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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE TRANSFER SUPPORT SYSTEMS OFFERED
AT TWO- AND FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

A Chapter Style Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science in Education

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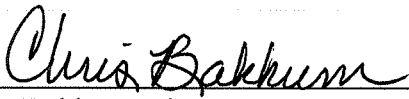
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By Teri Passow

We recommend acceptance of this thesis in partial fulfillment of the candidate's requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education: Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education.

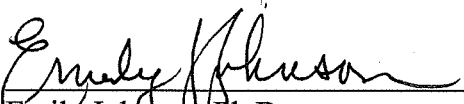
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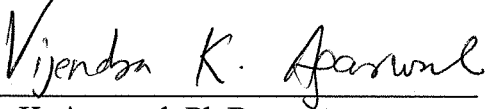

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ABSTRACT

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As the number of transfer students increased across the country, it is important to continue to learn about the transfer process. This qualitative study explored the support systems made available to students transferring from a two- to four-year campus. To investigate the transfer transition, this research utilized the following question: What perceptions do students have of the transfer support systems offered at two- and four-year institutions? Nine students, seven staff members from two-year campuses, and five staff members from a four-year institution participated in the study. Data gathered during these interviews was analyzed using a constant comparative method. While separate themes were identified for each group of participants, four major conclusions emerged in the complete analysis: communication, types of support, levels of support, and overall transfer experience. Considering these conclusions, several recommendations and ideas for future research are provided. These observations and suggestions will assist two- and four-year campuses in providing more complete support systems for transfer students in the future.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Tom Hanks, Calvin Klein, Clint Eastwood, Walt Disney. Each of these individuals has made their mark in pop culture, but they also share a common personal history: they each attended a two-year college campus to develop strong academic and professional foundations early in their careers (Chen, 2008). While these may seem like rare, star-studded examples, a brief review of current newspapers and journals reveal that these educational beginnings are far from uncommon in today's society.

Many of these recent articles often present and discuss components of President Barack Obama's vocalized commitment to increasing the number of graduates by 2020, primarily through greater numbers of graduates from two-year campuses across the country (Fuller, 2010). Although many of these initiatives aim to increase the numbers of graduates entering the workforce after completing a two-year program, the numbers of students using a two-year campus as a catalyst for further education are also increasing. As Adelman (2005) states, more than 40 percent of students attend multiple institutions in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. With staggering numbers such as these, investigation into the support systems in place for transferring students has become crucial for the future of higher education.

As previously alluded to, the number of individuals attending institutions of higher education has increased dramatically over the last 50 years (Jacobs, 2004).

However, not all college students come directly from the high school classroom. Instead, there are a significant number of individuals who enter the doors of colleges and universities each semester from unique pathways. One of these distinctive groups is transfer students, or those students who have been enrolled in more than one institution during their higher education career. The national trend of an ever-increasing number of transfer students is mirrored in Wisconsin as well. During the 2007-2008 academic year alone, 15,682 students transferred into or within the institutions in the University of Wisconsin System (UW System) (University of Wisconsin System, 2008). This distinctive group of students brings with them a variety of previous experiences, both in and out of the higher education setting.

Transfer students are often grouped with other continuing college students and are not assisted with the specific needs and concerns they may have. Reasons for students' transfers to new institutions are varied, but one fact remains the same: they are a group of students with particular needs and characteristics that must be addressed by both the institutions they transfer from as well as those which they transfer to. Colleges and universities that do not work specifically with these students to prepare for and adjust to the changes that are encountered during the transition are doing a disservice to this important group of individuals. This study aims to uncover the perceptions transfer students within the UW System have of the transition process, specifically for those who transfer into the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-La Crosse) from one of the 13 University of Wisconsin Colleges (UW Colleges) two-year campuses. An understanding of these perceptions will allow institutions to better serve this population in the future.

This chapter includes a statement of the problem as well as outlines the purpose and importance of the study. In addition, the research question used to conduct the study has also been stated. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the limitations of the study, and provides definitions of specific terms used throughout the research.

Statement of the Problem

To better understand the problem at hand, it is important to recognize the population being discussed. During the 2007-2008 academic year, 491 students transferred into UW-La Crosse. To put this into perspective, the University website records a total undergraduate enrollment of 8,521 students (“Fast Facts,” n.d.). This equates to nearly six percent of all undergraduate students enrolled at the University who have transferred from another institution. More specifically, 83 of the 491 students came to the UW-La Crosse from one of the 13 UW Colleges two-year campuses (University of Wisconsin System, 2008).

Because transfer students are rarely identified beyond their initial application, their status is often unknown to administrators, faculty, and staff across campus. The unique characteristics and needs of these students call for specific attention on the part of these key individuals. However, if this population is not identified and studied in greater detail, there is no way to understand their experiences and challenges and work to create a better environment to assist them during the transition.

Purpose of the Study

An examination of previous research reveals that transfer students are a group which has been largely overlooked by many colleges and universities in the past. Although these students may be offered a variety of support systems throughout their

transition, little research has been conducted to determine the perceptions that students have of the assistance they are provided during the transfer process. As previously mentioned, there is little that can be done to assist these students if their unique needs and challenges are not understood. Nevertheless, by working to uncover these perceptions and improve the services provided to transfer students, an enhanced transition experience can be achieved.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the opinions that students have of the support resources that are made available to them throughout the transition process. As will be revealed in subsequent discussions, although there is a select group of resources which are made available specifically to transfer students, there is a lack of support designed to address the unique needs of this group. In order for institutions to ensure they are meeting the needs of these students, it is important to have a clear understanding of the resources and support systems that they believe are most helpful and useful during the transfer process. UW-La Crosse as well as the UW Colleges will be able to utilize this information, then, to create and improve support services for transfer students.

Importance of the Study

Nearly all colleges and universities emphasize the importance of helping incoming first-year students, often referred to as native students, through their initial transition into the institution by offering a variety of support systems and resources tailored to their anticipated needs and challenges. Along the same lines, similar programs have proven to be beneficial for transfer students as well. “Support programs have proven to be an essential element in the success of native students in their academic performance

and baccalaureate degree attainment...Support programs tailored toward community college transfer students would have the same effect” (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001).

Berger and Malaney (2003) elaborate by stating that as enrollment in community colleges continues to increase, there is a growing concern on the part of two- and four-year institutions about assisting students through the implementation of these types of programs.

At the same time, as Laanan (2001) states; “Based on the research, transfer students are likely to experience a complex adjustment process – academically, socially, and psychologically – because of the environmental differences between two- and four-year institutions” (p. 11). As a result of these problems with transition and adjustment, it is crucial for transfer students to receive assistance and support specific to the challenges they may face. By gaining a better understanding of the perceptions that transfer students have of the support that is offered to them, institutions will be able to serve this population in the most beneficial manner.

