that not all students are seeking the same college experiences. Continued reliance on traditional engagement indicators (Kuh, 2003; NSSE, 2004) may perpetuate a bias towards students who are seeking a more traditional student experience. Thus, as demonstrated by the four transfer dispositions in this study and the ways that these students

approached and understood their experience, it is important to note that activities which engage some students may not necessarily be engaging to all students.

In both research and practice it is important to identify high-impact practices which promote student success. However, equally important is not to assume that these practices will influence every student in the same way. Given the student dispositions in this study and the varying expectations related to students' transfer experiences, we must think about how we support all types of students. Diversifying the ways we support transfer students means acknowledging that students have different expectations for their experiences and that not all students will perceive their experiences in the same way. Therefore, programs and services that are beneficial to the majority of students may not have that same benefit for all students. An implication of this study is that support of and service to all transfer students must include a broader understanding of the various ways that students want and are able to engage with the campus community.

6.2 A MODEL OF THE TRANSFER STUDENT SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

The findings I have presented in this study suggest a new model is needed for studying student transfer. This new approach would include individualizing the student experience to allow for transfer experiences that are defined beyond transfer movement, recognition of the various types of previous collegiate experiences that provide transfer capital, including commuting and living on campus, and consideration of the role that perceptions and attitudes play in students understanding and reconciliation of their lived experiences. The four transfer dispositions described in this study demonstrate how broadening the exploration and

interpretation of the transfer student experience can lead to a richer understanding that supports multiple type of transfer experiences.

The new model I present of the transfer student experiences re-imagines Milem and Berger's (1997) conceptual model of native student persistence. The transfer student social experiences model gives consideration to the various types of transfer experiences but does not require differentiation by type of transfer. This distinction is important given the implications of this study that researchers must begin to understand and explore transfer experiences in ways that are not limited by type of transfer. This model highlights how individual student dispositions influence the perception and behavior cycle and how students reconcile those experiences. The transfer student social experiences model reflects the findings of this study related to the transfer experiences of vertical and lateral transfer students at UMAR.

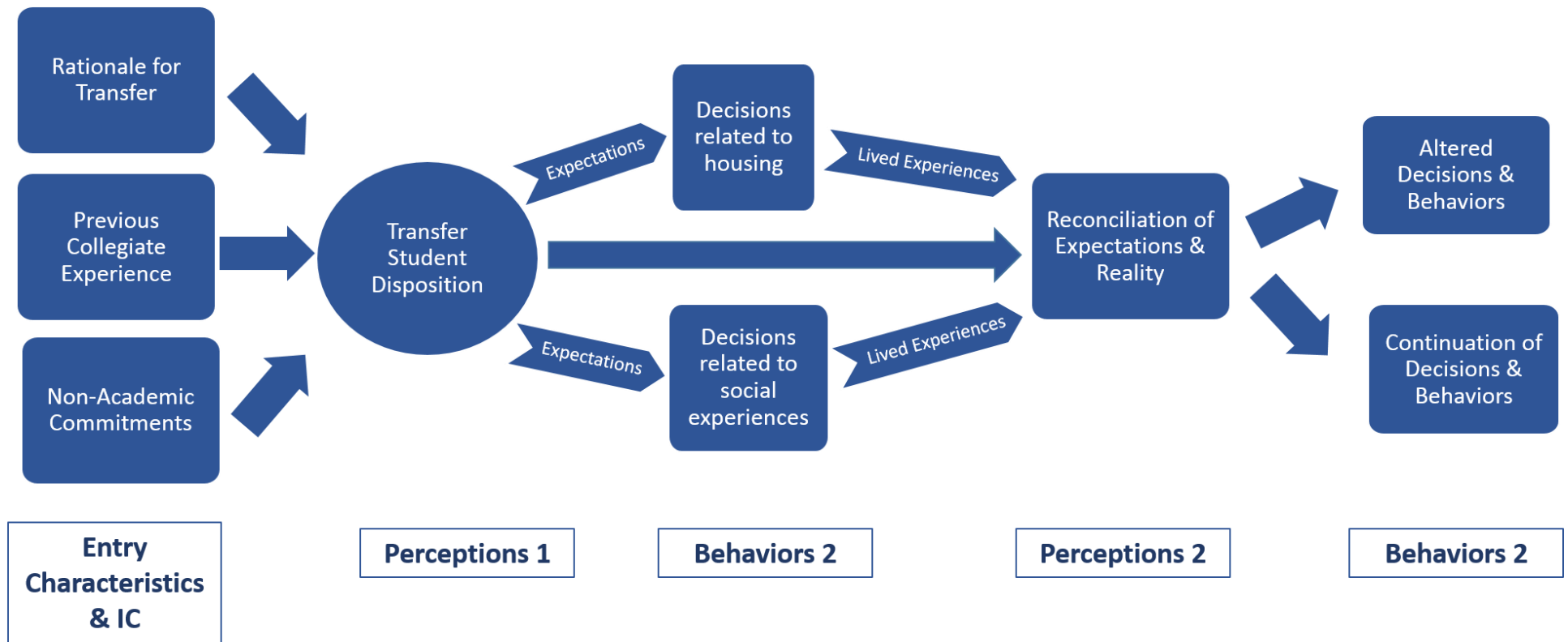


Figure 2. Transfer student social experiences model

6.2.1 Description of the model

In this section, I present a transfer student social experiences model using the findings and implications of this study to conceptualize the study of the transfer student experience. This section contains a description of the model, and in the next section I discuss the significance of the model for researchers and practitioners. Milem and Berger's (1997) conceptual model of native student persistence provides a helpful framework for understanding the interrelation between transfer student dispositions and expectations, the lived experience and the reconciliation of those experiences. Milem and Berger's model demonstrates how students enter the institution with certain characteristics that inform their commitment to the institution and then transition to the institution through a cycle of behaviors and perceptions. This cycle of behavior and perceptions promotes various levels of academic and social integration which ultimately lead to students' persistence or departure.

In the transfer student social experiences model, I re-conceptualize and expand on Milem and Berger's (1997) model to illustrate the complexity of the transfer experience. The presented model has three phases: the first phase is represented by the entry characteristics and institutional commitment, the second phase is the first set of perceptions and behaviors, and the third phase is the second set of perceptions and behaviors. These phases are distinct from the conceptual model of native student persistence because I expand on the characteristics that contribute to the entry characteristics or transfer disposition and include more detail in the behavior-perception cycle which includes the influence of transfer disposition and the reconciliation of expectations and lived experience. Unlike the Milem and Berger model, the transfer student social experiences model does not include final decisions to persist or depart because this study was limited to the first and second semester transfer experiences.

Furthermore, findings of this study suggest that integration is a fluid and ongoing experience. Therefore, while there is a final decision to persist or depart, there is not a singular point of integration.

Entry characteristics and institutional commitment are conceptualized to include three parts; rationale for transfer, previous collegiate experiences, and students' non-academic commitments. These three areas contribute to a student's disposition upon enrolling at the receiving institution, and in this study I identified four primary dispositions. Students' dispositions include their commitment to the institution aligned with their other commitments and responsibilities. Students enrolled at UMAR for different reasons, including academic, finances, convenience, and institutional fit. The degree to which students committed to the institution and degree completion is interrelated to their reasons for transferring, competing commitments, previous collegiate experiences and their overall transfer disposition.