Research Question

Nationwide, a significant amount of research has been conducted in regards to transfer students on a variety of levels. Much of this research has focused on academic performance, degree attainment, and persistence at the four-year institution (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). However, one area that has not been researched in detail is a deeper investigation of the support systems that are offered to students during their transition. Even less studied are the opinions that students have about the effectiveness and helpfulness of these resources. A student transferring to a new institution brings some previous higher education experience, but may have specific or unique questions and

concerns throughout the process. For these students, it is important to have a network of resources in place to assist them during this transition. However, because this area has not been deeply studied in the past, the following research question was created to look at this in greater detail.

What perceptions do students have about the transfer support systems offered by two- and four-year institutions?

Definition of Terms

Transfer Student

A student who has previously earned college credits at another institution (University of Wisconsin System, 2000).

Sending Institution

The institution from which a student has most recently transferred.

Receiving Institution

The institution which the student has transferred into.

Transfer Support Systems

The services, materials, and resources (both tangible and non-tangible) provided to transfer students before, during, and after their transition to the new institution.

Perception

Largely rooted in the functional definition of “perceive”, the term refers to an individual’s understanding of and opinions regarding a particular situation or event (Merriam-Webster, 2010). In this case, perception refers to the students’ views of the support that is made available to them during the process of transferring to the new institution.

Chapter Summary

As a result of the increasing prevalence of students transferring to new colleges and universities, understanding their perceptions of the process is crucial to ensuring a positive experience. The purpose of this study was to investigate these perceptions held by students, focusing specifically on the support they are offered from both the two- and four-year institutions.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A broad review of previous research conducted on transfer students and their experiences reveals a wide range of findings and conclusions. Studies have examined a variety of areas within the realm of college transfer including academic achievement, degree completion, and retention and persistence at the institution to which the student transfers (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). However, with few exceptions (e.g. Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Townsend, 1995), previous research has not focused on students' perceptions of the transfer process. More specifically, as Davies and Dickmann report, there are few studies that have been conducted to examine students' knowledge of and attitudes toward the support systems that are offered by sending and receiving institutions.

According to Jacobs (2004), "Many four-year campuses think of students only as new freshman, continuing students, and graduate students, and fail to fully recognize that transfer students compose a significant percentage of their campus community and, in addition, are a unique group of students with their own needs, challenges, and contributions" (p.11). Many current research articles conclude with suggestions of potential support systems that may be implemented by two- and four-year institutions to assist students in the transfer process. However, there has been very limited research conducted to specifically investigate students' perceptions of these services.

This gap in the research proves to be increasingly problematic as the number of transfer students at institutions continues to grow steadily. Miller and Nadler (2004) discuss this in greater detail: “In other words, if colleges and universities do not intend to restrict the presence of transfer students in their classes, they accordingly must commit to serving transfer students with a degree of excellence in everything they do. Institutions must become more purposeful in their service and in their operations and systems” (p. 200). It is important for colleges and universities to recognize transfer students as a collection of diverse individuals so they are able to provide assistance during this vital transition.

Who Are Transfer Students?

In order to better understand the perceptions and attitudes of transfer students, it is important to recognize their personal differences and the varied backgrounds from which they come. A majority of earlier research focused specifically on community college students who intended to or had transferred to a four-year institution (Grites, 2004). However, as the number of students making the transition from one institution to another steadily increases, the scope of research has also expanded. Before investigating the specific details of previous research surrounding transfer students, it is important to better understand the characteristics and behaviors of these students.

On a surface level, it seems easy to define a transfer student as an individual who has left one institution to enroll in another. However, as the vast scope of studies related to transfer students demonstrates, this distinction is not as simple as this brief description may lead one to believe. Previous research has often over generalized the characteristics of this group, but more recent studies have shed light on transfer students by suggesting

additional factors that must be considered, including “demographic makeup, academic backgrounds, enrollment patterns, and academic persistence” (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001, p. 89).

Although often grouped together, transfer students are a diverse group within themselves and must be treated as such in order to provide the most beneficial support services to assist them in their transition process (Jacobs, 2009). Dunn (2004) illustrates this diversity by discussing the wide variety of characteristics and backgrounds of transfer students:

They are traditional aged and they are senior citizens. They are overachievers and they are underachievers. They are international students; they are moms with young children; they are disabled students; they are displaced homemakers; they are men and women who want to improve their skills so they can advance in their jobs... (p. 29)

Although not an exhaustive list, this small sample of characteristics and circumstances clearly illustrates the diversity that is found among transfer students.

In addition to these varied traits and personal histories, transfer students also have a wide assortment of educational backgrounds and experiences. Traditionally, using the term transfer suggested that a student had completed two years of education at a community college before moving on to a four-year institution. However, as society has continued to change and evolve, so too has the transfer trend among America’s college students. Transfer students may have come from four-year public or private schools, obtained an associate degree or other certificate, earned credits at more than one institution, or any other number of circumstances.

As a majority of the research exemplifies, the most common type of transfer remains the traditional two- to four-year transition (Jacobs, 2004). Nevertheless, several

other types of transfer have also been identified. As Jacobs discusses, “[r]everse transfers (those who transfer from a four- to a two-year school) and lateral transfers (those who transfer from a two-year to another two-year or from a four-year to another four-year school) are quite common” (p. 3). Each of these forms of transfer illustrates a linear progression through the higher education environment. However, as a recent development in the examination of transfer students proves, this is not always the case.

Recently developed and recognized, the concept of “transfer swirl” indicates a recognition that transfer does not always occur in a linear fashion. Instead, students may record multiple institutions on their transcripts by the time they receive a degree. This may be the result of a student moving from one institution to another multiple times, being concurrently enrolled in more than one college or university, or any other combination of situations (Jacobs, 2009). Following this new pattern, several recent articles discuss transfer swirl and the implications for students, including decreased involvement in extracurricular activities and longer average time to degree completion (Ryman, 2007). Although limited formal research has been conducted to examine the trend, it has received increased attention as institutions begin to recognize the prevalence of this pattern on campuses across the nation.

One characteristic that all transfer students do have in common with one another is their previous experience with higher education in some capacity. In many ways transfer students can be compared to new freshman students since they are enrolling in a particular institution and beginning their new journey through that system. However, as Townsend (2008) describes, “...they are unlike beginning first-year students in that they have already survived college life and shown they can succeed in an academic

environment” (p. 73). Regardless of the institution that an individual is coming from, they have already plotted a course through some type of higher education institution and bring that experience with them to their new college or university.