The students' transfer disposition is not only a reflection of their entry characteristics but also an influence on their decision-making and a reconciliation of their experiences. The second phase of the model represents how students' dispositions inform their initial perceptions of UMAR and contribute to the expectations they have of their college experience. Based on their perceptions and expectations, students make decisions relating to their housing and social experiences. This decision-making is informed by their previous collegiate experience, their non-academic commitments, and their rationale for transfer. It is important to note that prior to enrollment, students have certain perceptions about their experiences which inform their expectations and decisions. Therefore, their initial decision-making often occurs prior to significant interactions with campus. In this model, initial perceptions occur before initial behaviors, and perceptions inform their behavior as opposed to behavior informing perceptions.

This model is different from Milem and Berger's conception (1997) as they placed behaviors as the starting point of the cycle.

The decisions that students make related to their housing and social experiences, such as extracurricular activities, defined the spaces that they have access to for social engagement, which in turn influence their lived social experience. Once students have initial social experiences, they reconciled those experiences with their initial expectations. The reconciliation process is represented in the third phase where students have new perceptions based on their lived experience. As students reconcile their experiences they must decide to alter or continue their behaviors and decision-making.

While all students described social experiences and their reconciliation of those experiences, the magnitude of the experience and the timing of their reconciliation were different for each participant. Thus, two students may have similar lived experiences but their disposition may influence how they reconciled those experiences. The transfer disposition established earlier in the model influences the reconciliation process because students' understanding of their lived experience is related to their disposition. Additionally, the reconciliation process is ongoing and the perception-behavior-perception cycle does not have an ending point; instead, it repeats until a student is no longer enrolled (either by departure or graduation). There is no timeline for this model or the reconciliation process, and, therefore, there is not a distinct moment in which we can define a student's point of integration. Some students reconcile and alter their behavior within the first few weeks whereas other students may take months or semesters to reconcile their experiences. Therefore, integration is not static but fluid with the ongoing student experience.

6.2.2 Significance of the model

Given the findings and implications of this study, this model provides a different perspective of the transfer student experience that incorporates the various dispositions of transfer students and the influence those dispositions have on student's expectations, decisions making and perceptions about their experience. This model enables us to understand student transfer in a way that is less constrained and more inclusive of all transfer experiences. Within this model, researchers can explore the phenomenon of transfer and achieve enhanced meaning and complexity in our understanding of it, thereby influencing the ways that the higher education community can support student success. This model is unique because it allows for consideration of diverse transfer experiences and the influence that previous experiences have on students' understanding of their current experience.

This model redefines entry characteristics and institutional commitment and places significance on what contributes to the unique transfer student dispositions identified in this study. Students' rationale for transfer, their previous collegiate experiences, and their non-academic commitments shape their disposition as they transfer and enroll at the receiving institution. Student's entry characteristics and institutional commitment are interrelated because the rationale for transferring and their selection of receiving institution are related to their previous experiences and their non-academic commitments. Bringing specificity to and identifying how these characteristics contribute to the student disposition will help researchers and practitioners to identify the different types of transfer students that are entering their institution.

Furthermore, this model does not rely on transfer movement as a differentiating factor of the transfer experience. Instead, by considering the various entry characteristics, the transfer

experience is presented in a much more complex way. The type of transfer is still given consideration, but this consideration occurs through the scope of the many entry characteristics. While this study was limited to the vertical and lateral transfer experience, the model may be applicable to all types of transfer movements and previous experiences. The model provides consideration for the many entry characteristics and transfer dispositions, and, as such, this supports the study of various transfer students experiences including multiple transfers and non-fluid movement. Therefore, this model is helpful as we progress in the study of student transfer and give consideration for what influences the transfer student experience.

One of the implications of this study is that students do not experience or perceive their transition in a uniform way. Instead, their disposition influences the decisions they make and the ways that they reconcile their expectations and lived experiences. This model helps researchers to incorporate the reconciliation of expectations and lived experiences by acknowledging the influences they have on students' decision-making. Thus, this model showcases how students' disposition and expectations shape their perceptions and how these initial perceptions shape their behaviors. Milem and Berger's (1993) model focused on initial behaviors and how the outcome of those behaviors then influenced perceptions. The new model suggests that students' disposition and expectations inform their initial perceptions which influence their initial behaviors. Therefore, their perceptions evolve and change as they reconcile their initial perceptions with their initial behaviors.

In this study, I referred to the decisions that students make related to housing and their social experiences. These decisions were important to the analysis and findings because they were influential in the student experience and were informed by their disposition and perceptions of their experience at UMAR. The decisions that students made influenced their social

experiences by influencing the environments and people that they had access to which shaped their lived experiences. For example, deciding to live on campus provided access to residence halls and other students living in those residence halls. Decisions to join a student organization provided access to the people who belonged to that organization. In contrast, decisions to commute or not to join a student organization limited their access to those spaces and their peers.

One of the characteristics of this decision-making process is that decisions were made based on expectations about campus life at UMAR, and often they were inaccurate. Therefore, by examining expectations, decision-making, and the lived experience, we can better understand why students made the decisions they did and what shaped their resulting perceptions (Perceptions 2). Examining expectations and disposition is important for scholars who are looking to influence the success of students in transition because by understanding these complexities in the decision-making process, they can provide intervention and support to promote informed decision-making. The more accurate information students have to inform their decision-making, the more these decisions can reflect their desired outcomes. However, we also have to consider and acknowledge that students enter with different dispositions, and these dispositions influence their desired outcome from their transition experience. Thus, practitioners must consider student expectations when designing their intervention and support so as to guide students towards their desired outcome.

With the provided model, researchers can study transfer in a manner that does not limit our understanding to the current constructs of the native student population or the ways we have examined vertical transfer in the past. As we expand our understanding of the various types of transfer students, researchers can design studies that engage the various experiences of transfer

students. This model provides a more complete and holistic approach to understanding the transfer experience and challenges what is currently known about student transfer.

6.2.3 Limitations of the model

While the model provides a new way of understanding the transfer student experience, given the limitations to the scope of this study, further research should identify the applicability of the model with different types of institutions and transfer populations. This research was conducted at a large, urban, research institution and with this, students rationale for transfer and disposition towards the receiving institution may be related to type of institution they were selecting. When considering different types of receiving institutions these entry characteristics may influence the student's dispositions differently and may alter their expectations for their receiving institution. In addition to a specific institutional type, this research was also limited to vertical and lateral transfer students. It is not known how this model is applicable to reverse and swirling transfer students or those with gap terms or stop out. The model created from this study can be utilized to study transfer in a way that individualizes the student experience and allows for multiple types of transfer students. However, its application has not been studied outside of the student experiences in this study and given this limited scope, further research is needed to identify applicability among diverse transfer student populations and a variety of transfer institution types.

6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study's implications and findings and the new model of transfer student experience lead to certain questions about the ways that we study and understand the transfer student experience. Recommendations for future research are included below.

6.3.1 Acknowledging and including various types of transfer experiences

There are many different types of transfer students, and this population is defined not only by the type of transfer movement but also the various student experiences that occur within these populations. Yet, most of the current research has been focused on the vertical transfer population as a representation of the majority of the transfer experiences without considering alternative populations in addition to vertical transfer or the various experiences that may exist within the vertical population. The commuter and residential experience is just one of many examples that highlight the diversity within this student population.

To advance research on student transition, the current literature needs to be reexamined to identify how transfer type and transfer disposition have influenced the findings. With this new lens, future research can address differences in the transfer student experience by representing that experience in more complex ways. Researchers need to recognize that failure to identify and acknowledge various transfer dispositions and experiences is a limitation to current research, one that has not properly been addressed. Future research should contextualize current findings and design studies with various transfer populations in mind.

6.3.2 Understanding of transfer student engagement

In addition to recognizing the various types of transfer experiences, researchers need to think about how we study transfer and the indicators we use to assess and understand integration. It is not sufficient to identify differences between behaviors and correlate those differences to make conclusions about successful integration. Rather, findings of this study suggest that behaviors must be contextualized by what they mean for students and the perceptions that students have of their experiences. Social connection and integration are subjective (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003), and to gain more understanding about that subjectivity, we must understand what influences students' decision making related to transfer and what they hope to gain from their transfer experience. Only then can we better understand the relationships between engagement behaviors and feelings of social connection.

The model presented in this chapter can be put to use by researchers to re-conceptualize the transfer experience in order to engage in conversation about the many ways that students experience transfer. This model broadens our understanding beyond the type of transfer movement and gives credence to the subjective nature of the student experiences. It allows us to analyze how students' understanding of their experiences is influenced by their disposition and previous experiences and the ways in which their understanding evolves during their time at the receiving institution.

6.3.3 Researching beyond vertical and lateral transfer

One limitation of this study is that the sample population is only a partial representation of the types of transfer movements and experiences. The participants were limited to students

with consecutive vertical and lateral transfer movements. Thus, while the findings identify many distinguishing traits within those experiences it is important to highlight that the findings only represent a portion of the transfer population at one receiving institution. As researchers continue to explore the social experiences of transfer students, we need to investigate a wider breadth of experiences, including consideration for gap terms and stop out, as well as various student demographics and the characteristics of the sending and receiving institutions. While this study identified four predominant types of transfer dispositions among the participants, additional transfer dispositions may exist. Future research can include more diverse transfer student populations in order to identify additional types of transfer dispositions.

Additionally, beyond student demographics and type of transfer, we need to explore what may influence the student experience. This study revealed how living on and off campus created a differentiation of student experience. Further research may reveal that other aspects of the student experience have similar influence on the student transition experience. There were many student demographics which may influence the student experience that were not included in the research questions, data collection or analysis but may be important to understanding the student experience. This includes various collegiate and non-collegiate influences such as the type of academic program, full or part-time work commitments, socio-economic status, regional location, parental education and involvement in structured activities. Understanding the role these aspects of the student experience have on the transfer experience will help to identify the activities that influence the transfer student experience in positively and negative ways for various types of transfer students.

6.3.4 Understanding areas of influence

Given the findings of this study and the transfer student social experience model, researchers should continue to consider the role that entry characteristics play in the student experience. This study finds that previous experiences serve as a form of preparation for transfer as they influence students' perceptions and decision-making at UMAR. Further pre-enrollment preparation and orientation could influence the students' disposition and decision making. The model I presented can assist researchers in exploring intervention mechanisms which could influence the students' entry characteristics and dispositions with the goal of increasing the transfer capital that informs student decision making.

Further consideration should be given to the difference that years of college experience may have on the students overall experience. In this study, the majority of vertical transfer students were junior standing while the lateral transfer students were often sophomores. Given the variance in their social experiences, it is important to consider how student disposition, expectations, decision making and reconciliation may be different given their different standing. Junior students may have different experiences from sophomores which influence their maturity and perceptions about their experiences. As researchers look for ways to influence the student experience, consideration for years of collegiate experience may be an important factor.

6.4 RECCOMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

6.4.1 Institutional acknowledgement

In this study, I found that students may experience the same program or service but perceive that experience differently. When students transfer they must also relearn a new campus environment and culture (Laanan, 2001); however, this relearning is not uniform and is contextualized by previous experiences and expectations. With the relearning process being individualized, it is important for institutions to learn about their transfer populations and their various needs. Supporting transfer student success includes avoiding assumptions about what students need or want from their transfer experience. Administrators, faculty, and staff carry their own assumptions and stigmas related to student transfer (Alexander et al., 2009; Townsend, 2008) which inform the ways that they interact with this population. With the number of transfer students increasing (Adelman, 2006), it is important that administrators, faculty, and staff possess the knowledge and training needed to understand this population. Institutions should find ways to acknowledge and serve the increasing transfer population and the diverse experiences of transfer students on campus. The goal is to remove overt bias and assumptions about transfer students and to increase awareness of their needs in all aspects of student life.

6.4.2 Preparation for Transfer

Students in this study entered the receiving institution with many misunderstandings and expectations about what their experience would be like. To prepare students for transfer and assist with their success at the receiving institution, intervention is needed prior to departure

from the sending institution (Kuh, 2003; Laanan et al., 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Administrators at both community colleges and four-year institutions should reexamine the support they provide to students who are planning to depart their institution. This is a challenging idea given limited institutional resources and retention-focused institutional missions (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Tobolowski & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Townsend, 2008). However, as a system of higher education, one that supports and promotes student access and success, colleges and universities need to reevaluate how they support student movement between institutions.

This study suggests that pre-departure counseling and services could be important to help transfer students select an institution that fits their needs, prepare for transfer, and gain a better understanding of the potential challenges and roadblocks. Engaging in these types of educational practices will help to influence the perceptions and expectations of transfer students and increase the likelihood that expectations and realities will align. Doing so will enhance student decision making at the receiving institution both prior to arrival and after enrollment. Given the findings of this study related to the importance of commuting to and living on-campus, it may be useful to include in this pre-departure counseling intentional conversations about housing options on and off-campus, including the benefits and challenges of either option. This type of guidance will help students to make decisions and select housing that best fits their needs and expectations.

6.4.3 Orientation and on-going support of transition

Orientation and transition services are important in helping new transfer students adjust to and learn to navigate their new campus environment (Kuh, 2003; Laanan et al., 2010; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). The findings of this study support a reevaluation

of the approach to orientation and transition services offered for the transfer student populations. This reevaluation should include a redefining of the types of programs and services offered to transfer students and consideration of how we understand success and engagement within this population (Townsend, 2008). Given that students have varied expectations about their collegiate experience, orientation and support services must give credence to these experiences and recognize that a one-size-fits-all model of transfer programming will not meet the needs of all transfer students. Furthermore, specialized and individualized support services should include consideration for various types of transfer students including students who are not seeking a traditional or residential experience.