Based on the vast amount of research available detailing their characteristics, behaviors and experiences, it has become clear that transfer students are an important element in the realm of higher education. “The number of students who transfer is increasing, and the complexity of dealing with those students’ needs has become an increasingly important issue...” (Jacobs, 2004, p. 3). Colleges and universities across the country are obviously recognizing these issues as they have begun to invest more resources in offering various support systems for students who transfer to and from academic institutions.

Support Systems Available to Transfer Students

Expanding upon this increased understanding, a variety of studies have been conducted nationwide to identify and evaluate the support systems that are offered to transfer students to aid them in the transition process. In particular, three main support systems continually emerge in the research: articulation agreements, advising, and orientation programs. However, there are also several other systems that have been recognized as prospective supports for transfer students.

Articulation Agreements

Numerous studies have shown that one of the most common areas of research within the realm of the transfer transition is an investigation of ease in which students are able to transfer their credits between institutions (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Welsh, 2002). These credit-transfer

arrangements, known as articulation agreements, aim to provide a structure and framework for students who attend one institution to transfer their credits to a new college or university with as little trouble and confusion as possible (Davies & Casey, 1999). Originally designed to allow students an easier and more effective means of earning a degree by providing a guide for completing the necessary coursework at more than one institution, these agreements have grown steadily over the past decades as the numbers of students attending community colleges has continued to increase (Grites, 2004; Mosholder & Zirkle, 2007).

Students have reported in numerous studies that credit transfer was one of the areas they were most concerned about when preparing for their transition to a new institution. A majority of the research has shown that this is an area which students feel must be better coordinated among institutions, as there is often little information provided to them about which credits will transfer and how they will apply towards a degree at the receiving institution (Townsend, 2008). According to Dunn (2004), developing clear articulation agreements must be a joint effort between both the sending and receiving institutions and should be revisited on an annual basis to assure that they continue to provide assistance to transferring students. However, as Herman and Lewis (2004) explain, although this type of support system proves to be beneficial for many, there are also additional services that are crucial to transfer students' adjustment to the new institution.

Advising

Assistance with advising, both at the sending and receiving institution, is another area which continually emerges in research surrounding transfer students. As indicated in

the literature, this advising must address the wide variety of issues that students face during the transfer process. According to Jacobs (2009), transfer advising is both a developmental and prescriptive process, meaning that advisors should not only talk with students about their goals and progression, but also discuss the choices that are available to them so they are able to make informed decisions about their futures.

In addition, several studies suggest that transfer advising should also include conversations about articulation agreements and the other tools that are available to students before, during, and after the transition (Jacobs, 2009). Townsend and Wilson (2006) expand upon this idea by discussing the findings of a study that examined the perceptions community college students had of the transfer process and the similarities and differences they felt existed between their sending and receiving institutions. According to their research, many students also use advising experiences to discuss which credits will or will not transfer to the new institution.

As with any study investigating interactions among people, an assortment of experiences with and attitudes toward the advising that is offered have been reported in the research (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). In many cases, students seem to receive satisfactory advising from either a staff or faculty member who is able to help them navigate through the transfer process. These positive experiences are often reported when students feel there are open lines of communication and they are able to have their questions answered in a clear manner (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). Students also report successful advising experiences when the advisor is accessible to them and when they sense collaboration between departments as well as institutions (Netzer & Morken, 2004).

On the other hand, there are also studies that have uncovered students' frustrations with the advising that they received at both their sending and receiving institutions. In many cases, this dissatisfaction is the result of poor communication between the advisors and the student. A lack of knowledge is also a common reason for students to have a poor advising experience during the transfer process (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). In addition, students often become confused during the transfer process as they are unsure of which institution or advisor they should be working with along the way (Netzer & Morken, 2004). In any case, it is clear the advising is a crucial step in the transfer transition as students are often charting new waters they have no experience with.

Orientation Programs

Orientation programs are another form of support that is made available to incoming students in nearly all institutions. For most students, a campus orientation is the unofficial beginning of the academic journey. Referencing Smith and Brackin (1993), Ward-Roof and Cawthon (2004) provide a succinct overview of student orientation programs; "...their primary purpose, goal, and mission remains the same: assisting students with their adjustment to the campus environment and supporting their ultimate academic success" (p. 50). Although these goals remain much the same for all student orientation programs, research has shown that there are additional components to traditional orientation sessions that must be addressed for transfer students.

An overwhelming number of studies that have examined transfer student orientation programs have encountered similar findings. In general, transfer students seem to be reluctant to attend the sessions or are dissatisfied with the information that is

presented to them if they do participate (Townsend, 1995). Reasons for this resistance and dissatisfaction are varied and include a wide scope of explanations.

Many institutions conduct orientation sessions for transfer students either in conjunction with or based upon the standards for programs for new incoming freshman students (Gordon & McDonald, 2004). As previously mentioned, transfer students do encounter several similar experiences as those of new freshman, yet, in spite of these similarities, they are a distinctly different group with noticeably different challenges and concerns. Transfer students are often disappointed during orientation sessions because they may be presented with a large amount of information that does not pertain to them. At the same time, there may also be noticeable gaps in some areas as transfer students desire particular pieces of information that are not relevant to first-year students (Ward-Roof & Cawthon, 2004).

As Grites (2004) expresses, the variety of information that transfer students request is different than what is traditionally presented at an orientation session: “Transfer students need an orientation to the culture of the new campus, the academic and social impacts of the new environment, the academic advising structure, and the support services, activities, and organizations that are available to them” (p. 126).

Although freshman students may also be provided with information in similar topic areas, the resources are different for new students as compared to those transferring credits into the institution, therefore requiring a different approach to orientation.

Certain pieces of information are crucial for all students to receive during an orientation program to help them acclimate to the institution. However, as Ward-Roof and Cawthon (2004) suggest, “As the number of transfer students continues to increase

and as the cost of participating in higher education grows exponentially – particularly for students attempting to negotiate coursework across two (or more) institutions – the development of an appropriate transfer orientation system is of paramount importance” (p. 57). In other words, it is imperative that transfer orientation programs address the specific needs of this unique and diverse group.

Additional Supports

Although the above-mentioned topics are the three areas which have received the most attention in previous research, there are also several other support systems that have been made available to transfer students to help them through the transition of enrolling in a new institution. Administrators, faculty, and staff have achieved varied levels of success with the implementation of support programs at institutions across the nation. Many of these services have received mixed reviews from students who are attempting to navigate through the transfer process.