Supporting transfer populations requires including opportunities for students to get to know one another outside of the classroom and residence hall spaces during formal orientation periods and throughout the semester. Extracurricular activities, both academic and non-academically related, help bring together students who share common interests (Chrystal et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In this respect, consideration should be given to promoting activities that complement the academic experience and are conducive to students who have commuter schedules. Intentional activities should be provided to assist students who may have less time to spend on campus and cannot engage in the social aspects of orientation. Transfer orientation programs which facilitate personal interaction may help students identify commonalities among students beyond their transfer status. Unifying factors could include commonalities such as adult learners, specific academic programs, commuter and students with dependents.

As students in this study transitioned to their new institution they experienced changes in their perceptions and feelings about their social interactions and experiences. The reconciliation

process happened at different times for different students and was ongoing. As described in the perception-behavior-perception cycle, student experiences inform their perceptions which, in turn, inform their behaviors. As this cycle continues, students may realize that they desire something different from their experience at their transfer institution. Practitioners should consider the timing of their interventions and services. Students in this study varied in terms of the type and timing of support services they needed. Thus, limiting orientation and support services to the first few weeks of classes, may be detrimental to students who are seeking to change their experience later on. Transfer programming should be on-going and available throughout the academic year and should include intentional programs that meet the needs of students living on and off campus.

6.4.4 Intentional community spaces

Students in this study enrolled at the receiving institution with pre-conditioned understanding about the places and spaces that promote social connection. However, the spaces that students expected to provide them with this social connection were often ineffective in achieving this goal. Thus, institutions should evaluate community-building initiatives within these spaces and provide alternative space for transfer student-specific socialization.

This socialization could occur is through intentional community building activities, services and programs within the residence halls (Chrystal et al., 2013; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015). In this study, students were living in upper-class residence halls where social programming and promotion of support services were geared towards upper-class students. There was little to no consideration that students on the floor may be struggling to connect or may be in need of additional support. Many students cited a lack of community building on the

part of their resident assistant. The residence hall communities were more closed off and less communal than expected and it was assumed that the students on the floor had pre-established communities. Resident assistants and professional staff should modify their programming and support in upper-class residence halls to give consideration to the transfer audience. Furthermore, institutions should consider transfer student specific housing options.

For students living off-campus, a transfer student programs office which includes lounge and communal space could provide a center for activity (Barnett, 2010; Borglum & Kabala, 2000; D'Amico, et al., 2014; Lester et al. 2013). Commuter students in this study found it difficult to building meaningful relationships in part because they had no common space outside of the classroom environment. Providing such a space would create a common area for both commuter and on campus students but would be particularly effective for students who do not have a common space to congregate in between classes. This space would also facilitate relationship building among students as they could easily identify other transfer students.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that there are unique transfer student experiences within the vertical and lateral transfer population that are differentiated by student's dispositions, decision-making, and expectations about their collegiate life. The dispositions of these transfer students influenced their lived social experiences and their feelings and perceptions of those experiences. This study expands our understanding of transfer students beyond vertical and lateral transfer and highlights the influence of previous collegiate experience on students'

perceptions of social connection and the ways in which previous commuter and residential experiences influence transfer student capital and experiences at UMAR.

Current research has been limited in its understanding of the transfer experience because scholars have often used a comparison to the native student experience or focused narrowly on the vertical student population. In instances where different transfer movements were given consideration, researchers generally categorized findings solely by specific type of movement, without consideration for the diversity of experiences within that category. This study demonstrates that we need to understand the phenomenon of transfer beyond the restrictive category of type of transfer and identify other influences on the student experience. The model I presented will help to expand our understanding of transfer because it allows us to move beyond the restrictive understanding of vertical or lateral transfer that currently exists in research and practice. In this framework, the findings do not contain assumptions and bias about students who fall within a categorization of vertical or lateral transfer and examines the entirety of the individualized experience.

The findings of this study are significant because as the transfer population is grows and diversifies (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; McCormick 1997, 2003; Peter & Cataldi, 2005), scholars and practitioners must reexamine how we study and understand the transfer student experience. The study of student transfer is complex because of the many enrollment and attendance patterns, multiple rationales for why students transfer, and the diverse expectations students have of their transfer experience. The way we study transfer includes significant limitations that do not allow the higher education community to advocate for, provide service to or support this growing population. Current practice and research often restricts the study of student transfer to the community colleges and the vertical population which limits the

understanding of and support services available to students who transfer laterally or otherwise (Tobolowski & Cox, 2012). Furthermore, the current practice of four-year institutions is to focus on transfer students solely for their role in enrollment management. Findings from this study should compel institutions to reevaluate their practices and to assume accountability for transfer student success and degree completion. This study begins to provide a more complex understanding of student transfer and introduces a model for the continued study of student transfer that allows for and appreciates the diversity of experiences within the transfer student population.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT SOLICITATION EMAIL

Subject: Seeking participants in transfer student research study

Hello,

You are receiving this email because you are a transfer student at [UMAR]. Your email address was obtained through the Transfer Student Programs Office at [UMAR].

I am a current doctoral student in the School of Education who is seeking current transfer students to participate in a research study. This study is about the experiences of transfer students before, during and after they transferred to the [UMAR]. If you participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in a 1-hour, one-on-one interview and a 20-minute follow up interview. You will be asked about your previous institution, the transfer process to and your experience at [UMAR].

To be able to participate in this study, you must be a [UMAR] student who transferred within the past year and is enrolled full time (12 or more credit hours). Participants will receive a small compensation for their participation.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please email Mary Utter at [utter@\[UMAR\]](mailto:utter@[UMAR]) or call 412-648-7897.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS

1. Are you currently enrolled at [UMAR] – regional campus?
2. How many credits did you complete in the fall 2014 and how many credits are you currently enrolled in?
3. Please list any previous colleges or universities you attended including your start and end dates (please include [UMAR] regional campuses).

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Table 5. Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	<i>Transfer Type</i>	Standing	Gender	Age	Major at UMAR	Race
Addie	Lateral	JR	Female	< 25	Anthropology	White
Aiden	Vertical	JR	Male	< 25	Social Work	Bi-Racial
Aisha	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Biology	White
Bria	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Psychology	White
Christian	Lateral	JR	Male	< 25	Education	White
Crystal	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	History	Asian
Damon	Vertical	SO	Male	< 25	Information Science	Asian
Deena	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Nursing	White
Ella	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Communication	Black
Fiona	Lateral	JR	Female	< 25	Accounting	White
Gina	Vertical	SO	Female	< 25	Undecided	White
Hazel	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Fictional Writing	White
Jade	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	English	White
Janelle	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Engineering	White

Table 5 continued

Jay	Lateral	SO	Male	< 25	Economics	White
Keaton	Lateral	SO	Male	< 25	English	White
Kiki	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Rehab Sci	Black
Krista	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Biology	White
Lacey	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Psychology	White
Lamar	Lateral	JR	Male	< 25	Athletic Training	White
Leigh	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Undecided	White
Maddie	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Exercise Science	Black
Marisol	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Nursing	White
Nadia	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Psychology	Caribbean
Nora.	Lateral	JR	Female	< 25	Social Work	White
Quinn	Vertical	JR	Female	> 25	Public Service	White
Ria	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Biology	Asian
Robert	Lateral	JR	Male	< 25	Psychology	White
Sabrina	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Rehab Sci	White
Shelia	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	English	White
Tamika	Lateral	SO	Female	< 25	Emergency Medicine	White
Tess	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Social Sciences	White
Tobias	Vertical	JR	Male	< 25	Engineering	White
Valarie	Lateral	SR	Female	< 25	Engineering	White
Vera	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Engineering	American Indian
Whitney	Vertical	JR	Female	< 25	Business	White
Yolanda	Vertical	JR	Female	> 25	Sociology	White
Zoe	Lateral	JR	Female	< 25	Pharmacy	White