Web resources. As the number of transfer students continues to increase, so do the online support systems that are made available to help them navigate through the process (Holaday & McCauley, 2004). Throughout the research, these online resources and systems are often closely linked to the articulation agreements discussed. Although each state or system may have their own resources in place, the primary goals remain nearly identical: to aid students in understanding how their credits will transfer among institutions based upon these agreements while assuring that the necessary transition information is readily available (Nelson & Elwood, 2004). Welsh (2002) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of student information systems across the nation. His findings report mixed opinions on the usefulness and relevancy of current systems,

but reiterate the importance that students place upon these resources during their transfer transition.

Statewide standards. Considering many of the same principles as those used to develop articulation agreements between institutions, statewide standards in higher education have been implemented in several states. Articulation agreements tend to focus on course equivalencies and helping students to determine how their previous coursework will apply at the new institution. However, several states such as Louisiana, Maryland, and Texas have implemented statewide common cores for academic credits. These universal cores standardize the expectations and degree requirements at participating institutions, which allows the student a smoother transfer transition (Bell, 2004). As Davies and Casey (1999) reveal, these uniform transfer and credit acceptance practices provide students with an additional framework while helping them gain a better understanding of what to expect throughout the process.

Transfer centers. An emerging trend in the field of transfer preparation and assistance is the idea of creating a center specifically for transfer students. Many colleges and universities have begun to recognize the diversity that exists among transfer students and have created these one-stop service centers that will provide students with a central location to have their questions or concerns addressed (Davies & Casey, 1999). Dunn (2004) expands upon this notion to discuss the important role that transfer centers can play in the transition process by making all necessary information available in one, central location: “A transfer center equipped with articulation agreements, catalogs, and computer terminals is an ideal setting for college searches by students, their advisors, and

interested faculty members” (p. 36). It is also suggested that these centers make additional resources and support systems available to transfer students.

Transfer transition courses. Similar to orientation programs, transition or orientation courses have also come to play an important role in the adjustment of students to the campus environment. Both two- and four-year institutions may implement these courses which are provided to help students through their transfer transition (Herman & Lewis, 2004). Transfer courses offered at sending institutions will often focus on planning for the transition as well as provide information about what their new institution may be like. Conversely, Herman and Lewis also discuss the support that may be made available at the receiving institutions. Post-transfer transition courses are generally structured like many first-year introductory courses, and may focus on the adjustment to the new institution as well as study tips and skills that will be beneficial for these students.

Workshops. Recognizing that students must begin to work through the transition before they arrive at the receiving institution, Laanan (1996) proposes the concept of workshops offered by the sending institutions, predominantly by two-year community colleges that have a large number of students transferring out regularly. These workshops may include information about how to make the transition to a new institution, while also providing important information such as how to obtain financial aid. In addition, Laanan suggests that the workshops may also include a panel of former transfer students who are able to speak first-hand about the process of adjusting to a new college or university. These workshops may cover similar information as orientation programs at the student’s

receiving institution, but will provide the information earlier, allowing the student to be better prepared when the transition is upon them.

Mentor/mentee relationships. Laanan (1996) also suggests that students may find assistance in participating in a mentor/mentee relationship with an established transfer student at their receiving institution. A collaborative effort between institutions that see a large number of students transferring allow for an early connection to be made for those incoming students. The goal of these programs is to allow students to ease into the transition process while learning first-hand through the mentor's perspectives and personal experiences (Laanan; Townsend, 2008). Not only are students able to gain a better grasp of the institution to which they are transferring, but they are also able to forge an initial relationship with another student on campus.

Theory Related to Transfer

A variety of theories relating to student development and adjustment in college have been utilized to better understand the variety of experiences and components of transferring to a new institution. Two theories commonly employed in past studies surrounding the transfer transition are Astin's Involvement Theory and Tinto's Model of Student Retention. However, another theory that lends itself well to a study examining student perceptions of the transfer process is Schlossberg's Transition Theory. This theory also provides an appropriate conceptual framework to utilize when examining how students perceive the transfer support systems that are offered during the transition process.

Astin's Involvement Theory

A large number of previous studies on transfer students and their transitions have focused on the adjustment to the new institution. In order to make sense of this adjustment process, many researchers have applied the framework of Astin's involvement theory, which stresses the role of student involvement in development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). For the purposes of his research, Astin (1999) defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). His theory discusses the need for active participation on the part of the student throughout the learning process, in areas ranging from academics to campus activities.

In establishing the theory, Astin (1999) developed five key postulates that help explain the role of involvement in student development (p. 519):

1. "Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects." These objects range from the student experience in general to more specific interactions, such as preparing for an exam.
2. "Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum." Students will vary greatly in the amount of time and energy that they put into their experiences. The degrees of involvement differ depending on a variety of factors, including the situation, time, and student.
3. "Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features." The degree of a student's involvement can be measured quantitatively (by looking at how many hours the student spends studying, for example) as well as qualitatively (the level of attention and seriousness with which the studying was done).

4. “The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.” In other words, a student that puts more into an activity will have a greater reward than a student who is minimally involved.
5. “The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.”

Used in a variety of settings within higher education, Astin’s theory does not examine actual development in students. Instead, it focuses on the factors that facilitate development, allowing for application to practice in a logical and straightforward manner (Evans et al., 1998).

Although this theory is often used to examine traditional college students’ persistence and retention, it is also relevant to studies of transfer students. As Lanaan (2004) states, “Astin’s theory of student involvement provides a useful conceptual framework to examine and understand the complex academic and social adjustment process of community college transfer students” (p. 335). Applying Astin’s theory in this manner, then, has allowed many researchers to test the idea that transfer students who are involved in both academic and social activities will likely experience a successful transition into a new institution as compared to those who are not as involved.

Tinto’s Model of Student Retention

Another theoretical framework that has been applied in many research studies regarding transfer students and the transition process is Tinto’s model of student retention. Although there are overlapping philosophies among Astin and Tinto’s models,

the later focuses more specifically on the persistence and retention of students as a result of their involvement and experiences in their college or university (Tinto, 1993). As Townsend and Wilson (2006) explain, Tinto's model suggests that students' persistence is not influenced by their own characteristics, goals, or commitments alone. Instead, he proposes, similar in many ways to Astin's ideas, that students' academic and social experiences during college also influence their retention at the institution.

However, the ideas presented in Tinto's model have not always been an accepted rationalization for student retention. As previously mentioned, prior to the development of this model, most research concluded that retention was "primarily the reflection of individual actions and therefore [was] largely due to the ability or willingness of the individual to successfully complete the tasks associated with college attendance" (Tinto, 1993, p. 85). In other words, a student's likelihood of persisting at an institution was based first and foremost on the personal characteristics of that individual.