APPENDIX D

PRIMARY RESIDENCY AND PREVIOUS INSTITUTION TYPE

Table 6. Participant Primary Residence & Previous Institution Information*

Pseudonym	<i>Transfer Type</i>	Primary Residence ^a	Previous Institution Location ^b	Previous Institution Type
Addie	Lateral	In State, Non Regional ^c	In State, Non Regional	Public, Large, Masters
Aiden	Vertical	In State, Regional ^d	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Aisha	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Bria	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Christian	Lateral	Out of State ^e	Out of State	Public, Large, Doctoral
Crystal	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Damon	Vertical	In State, Non Regional	In State, Non Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Deena	Vertical	In State, Non Regional	In State, Non Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Ella	Lateral	In State, Regional	In State, Non Regional	Public, Large, Doctoral
Fiona	Lateral	In State, Non Regional	In State, Non Regional	Private, Medium, Baccalaureate
Gina	Vertical	In State, Non Regional	In State, Non Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Hazel	Lateral	Out of State	Out of State	Private, Medium, Doctoral

Table 6 continued

Jade	Lateral	In State, Regional	Out of State	Private, Small, Masters
Janelle	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Jay	Lateral	In State, Non Regional	Out of State	Private, Large, Doctoral
Keaton	Lateral	In State, Regional	Out of State	Private, Small, Baccalaureate
Kiki	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Krista	Lateral	In State, Non Regional	In State, Non Regional	Private, Medium, Baccalaureate
Lacey	Lateral	In State, Non Regional	In State, Non Regional	Private, Small, Baccalaureate
Lamar	Lateral	In State, Regional	Out of State	Public, Large, Doctoral
Leigh	Lateral	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Private, Small, Masters
Maddie	Vertical	Out of State	Out of State	Public, Large, Associates
Marisol	Lateral	Out of State	Out of State	Public, Large, Masters
Nadia	Lateral	In State, Non Regional	In State, Non Regional	Public, Very Small, Masters
Nora.	Lateral	In State, Non Regional	Out of State	Public, Medium, Masters
Quinn	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State – Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Ria	Vertical	Out of State	Out of State	Public, Very Large, Associates
Robert	Lateral	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Private, Small Baccalaureate
Sabrina	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Shelia	Lateral	Out of State	Out of State	Private, Medium, Masters
Tamika	Lateral	Out of State	Out of State	Public, Large, Masters
Tess	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates

Table 6 continued

Tobias	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Valarie	Lateral	In State, Regional	In State, Non Regional	Public, Medium, Masters
Vera	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State - Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Whitney	Vertical	In State, Regional	In State, Regional	Public, Large, Associates
Yolanda	Vertical	Out of State	Out of State	Public, Medium, Associates
Zoe	Lateral	In State, Regional	Out of State	Private, Small, Baccalaureate

* The primary residency and previous institution location are described in terms of distance and relationship to UMAR.

^aThe primary residency designates a student's hometown area or place of residence when he or she is not enrolled at UMAR. ^bThe previous institution location designates the location of the student's former institution in relation to UMAR. ^cIn state non-regional denotes a location that is in the same state but not within the five county region. ^dIn state regional includes all locations within a five county, 50-mile radius of UMAR. ^eAn out-of-state distinction of the primary residence means a state other than that of UMAR.

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

Consent to act as a Participant in a Research Study

Title: An Exploration of How Previous Collegiate Experience Influences the Social Integration Experiences of Vertical and Lateral Transfer Students at the Transfer Institution.

Principle Investigator: Mary Utter
University of Pittsburgh
119 William Pitt Union
412-648-7897
Utter@pitt.edu

Why is this research being done?

You are being asked to participate in a research study in which you will be asked questions about your experience in transferring to [UMAR]. Specifically this research seeks to gain a better understanding of the transfer students experience and factors that contribute to a successful transfer.

Who is being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being invited to participate in this research study because you have recently (within the past year) transferred to the [UMAR]. People invited to participate in this study have transferred to the [UMAR] from another institution. Approximately 40 individuals will participate in this research study.

Participant's Initials _____

What procedures will be performed for research purposes?

Interview Procedures

You will be asked to participate in a 1-hour interview session and 20-minute follow-up with the Principle Investigator. During this time, you will be asked a series of questions about your transfer experience. You will be asked to describe your experience starting from when you enrolled at your first higher education institution all the way until the date of the interview. All interviews will be recorded via audio recording device.

Analysis Procedures

Once the interviews are completed, the Principle Investigator will utilize a transcription service to transcribe the interviews. The Principle Investigator will then analyze the transcriptions to look for similarities and themes throughout the interviews. This analysis will seek to characterize and describe the behaviors and perceptions of students during their transfer experience to the University of Pittsburgh.

What are the possible risks, side effects and discomforts of this research study?

This research study will ask specific questions about your experiences and feelings. The interview may lead to discussion about issues and topics that may invoke emotion. However, these questions will cause no more stress than what you would encounter in a normal conversation about this topic. If at any time you are experiencing emotional distress, we can discontinue the interview.

The conversations that take place during this study will have no impact or influence on your standing at the University.

What is the expected duration of the participation?

You are being asked to participate in a 1-hour interview. At your discretion, this interview may last more than one hour. Following the initial interview, you will be asked to engage in a 20-minute follow up conversation to provide feedback on the initial analysis of the research.

What are the benefits to participating in this study?

As a participant in this research study, you will contribute to the field of knowledge about the transfer student experience. This research study hopes to inform the academic community so that they can better understand the experience of transfer students. You will likely receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participant's Initials _____

Will I be paid if I take part in this research study?

You will receive a [UMAR] t-shirt and a \$5 gift card for taking part in this research study. To receive this payment, you must participate in the 1-hour interview. You are not required to answer all interview questions in order to receive the payment. If the interview is discontinued due to emotional distress, you will still receive payment for participation.

Who will know about my participation in this reach study?

Any information about you obtained from this research study will be kept confidential (private). All records relating to your involvement in this reach study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Your identity on these records will be indicated by a pseudo name. And your identity will be kept separate from the research records. You will not be identified by name in any publication of the research results unless you sign a separate consent form giving your permission (release).

Who will have access to identifiable information related to my participation in this research study?

In addition to the investigator on the first page of this authorization (consent) form and her research staff, the following individuals will or may have access to identifiable information (which may include your identifiable information) related to your participation in this research study:

Authorized representatives of the [UMAR] Research Conduct and Compliance Office may review your identifiable research information (which may include your identifiable information) for the purposes of monitoring the appropriate conduct of this research.