Nevertheless, as Tinto began to explore the experience of student departures from colleges and universities, he uncovered additional factors which also influence persistence and retention (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Throughout his work, he discusses the variety of experiences, both academic and social, that contribute to a student's sense of belonging to an institution (Tinto, 1993). He argues that these experiences are equally as crucial to student persistence as their personal characteristics and goals.

Though his work is often applied in the creation and implementation of institutional efforts to retain first-year students, many of the concepts directly relate to transfer students as well (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). As new members of the college or

university community, it is important to ensure that the student is provided with opportunities to develop a connection to the institution which has proven crucial in retention efforts across the country. It is for this reason that many studies on transfer students and their transition experience have utilized Tinto's ideas as a framework for the research.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Although originally developed as a theory for understanding adult student development, Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory demonstrates an appropriate framework for understanding the transition process for transfer students of all ages. Her ideas regarding the transition process for adult learners were first presented in 1981 in an article published in *The Counseling Psychologist*. Over the years, she has worked with several colleagues, including Arthur Chickering, Elinor Waters, and Jane Goodman, to revise her earlier models and has presented these new ideas with the intention of improving the understanding of students in transition (Evans et al., 1998). There are vast numbers of resources dedicated to explaining this complex theory, but the general ideas presented allow for a deeper understanding of the transition process that many students, specifically those who transfer to a new institution, may face.

Schlossberg's ideas were first conceptualized out of the apparent need for a model that would provide a "framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and lead them to the help they needed to cope with the ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 108). As her work has been utilized over the years, however, it has become clear that her theory is not only applicable

to adult students. Instead, the transition theory model provides a context for all students facing transitional periods of any nature.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) broadly define a transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). They continue on to describe transitions in greater detail, noting that they are life events that may involve gains and/or losses, but are careful not to use the term “crisis” because of the negative connotations often associated with the word. In addition, they provide a deeper comprehension by describing the importance of understanding that a transition is not simply a specific matter of change for an individual. According to their definition, an event can only be viewed as a transition “if it is so defined by the person experiencing it” (Schlossberg et al., p. 28). For example, two individuals could experience the same change, but if they each attach a different meaning to the experience, it may be seen as a transition for one and not for the other.

Throughout their work, Schlossberg and her colleagues present several components of the theory that can be used to better understand how students may process these experiences in order to make sense of the changes they are facing. One of the most fundamental elements of transition theory is the categorization of the three types as presented by Schlossberg et al. (1995): anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event. Anticipated transitions are most common and are defined as changes or events that are expected to occur in an individual’s life. Examples of anticipated transitions may include attending college, marriage, the birth of a child, and moving away from home.

Conversely, unanticipated transitions are non-scheduled events which are not predictable. These changes may be seen as improbable and may happen to fewer people

than anticipated transitions (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Inheriting a fortune, being convicted of a crime, and being the victim of a natural disaster are all examples of events that are often seen as unanticipated transitions.

Finally, Schlossberg et al. (1995) describe non-event transitions as “the ones an individual had expected but which did not occur, thereby altering his or her life...” (p.29). In other words, these are events which were anticipated but for any number of reasons did not occur. More specifically, four means of identifying non-event transitions are presented: personal, ripple, resultant, and delayed. Each of these represents distinctive non-events that may occur in an individual’s life.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) also shed light on several other concepts that aid in understanding these types of transitions and the effect they may have on an individual. Relativity, context, and impact are three distinct factors which may assist in determining the extent to which a person is affected by a particular transition. These interrelated concepts serve as a framework for examining what level of meaning an individual will attach to a particular transition. As noted by Schlossberg et al., “For an individual undergoing a transition, it is not the event or non-event that is most important but its impact, that is, the degree to which the transition alters one’s daily life” (p. 33).

Because of the origins of the theory in examining the development of adult learners, the model originally focused on the transitions faced by non-traditional students. However, students of all ages face a variety of transitions which can also be examined through this work. In order to make sense of the transition process for individuals, the theory presents an integrative model that helps simplify this complicated course of development.

Due to the circular nature of the transition process, there is no clear-cut beginning or end to the cycle. However, for the sake of clarity, Schlossberg et al. (1995) begin their description with the moving in stage. It is during this period that students find themselves in the first stages of a new event or experience. “Using moving in as a starting point, people who move into a new situation...have some common agendas and needs. They need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms and expectations of the new system” (Schlossberg et al., p. 44). Moving in may be seen as the beginning stages of a new transition period as the student is embarking upon a new journey and must find the best way to approach this new situation.

As a student begins to come to terms with a new experience, they may shift into the moving through stage. Schlossberg et al. (1995) state that “we see that the *moving through* period begins once learners know the ropes” (p. 45). At this point, the student may confront issues that begin to arise such as how to handle this new role or position. In addition, the student may look for a balance of challenge and support during this period (Schlossberg et al.). The moving through period will often be the longest stage for a student as they continue through the transition process.

The final stage within the transition progression can be seen as both the ending and beginning of the process. According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), “Moving out can be seen as ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next” (p. 45). A student may come upon the end of one transitional period in their lives during this stage, while they simultaneously begin to explore the beginning of another.

This structure allows for a better understanding of the transition process that many students will go through. However, it is also important to understand the factors that

influence the ability of the individual to cope during these periods of transition.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) present these factors – situation, self, support, and strategies – to provide a better comprehension of the ways that students are able to manage these periods of transition.

Situation is an important variable that must be considered when looking at an individual's ability to cope with a transition. Depending upon the circumstances at a particular time, an individual will react differently to a given event or transition.

Situations vary according to an assortment of additional factors including, but not limited to, triggers, timing, control, role changes, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Each of these factors influences the way in which an individual is able to come to terms with a situation and handle a new period of transition.

Schlossberg et al. (1995) also discuss the self factor which influences the transition process for an individual. In looking at the self, it is important to look at what the individual is bringing to the transition. This factor is further segmented into personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. Personal and demographic characteristics are those that affect how an individual views life, and include factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, and ethnicity (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al.). Additionally, psychological resources also serve as coping aids during transition and are described as personality traits that allow people to cope with various situations. Ego development, personal outlooks, commitment, and values are all examples of psychological resources that individuals may draw from during a transition period (Schlossberg et al.).

The third factor described by Schlossberg et al. (1995) is support and is arguably one of the most crucial features of the transition model. According to Schlossberg et al., “Support, however, needs to be defined operationally because it comes in many sizes and shapes...” (p. 67). For this reason, they put forth four types of support that may be present for individuals: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions or communities which the person may be a part of (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al.). Depending upon the level of support the individual receives, they are able to draw from these various supports to find a way to cope with a transition.