In unusual cases, the investigator may be required to release identifiable information related to your participation in this reach study in response to an order from a court of law. If the investigators learn that you or someone with whom you are involved is in serious danger or potential harm, they will need to inform, as required by Pennsylvania law, the appropriate agencies.

For how long will the investigators be permitted to use and disclose identifiable information related to my participation in this research study?

The investigators may continue to use and disclose, for the purposes described above, identifiable information (which may include your identifiable medical information) related to your participation in this research study for a minimum of seven years after final reporting or publication of a project.

Participant's Initials _____

Is my participation in this research study voluntary?

Your participation in this research study, to include the use and disclosure of your identifiable information for the purposes described above, is completely voluntary. (Note, however, that if you do not provide your consent for the use and disclosure of your identifiable information for the purposes described above, you will not be allowed to participate in the research study.) Whether or not you provide your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

May I withdraw, at a future date, my consent for participation in this research study?

You may withdraw, at any time, your consent for participation in this research study, to include the use and disclosure of your identifiable information for the purposes described above. (Note, however, that if you withdraw your consent for the use and disclosure of your identifiable medical record information for the purposes described above, you will also be withdrawn, in general, from further participation in this research study.) Any identifiable research or medical information recorded for, or resulting from, your participation in this research study prior to the date that you formally withdrew your consent may continue to be used and disclosed by the investigators for the purposes described above.

To formally withdraw your consent for participation in this research study you should provide a written and dated notice of this decision to the principal investigator of this research study at the address listed on the first page of this form.

Your decision to withdraw your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the [UMAR].

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator(s) listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number(s) given. I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator.

I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, [UMAR] (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that have occurred during my participation.

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature

Printed Name of Participant

Date

CERTIFICATION of INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT

You are being asked to participate in a research study in which you will be asked questions about your experience in transferring to the [UMAR]. Specifically this research seeks to gain a better understanding of the transfer students experience and factors that contribute to a successful transfer.

There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in this study. Any information you provide during the interview or throughout the course of the research study will not impact your standing at the [UMAR]. Your interview will be audio recorded and transcribed and your name will be removed and replaced with a different first name. This will protect your identity and responses. I, the primary investigator, will be the only person with access to the original audio recordings and transcriptions. These recordings and transcriptions will be placed in a locked file cabinet and destroyed after the final report is complete.

Your participating in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time. For your participating in the study, you will receive a [UMAR] t-shirt and a \$5 Panera Bread gift card.

This study is being conducted by Mary Utter, who can be reached at 412-648-7897 or via email at [utter@\[umar\].edu](mailto:utter@[umar].edu).

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND RATIONALE

This table provides an overview of how I will utilize the supporting research to frame my interview protocol. The rationale for each question explains why I am asking that question, what information will be gained and how the question will support my research questions. The protocol includes 15 primary questions (1-15) along with additional prompt questions (a-g) that are included underneath the primary questions.

Table 7. Rational for the Interview Protocol

Questions	Rationale	Relation to Research Question
Previous Institution Experiences	This section of questions will prompt the student to describe their previous collegiate experiences and provide detail on student satisfaction with the initial institution. (Eagan et al., 2013; McCormick 1997, 2003; Wood, 2012)	

Table 7 continued

1. Tell me about your decision to enroll at (previous institution). Why did you choose that school?	This question seeks to understand the student's rationale for choosing their initial institution and identifies any original intent to transfer or disappointments about the institutions he/she accepted to. (Eagan et al., 2013; McCormick 1997, 2003; Wood, 2012)	3
2. Tell me what life was like at your previous institution	Description of campus that can be utilized for future comparison of institutions. This question also begins to understand what the student liked or did not like about their previous collegiate experience. Questions a-e will be utilized as additional prompts if these areas are not covered in the initial response. (Barnett, 2010; Borglum & Kabala, 2000; D'Amico et al., 2014; Kuh, 2003; Lester et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	2, 3
a. What was campus like?	Prompts into campus environment and what their experience was like including the difference in campus environment between 2 and 4 year institutions. This difference has been demonstrated be an important part of the transition experience and sets the basis for student expectations at the receiving institution. (Barnett, 2010; Borglum & Kabala, 2000; D'Amico et al., 2014; Kuh, 2003; Lester et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	2, 3
b. Tell me about your classes, faculty, classroom setting, and advisor	Provides understanding of previous academic experiences including engagement with faculty. Also sheds light on potential satisfaction or dissatisfaction with academic environment or struggle with academics. (Barnett, 2010; Borglum & Kabala, 2000; D'Amico et al., 2014; Kuh, 2003; Lester et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	2, 3
c. What did you do outside of class? What organizations or activities where you involved in?	Provides understanding on what life on campus was like for the student including, what types of activities the student engaged in outside the classroom. Will give understanding of where friendships may have developed or not developed. Also gives sense of daily routines, eating, exercise, etc. (Barnett, 2010; Borglum & Kabala, 2000; D'Amico et al., 2014; Kuh, 2003; Lester et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	2, 3

Table 7 continued

d. Describe your social life?	This question allows the student to determine what activities were social in nature and which ones were not. Will also be prompted to talk about social relationships and satisfaction with social life and relationships. (D'Amico et al., 2014; Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010)	2, 3
e. Where did you live, what was that experience like?	Since housing seems to be an important differentiator between lateral and vertical experience, this question will help to see if living arrangements were a central part of sense of belonging and/or if living off campus detracted from the social experience. (Chrystal et al., 201; D'Amico et al., 2014; Laanan et al., 2010; Utter & DeAngelo, in press)	2, 3
<hr/>		
Decision & Transfer Process	This section of questions will explore why the student transferred and what factors influenced that decision. Additionally, these questions explore the time between institutions and what the initial interactions were with the receiving institution. This time period is important because the first impressions of the institution are established and can set the tone for the rest of the student experience.	
<hr/>		
3. Describe for me when you started to think about transferring?	This provides information on why the student transferred. What events or experiences triggered the decision and how they feel about that decision. (Eagan et al., 2013; McCormick 1997, 2003; Wood, 2012)	3
a. What made you decide to transfer	Provides for a description of what events or experiences contributed to the decision to transfer. Additionally, provides indication of who was influential in the decision-making process. (Eagan et al., 2013; McCormick 1997, 2003; Wood, 2012)	3
b. When did you know you would transfer?	Gives a sense of the timeline and clues us in to if this was an immediate decision, one that develop over time, or was it a rash /last-minute decision. These dynamics could influence student perception about the decision. (Eagan et al., 2013; McCormick 1997, 2003; Wood, 2012)	3
4. Tell me about your experience transferring to [UMAR]?	Provides a general understanding of what processes and procedures were involved in the transfer process and how the student felt about the process.	2,3