The final factor that Schlossberg et al. (1995) discuss as influences on transition are strategies. Endorsing the earlier work of Pearlin and Schooler, they present three categories of strategies that individuals may employ when facing a transition: responses that aim to alter the current situation, responses that control the meaning of the problem, and responses that work to manage stress after it has occurred (Schlossberg et al.). Individuals may utilize one or more of these strategies when coping in the hopes of controlling the transition they are facing.

Schlossberg’s transition theory places a large emphasis on the reflection upon the individual’s perspective and the details of their own experiences which allows for the incorporation of individual as well as cultural differences that are inevitable when working with students (Evans et al., 1998). “To understand the meaning a transition has for a particular individual, we need to examine the type of transition...the context of the transition... and the impact of the transition on the individual’s life” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 35).

Chapter Summary

In summary, transfer students are a unique group that carries with them a variety of backgrounds and experiences as they enter the doors of a new institution. This chapter examined the various types of transfer as well as the large number of supports that are made available to students entering and exiting institutions across the country. Previous research suggests that transfer students have unique needs that should be addressed on a more individualized basis than is the case on many campuses. In addition, the review of literature also explored several theories that relate to the idea of transfer, and provide a framework for understanding this important group of students. By increase the knowledge and awareness of the needs of transfer students, campuses will be posed to serve this significant group more effectively in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions that transfer students have of the support systems made available to them at both their sending and receiving institutions. Uncovering these experiences and opinions will allow both two- and four-year institutions to serve this population more effectively in the future. This chapter describes the research design, sample, data collection methods and analysis procedures, and provisions for confidentiality. Also included is a description of the perspective and approach that was utilized in this study.

Research Design

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide a succinct description of the value of employing qualitative methodologies in research:

Some areas of study naturally lend themselves to more qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experiences...Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known. It can be used to gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit it already known. Also, qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods. (p. 19)

Aligning specifically with these ideas, the goal of this study was to learn more about the students transferring within the UW System by examining their perceptions and experiences of the transition.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) present five main characteristics that serve as a framework for designing and executing qualitative research studies, each of which was employed in this study to a certain degree. They first state that this type of research often relies on the natural setting as a direct source of data, with the researcher playing an integral role in to interpreting it. Many qualitative researchers make use of data collection methods such as videotapes and participant observation under the premise that human behavior is largely influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Although this type of on-location data collection was not conducive to this particular study, this research did depend on the ability of the researcher to review and interpret the recorded interviews.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) also note that qualitative research is descriptive in nature. Collected data may include words, pictures, and observations, each with a specific meaning attached to it. This is in direct contrast to the numerical data gathered during quantitative research. For this study, participants' comments were taped and later transcribed to produce the data that was analyzed to determine perceptions of and experiences with transferring to the new institution.

Unlike some other methods of research, qualitative studies are primarily concerned with the process rather than just the outcomes or products (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). More accurately, it is the process by which the researcher comes to a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied that is of greater interest. Although learning about the actual support systems offered proved beneficial in some ways, more was learned by discussing students' perceptions and what they felt about those supports.

Qualitative researchers do not seek out particular data to help prove or disprove pre-determined hypotheses. Instead, as Bogdan and Biklen (1992) reiterate, qualitative

research is an inductive method of investigation that allows a researcher to come to a better understanding of a particular situation or occurrence. For this research, it was vital that the researcher used open-ended questions that allowed for a complete view of participants' perceptions of the transfer support they received, rather than entering into the study with preconceived notions about what would be uncovered.

Finally, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) discuss the importance of ensuring that qualitative research remains centered on participant perspectives. Researchers utilizing this method are interested in the ways that people make sense of their experience, signifying that "meaning" is the central concern in this approach. For this study, student perspectives were analyzed to shed light on the dynamics of transferring from one institution to another.

Case Study Methodology

Within the realm of qualitative research, a variety of methodologies may be utilized to gain the desired information and insight. Typically, as is the situation in this research, a case study approach allows the researcher to gain in-depth information about a particular setting, subject, or event (Merriam, 1988). In brief, the case study method can best be described as an investigative funneling process. The researcher first begins with a broad topic idea, and moves towards a narrower and more focused study as information is gathered (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For this study, the concept evolved from an expansive look at the transfer process to a comprehensive and detailed examination of students' perceptions regarding the support they are offered throughout the process.

There are several types of qualitative case studies, each with its own specific considerations and data collection techniques. An observational case study was

implemented for this exploration, allowing the researcher to focus on a particular aspect of an organization, activity, or group; in this case, the process students went through to transfer to the new institution (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Utilizing an interview method of data collection allowed the researcher to learn, in great detail, about the experiences of each student as related to the others. Focusing on the uniting aspect among the student participants, their transfer experiences, the researcher was able to clearly see both the common and starkly contrasting experiences of each student.

Sample

Choosing appropriate participants for a study is crucial to obtaining information that works to answer the proposed research question (Esterberg, 2002). According to Esterberg, researchers “should choose those interviewees who can give you the greatest possible insight into your topic.” (p. 93). For the purpose of this study, participants were limited to college students, both male and female, who transferred to UW-La Crosse from the University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County (UW-Baraboo) or the University of Wisconsin-Richland (UW-Richland) for the Fall 2009 semester. These two specific institutions were selected as they represent the largest number of UW Colleges’ transfers to UW-La Crosse, and allow for a representation of the experiences of students transferring within the system. In total, nine student interviews were conducted; five who transferred from UW-Richland and four from UW-Baraboo.

Recruitment of potential participants began after Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted on November 5, 2009. At this time, a list of all current students who met the criteria for subjects was provided to the researcher by the UW-La Crosse Office of Institutional Research. On December 9, 2009, an initial email was sent

to each of the 31 eligible students requesting their participation in the study. A second email was sent to the remaining 28 students on January 7, 2010 requesting their assistance with the project again. A third, and final, email was sent to the remaining 26 students on January 28, 2010. After receiving replies from students who indicated an interest in participating in the study, the researcher then worked with each of the nine students to schedule an individual interview time that was convenient. All student interviews took place on-campus, in the researcher's office. Prior to beginning the interview, each participant signed an informed consent form outlining the goals, procedures, and other details of the research study (Appendix A).

In addition to the nine student interviews that were conducted, the researcher also met with key individuals at each of the institutions involved in the study. Names and positions of these individuals were gathered during student interviews and through informal conversations with other individuals at each participating institution. These interviews were conducted on-site at UW-La Crosse, UW-Baraboo, and UW-Richland and allowed for a more complete picture of the transfer process at each respective institution. These interviews proved to be a crucial component of the research allowing the researcher to physically visit the campuses from which the student participants had transferred, while also providing a chance to gather the large amount of printed resources available at each institution.