Table 7 continued

a. What made you decide to come to [UMAR]?	This question helps to understand why they chose Pitt over other institutions and answers questions about what they were hoping to find at Pitt or a specific program or rationale. This can contribute to overall student satisfaction once they are here and if their expectations aligned with the realities. This question also details if being accepted to Pitt something that was a highlight/ victory or a disappointment/ only option. (Eagan et al., 2013; McCormick 1997, 2003; Wood, 2012)	3
b. When were you accepted?	Gives a sense of timeline and how the student may have felt about that timeline.	3
c. Describe the process for transferring credits and registering for classes	Transferring credits and registering for classes can be a very challenging experience for transfer students. Also, this process may vary by type of sending institution if they are articulation agreements in place and/or helpful advising. This process happens before the student arrives and can "set the tone" for their experience. (Laanan et al., 2010; Miller, 2013; Townsend, 2008)	2, 3
d. Describe the process of finding place to live. Did you live off campus or on campus? What influenced your decisions on where to live?	Housing has been found to be a challenge for transfer students at this institution. This may have been a significant source of stress. Also, we want to know why students made the decision to live where they did. Was it by choice? A financial reason? Where they specific about wanting on campus or off campus house? Was the process different from what they expected? (Chrystal et al., 201; D'Amico et al., 2014; Laanan et al., 2010; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015)	2, 3
5. Prior to transferring, how did you feel about transferring?	This question gives a sense of the level of preparation for transfer and the perceptions the student had anticipating the transfer process. Also helps to prompt discussion of how expectations were different from reality. This aligns with the research relating to the importance of preparation in the transfer process. (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010; Miller, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	3

Table 7 continued

a. Is there anything about your transfer experience that surprised you?	This helps us to understand the students' preparation for transfer and the ways that what they expected might be different from what they experienced. (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010; Miller, 2013; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	2, 3
6. Describe your feelings now about your transfer experience.	Gives understanding of how student understood their experience. This understanding may shape perceptions about the experience. (Cabrera et al., 1992; Milem & Berger, 1997; Sedlacek, 1998, 2003, 2005; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003)	3
<hr/>		
Pitt Experiences & Descriptions	This section of questions will have the student describe their experiences about Pitt and the feelings that accompany those experiences. At the same time, the students will be prompted to think about how the experiences compare to the previous institution. Additionally, the behavioral questions in this section provide insight into the students' decision-making and what may have influenced those decisions.	
<hr/>		
7. Describe for me your first weeks days on campus	This questions give a sense of what life was like after transferring, provides descriptions of students behaviors, prompts students to describe why they chose to act in the ways they did, and what perceptions were behind the decision-making.	1, 2, 3
a. Did you go to orientation? What types of activities did you participate in?	Often orientation services are perceived to be for freshman and transfer students may be hesitant to participate. This question helps us to understand if the student knew about orientation programs, if they attended, and why they made the decision. (Kuh, 2003; Laanan et al., 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2, 3
b. What was move in like?	Housing has been found to be influential in the transfer student experience. These experiences may set the tone for the initial experience and impressions of their giving arrangements. (Chrystal et al., 2011; D'Amico et al., 2014; Laanan et al., 2010; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015)	1, 2, 3

Table 7 continued

c. Did you know anyone before you moved in?	Previous social connections have been shown to influence the transfer student experience. Often these previous relationships provide significant gateways to social networks, which can assist with social integration and feelings of belonging. (Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2, 3
d. What were the first few days of class like?	This provides initial reaction to the academic environment and prompts comparison to the previous institution and the ways that the experiences compare. Provides sense of academic trauma (Laanan, 2001).	1, 2, 3
e. Who did you hang out with?	Provides understanding of where social connection (or lack of connection) is coming from. (Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2, 3
f. What surprised you the most about [UMAR]?	Prompts student to compare their experience to what they were expecting and the ways that these feelings may have shaped behaviors moving forward. (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Laanan, 2007; Laanan et al., 2010; Utter & DeAngelo, 2015)	1, 2, 3
g. How did you learn how to navigate campus?	This provides information on what support systems the student is relying on and the tools or skills they use to understand their new environment. This tells us about the types of support systems available for transfer students and the influence this has on their perception of the institution as being helpful or unhelpful. Tells us about the transfer student capital that they have once on campus. (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kuh, 2003; Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2, 3
8. Tell me about your classes?	Prompts student to describe academic experiences & allows for comparison to previous institution. Also provides information on how the student views their academic experiences and how their experiences are perceived as positive or negative.	1, 2, 3

Table 7 continued

a. What are you taking?	Warm up question is student doesn't provide a lot of detail to initial question. This also helps to understand if the student had to re-take any classes to do challenges with credit transfer. (Laanan et al., 2010; Miller, 2013; Townsend, 2008)	1, 2, 3
b. What are your faculty members like?	Tells us if the student has developed any relationships with faculty and how they perceive them compared to their previous institution (Laanan, 2001, 2007)	1, 2, 3
c. How do you feel about your success in the classroom? Have classes been harder, easier or as expected?	Student can describe any academic trauma they may have experienced and helps to compare those experiences. (Kuh, 2003; Laanan, 2001, 2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 3
d. How does your academic experience compare to your previous institution?	Direct comparison of previous and current institution. Helps to understand how the environment and experiences are similar or different and what has been impactful on their experience. (Barnett, 2010; Borglum & Kabala, 2000; D'Amico et al., 2014; Kuh, 2003; Lester et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	2, 3
9. Describe what life is like for you do outside the classroom?	Prompts comparison between institutions of their social life. Indicates what activities are they engaging in and which are most important to them. Will also reveal if there is dissatisfaction with the social experience.	1, 2, 3
a. How did you get involved in these activities? How did you find out about them?	Tells us how students are getting involved, the resources they have utilized, and whether the social connections have provided them with a gateway to a larger social network. (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kuh, 2003; Laanan, 2007; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2
b. How do you feel about your level of involvement on campus?	Tells us if they are satisfied with level of involvement. This gives context to their perception of involvement and if the level of involvement they have is acceptable to them or if they wish for more. Tells us about non-cognitive aspects of the experience that may influence behavior. (Cabrera et al., 1992; Milem & Berger, 1997; Sedlacek, 2003, 2005; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003)	1, 3

Table 7 continued

10. How would you describe your social life here?	Provides details of social life outside of structured activities. This provides details on the less formal social structures that students may be seeking such as meals, "hanging out", campus parties, etc. (Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2, 3
a. Who do you hang out with	Provides information on social connection and peer relationships. (Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2
b. What do you do for fun?	This question removes constraints of time and gets at what the student would want to be doing if they had free time. Tells us what types of activities they enjoy and how often they get to participate in them. This can also help the student to describe if they feel they do not have sufficient time or ability to engage in the activities that they enjoy. (Kuh, 2003; Laanan et al., 2010; Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	1, 2
Reflection & Comparison		This section of questions provides for reflection on the student's experiences at the sending and receiving institutions, how these experiences compare, and how the previous experiences shape the current experiences.
11. Having been at [UMAR] for almost two semesters now, describe how your experience here has been compared to your expectations?	This question provides for a direct comparison between the two institutions and the expectations that may have been shaped by the student's first experiences. (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Milem & Berger, 1997)	2, 3
a. What has surprised you?	Provides details on perceptions based on previous experiences and how those related to the reality of the new campus.	3
b. How did you expect campus to be?	This question seeks to understand what the student had expected from the new institution and what the basis for that expectation was.	3
c. How is your social life different from and similar to your previous institution?	Specifically targets a comparison of their social life in case this topic is not covered by initial prompt questions.	2, 3