Introduction of Student Participants

In order to gain a better understanding of the student participants involved in this study, a short descriptive introduction has been provided below. Despite varied backgrounds, a few commonalities can be noted among all students. Each of students

entered the receiving institution, UW-La Crosse, during the Fall 2009 term. In addition, all nine student participants reported living in off-campus residences at their respective sending institutions. Beyond these factors, however, the students' assorted experiences became evident in many ways.

Henry originally enrolled for his first semester of college in Spring 2007. He transferred from UW-Baraboo, where he earned an Associate of Arts and Science (AAS) and expects to graduate in Spring 2011. Henry is the only on-campus resident of all student participants. He is a student in the College of Liberal Studies.

Originally enrolling in college in Fall 2007, Sabrina expects to earn her degree in Spring 2012. She transferred from UW-Richland, bringing with her the AAS she earned at that institution. Courtney is a College of Science and Health student.

Graduation is expected in Spring 2012 or 2013 for Elizabeth, who transferred from UW-Richland. She originally enrolled in Fall 2006, and earned an AAS prior to her transfer. Elizabeth is a student in the College of Science and Health.

Abigail enrolled for her first college semester in Fall 2008. She completed one year of coursework at UW-Richland before transferring to UW-La Crosse. She expects to graduate in Spring 2012, and is a student in the College of Science and Health.

Thomas expects to graduate from UW-La Crosse in Spring 2012 or 2013, after originally enrolling in college in Fall 2008. He did not obtain a degree at UW-Baraboo before transferring. Thomas is a student in the College of Business Administration.

Originally enrolled in college for Fall 2007, Natalie expects to graduate in Spring 2012. She completed her AAS at UW-Baraboo prior to her transfer, and is a student in the College of Liberal Studies.

James originally enrolled in college in Fall 2006 at UW-Baraboo. Prior to his transfer, he earned his AAS, and expects to graduate in Spring 2012. He is a student in the College of Science and Health.

Originally enrolled in Fall 2007, Kristin expects to earn her degree in Spring 2012. Prior to her transfer to UW-La Crosse, she earned her AAS at UW-Richland. Kristin is a student in the College of Liberal Studies.

Dana originally enrolled in Fall 2005 at a technical college in Wisconsin. She then transferred to UW-Richland where she spent two years earned her AAS. She expects to graduate in Spring 2011 as a student in the College of Business Administration.

Staff Participants

As previously mentioned, interviews were also conducted with support staff at each of the involved campuses. In total, twelve staff members were interviewed: three from UW-Richland, four from UW-Baraboo, and five from UW-La Crosse. Interviews took place with individuals in a variety of positions at each institution, each of which works directly with outgoing or incoming transfer students regularly. In order to maintain confidentiality, names and actual positions of these individuals will not be disclosed. From this time forth, the term “support staff” will be used, along with other descriptive labels, when discussing these participants’ thoughts and ideas.

Data Collection Methods

As Griffin (2006) states, researchers utilizing an interview method of data collection use information provided by the participant “to discover who people are and what they think, feel, or intend to do” (p. 16). This method of uncovering varying points of view was appropriate for this study as it allowed for a deeper understanding of the

perceptions that students have of the support systems that are made available to them during the transfer transition. In addition, the interviews with administrative and staff personnel at the institutions provided a deeper insight into the process of transferring and how it is handled and executed at each campus.

In particular, semi structured, in-depth interviews were utilized with both populations to obtain a variety of differing opinions and gain a more diverse understanding of the thoughts, experiences and opinions of members of both groups. Conducting these types of interviews allowed the researcher “to explore [the] topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 87). This notion was imperative in this study in allowing the perceptions and resulting opinions and experiences to be heard.

Prior to each interview, individuals were asked to read and sign an informed consent form and were also made aware that participation in the study was completely voluntary. At this time, each participant also agreed to allow tape-recording of the interviews so they could be transcribed at a later time. All were informed that the tapes would be destroyed upon completion of the research, and that their real names would not be used in the research in order to protect their identities.

To ensure that the information being gathered was consistent and relevant to the study, two interview guides, one for students and one for administrators and staff, were created (Appendices B and C). For the purpose of this study, it was important to ensure that the questions asked of the participants were open-ended and facilitated a greater discussion, rather than shutting down open lines of communication (Esterberg, 2002). The student interview guide included questions regarding the transfer experience at both

the sending and receiving institutions. In comparison, the interview guide with the administrators and staff at each of the institutions focuses on gathering information regarding the institution's philosophy on working with transfer students and the specific factors that play into their work with these students. To make certain that relevant information was obtained in greater detail, participants were also asked probing questions based on their responses to clear up any uncertainties or to examine a particular area of the conversation more closely.

Although interview transcripts proved to be the largest and most direct source of information for this study, additional data was also collected in other forms. During each interview, the researcher wrote down observations and notes to complement the transcriptions and provide a more complete picture of what was discussed. Comparing these notes to the interview transcriptions provided an opportunity to ensure that the participants' comments were kept in context and understood completely.

In addition to the fieldnotes collected during the interviews, the researcher gathered a variety of electronic and printed materials from each of the institutions. These materials included brochures, pamphlets and other handouts that are made available to students at each of the institutions. In addition, the researcher gathered copies of the materials sent to students who have been accepted to the receiving institution to prepare them for the transition. Many of the resources will be mentioned in participant comments in the subsequent segments of this research.

As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) assert, gathering these types of materials proves "useful in understanding official perspectives on programs, the administrative structure, and other aspects of the ...school system" (p. 136). By nature, these materials can be

viewed as subjective in terms of the level of usefulness they provide to students (Bogdan & Biklen). This mere fact made them crucial components to this research as they provided another view of the support that is provided to transfer students throughout the transition process.

Triangulation

In order to develop the levels of validity for this study, triangulation was employed by the researcher. As Denzin (1978) states, “It is conventionally assumed that triangulation is the use of multiple methods in the study of the same object” (p. 294). While several types of triangulation can be employed by researchers, the goal remains the same: to examine the data in multiple ways to ensure the highest level of accuracy and understanding possible. Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966) expand upon this idea by sharing what can be gained by employing triangulation in a research study, “When a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing it contains a degree of validity unattainable by one tested within the more constricted framework of a single method” (p. 174).