Table 7 continued

12. Tell me about someone who has been influential in helping you adjust to life at [UMAR]?	This provides details on social relationships and who has provided support for them. This could be a family member, peer, friend, advisor etc. Follow up prompt will include why this person was so influential. (Townsend & Wilson, 2006)	2, 3
13. How would you describe what it feels like to be a part of a community?	Provides details on the feelings and emotions that a student relates to sense of community. (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003)	3
a. How do you know when you are part of a community? What types of things make you feel that way?	Having students reflect on this will help to contextualize what is important to them about a community. Ultimately what they look for in a community and what determines that they feel a part of that community. This may be different for different types of students and may depend upon the things that made them feel a part of a community in the past.	3
b. Can you describe anything that has happened since you have been here that has made you feel like you belong?	Helps student to describe the experiences that lead them to feel connected on campus and why those particular experiences were important or noteworthy.	2, 3
c. Describe any experiences have made you feel like you do not belong here?	Helps student to describe the experiences that lead them to feel disconnected connected on campus and why those particular experiences. Also points to what may be lacking in the experience.	2, 3
14. If you could re-do your college experience, what would you do the same and what would you do differently? What advice would you give to yourself back during your first year?	This tells us what they feel about their decision and overall experience and if they are different from reality. Tells us if they wish they had chosen a different path and what different choices would they make. This allows for additional prompts as to the rationale behind the decisions that were made. Helps students to reflect.	2, 3

Table 7 continued

15. Tell me about how you think your experience at {insert previous college} has influenced your experience at Pitt.	Direct question relating to the research questions about previous experiences and behaviors on the receiving campus. Further prompt will ask about why the student believes this and what perceptions lead to the decision-making. (Milem & Berger, 1997)	2, 3
a. Can you think of any instances where a decision you made at Pitt was influenced by your time at {previous institution}	This prompt will be used to obtain descriptions of specific examples from above question. Will prompt for multiple examples. (Milem & Berger, 1997)	2, 3

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Previous Institution and experiences

1. Tell me about your decision to enroll at (previous institution).
 - a. Why did you choose that school?
2. Tell me what life was like at your previous institution
 - a. What was campus like?
 - b. Tell me about your classes, faculty, classroom setting, and advisor.
 - c. What did you do outside of class? What organizations or activities were you involved in?
 - d. Describe your social life.
 - e. Where did you live, what was it like for you?

Decision to Transfer & Transfer Process

3. Describe for me when you started to think about transferring.
 - a. What made you decide to transfer
 - b. When did you know you would transfer?
4. Tell me about your experience transferring to [UMAR]
 - a. What made you decide to come to [UMAR]?
 - b. When were you accepted?
 - c. Describe the process for transferring credits and registering for classes.
 - d. Describe the process of finding place to live. Did you live off campus or on campus? What influenced your decisions on where to live?
5. Prior to transferring, how did you feel about transferring?
 - a. Is there anything about your transfer experience that surprised you?
6. Describe your feelings now about your transfer experience.

Experiences & Descriptions – will include prompts to compare this experience to the previous experience and how they feel about this difference.

7. Describe for me your first few days on campus.
 - a. Did you go to orientation? What types of activities did you participate in?
 - b. What was move in like?
 - c. Did you know anyone before you moved in?
 - d. What were the first few days of class like?
 - e. Who did you hang out with?
 - f. What surprised you the most about [UMAR]?
 - g. How did you learn how to navigate campus?
8. Tell me about your classes.
 - a. What are you taking?
 - b. What are your faculty members like?
 - c. How do you feel about your success in the classroom? Have classes been harder, easier or as expected?
 - d. How does your academic experience compare to your previous institution?
9. Describe what life is like for you do outside the classroom?
 - a. How did you get involved in these activities? How did you find out about them?
 - b. How do you feel about your level of involvement on campus?
10. How would you describe your social life here?
 - a. Who do you hang out with
 - b. What do you do for fun?

Reflection & Comparison

11. Having been at [UMAR] for almost two semesters now, describe how your experience here has been compared to your expectations.
 - a. What has surprised you?
 - b. How did you expect campus to be?
 - c. How is the social environment different from and similar to your previous institution
12. Tell me about someone who has been influential in helping you adjust to life at [UMAR].
13. How would you describe what it feels like to be a part of a community?
 - a. How do you know when you are part of a community? What types of things make you feel that way?
 - b. Can you describe anything that has happened since you have been here that has made you feel like you belong?
 - c. Describe any experiences have made you feel like you do not belong here?
14. If you could re-do your college experience, what would you do the same and what would you do differently? What advice would you give to yourself back during your first year?
15. Tell me about how you think your experience at {insert previous college} has influenced your experience at [UMAR].
 - a. Can you think of any instances where a decision you made at Pitt was influenced by your time at {previous institution}
16. Is there anything else about your experience that you thin is significant for me to know that I did not ask you about already?

APPENDIX I

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your initial thoughts about the interview memo.
2. Describe if there is anything significant from the memo that you believe should be included and was left out.
3. Describe if there is anything from the interview memo that you disagree with.
4. Describe anything that, upon further reflection, you believe you may have left out from your interview.

APPENDIX J

PARTICIPANT DISPOSITION AND RELATED CAMPUS INFORMATION

Table 8. Participant Disposition & Related Campus Information

Pseudonym	Disposition Type	<i>Transfer Type</i>	Standing	Housing at UMAR	Gender
Addie	Second Chance	Lateral	Junior	On Campus - Double	Female
Aiden	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Male
Aisha	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Bria	New Beginning	Vertical	Junior	On Campus – Double	Female
Christian	Second Chance	Lateral	Junior	On Campus - Suite	Male
Crystal	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Damon	New Beginnings	Vertical	Sophomore	On-Campus – Single	Male
Deena	New Beginnings	Vertical	Junior	On Campus – Single	Female
Ella	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Single	Female
Fiona	Completion-Focused	Lateral	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Gina	New Beginnings	Vertical	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Hazel	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Suite	Female
Jade	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Jay	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Male

Table 8 continued

Janelle	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Keaton	Completion-Focused	Lateral	Sophomore	Off Campus Apartment	Male
Kiki	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Krista	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Double	Female
Lacey	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Lamar	Completion-Focused	Lateral	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Male
Leigh	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Maddie	New Beginnings	Vertical	Junior	On Campus – Single	Female
Marisol	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Single	Female
Nadia	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Single	Female
Nora.	Second Chance	Lateral	Junior	On Campus - Suite	Female
Quinn	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Ria	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Robert	Social-Completer	Lateral	Junior	Commute From Home (1 st)	Male
				Off Campus Apartment (2 nd)	
Sabrina	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Shelia	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus - Double	Female
Tamika	Second Chance	Lateral	Sophomore	On Campus – Double	Female
Tess	New Beginnings	Vertical	Junior	On Campus – Double	Female
Tobias	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Male
Valarie	Completion-Focused	Lateral	Senior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Vera	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commuter From Home	Female
Whitney	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Commute From Home	Female
Yolanda	Completion-Focused	Vertical	Junior	Off Campus Apartment	Female
Zoe	Social-Completer	Lateral	Junior	Commute From Home	Female

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