To provide this type of triangulation for this study, the researcher asked each participant to read through the transcript of their interview session. Both staff and students were asked to carefully review the documents to ensure that their thoughts and ideas were accurately presented. It is important to note that no noteworthy modifications were requested by any of the responding participants. At this point, the researcher also connected with each staff member to discuss the levels of anonymity that would be retained in the study, with each stating they were comfortable with the approach being taken.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once all interviews had been conducted and transcribed, a multifaceted examination of the data began. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explain, qualitative analysis is the process of exploring and organizing the collected data to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, allowing for dissemination of the information to others. In this study, the constant comparative method was employed to analyze the data. As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state, the purpose of this type of analysis is to interpret the information that has been collected by selectively explaining and arranging the data.

Analysis began after all of the interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim. The researcher transcribed seven of the interviews, while hired students transcribed the remaining 12 interviews. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher began the analysis process, as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). It should be noted that this process was completed three separate times; once for student interviews, once for two-year staff interviews, and once for four-year staff interviews.

Following the direction of Lincoln and Guba (1985), each set of data was “unitized;” a process that involved breaking the data into smaller units of meaning, serving as the foundation for defining the larger categories of meaning to be developed later. As directed by Maykut and Morehouse and Bogdan and Biklen (1992), the units of meaning were then coded with identifying information to allow for a reference back to the original transcript if necessary. Following this, the verbatim data was cut into individual units, allowing for ease in rearranging the pieces of data into categories.

At this point, the researcher began to look for emergent themes by considering recurring words, phrases, topics and concepts discussed by each group. This allowed for a closer examination of the data, uncovering the meaning in what participants said during their interviews. Throughout the process, the comments were scrutinized in regards to the proposed research question. These emergent pieces of information were then compared to one another to create a more cohesive view of the gathered data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Continual refinement of the categories proved crucial at this point.

In order to organize the coded data, the researcher applied the “cut-up-and-put-in-folders approach” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The 12 categories originally created from the student comments were condensed down to eight consistent and inclusive themes. The individual units of coded data were placed into one of eight folders corresponding to these defined categories. Further refinement of those categories found six emergent themes within the student data.

Following the same process, the original 13 categories discovered from the comments of the staff members from the two-year institution were reduced to six emergent themes. Finally, five themes emerged from the original 11 categories within the comments of the four-year staff members. These majors themes serve as the main findings of the research, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Limitations

This study had the following limitations:

1. While a variety of experiences and opinions were shared by the participating students, it must be remembered that a small number of individuals were actually interviewed

- for this study. Although some generalizations are able to be made, it cannot be said that these experiences are the same as every other transfer student.
2. All student participants in this study transferred to UW-La Crosse from one of two campuses, UW-Baraboo or UW-Richland. While student experiences at these institutions may echo others in many ways, the results of this study are specific to these institutions.
 3. Potential participants for this study were limited to students matriculating at the receiving institution for the Fall 2009 term. The students were interviewed in late December of the same year through early February of 2010, so their responses are limited to the experiences they had through one semester at the four-year campus.
 4. Although not a determining factor in selecting participants, it is important to note that all of the nine student participants resided off-campus at the two-year institution, while only one lived on-campus at the new institution at the time of the interviews.
 5. Similarly, demographic information was not considered when selecting participants. Therefore, characteristics such as age, background, or gender, among others, did not factor into the resulting conclusions of the study. It should be noted that the student sample was slightly skewed as it included three male participants and six female participants.
 6. Similarly, this was a self-select study, indicating that all involved students volunteered to be interviewed for the research. This may lead to a positive or negative bias, potentially affecting the results and conclusions of the study.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study aimed to uncover the perceptions held by students of the support systems that are made available during the transfer process. Using a case study methodology, one-on-one interviews were conducted with students who recently transferred to UW-La Crosse. In addition, key staff members who help provide these supports throughout the process were interviewed, allowing for a deeper comprehension of these perceptions. Once this data was collected, it was analyzed using a constant comparative process, pulling out common ideas and themes among the participants. While this method of data collection and analysis provided cohesive themes for understanding the student perceptions of transferring, several factors also limited the full scope of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

OUTCOMES

This chapter will examine the results of the interviews with both students and staff in relation to the proposed research question. Student interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis to gain a more in-depth understanding of how students perceive the supports that are offered to them during the transfer process. In addition, staff members from both the sending and receiving institutions were also interviewed to serve as a supplementary source of information about the supports offered to transfer students during the transition.

Emergent themes from the student interviews are communicated through an exploration of their experiences and perceptions of the transfer process. In addition, the ideas of staff members at each of the involved institutions are explored to provide a complete overview of the supports offered to transfer students on both side of the transitions. Throughout the chapter, student and staff opinions are expressed in verbatim quotations to preserve their intended meaning.

Student Themes

Throughout the interviews conducted with student participants, a variety of themes emerged regarding their transfer experiences. The main themes that emerged included thoughts on the overall transfer experience, seeking out or utilizing support and assistance, academic concerns, support provided beyond advising, connection to each of

the campuses, and adjustment to the new institution. In addition, subthemes were developed for each topic to allow for a deeper understanding of the participants' thoughts and opinions regarding all aspects of the transfer experience.

Overall Transfer Experience

The student participants in this research provided a framework for understanding their transfer experience by describing the overall transition in a variety of ways. Students expressed their thoughts by providing information about their experiences while discussing the level of support they received on both ends of the transition as well as their thoughts on the role of each institution in the process. They also talked about the connection they felt with staff and faculty at the sending institution.

Support and help from two-year campus. Throughout the interviews, students commented on the support and help they were offered by the sending institution from which they transferred. Henry, like many other students, mentioned the important role that the staff at each institution played in his transfer process, suggesting a deep appreciation for this support. "The ladies in Student Services there are just amazing. Some of the nicest people you'll ever meet."

Another participant discussed his satisfaction with the help he was offered by a staff member at the sending institution.

We had just the one office and [the advisor] was kinda like the head honcho of transferring and she really basically told me this is what you need to do, uh, this is when you'd need to do it by, this is the easiest way to do it. Um, I mean she was just a really good help through the entire thing. (Thomas)

In addition, several students also shared their views on the level of preparedness they felt for the transition. Thomas simply states his views on the transfer structure in

place at the sending institution. “Well, I guess like at Baraboo when they said like if you plan on transferring; they had a really good transfer system there in my opinion.”

Henry reiterates this point as he discusses his specific experience working with the staff members at his sending institution.

I wasn't completely ready for it, but as far as what they could prepare me for...definitely, you know, right up there, because, to their abilities they had me ready to go... They went above and beyond to make sure that I was as ready as I could be. (Henry)

Two-year institution's role. As students discussed their experiences with the role that the two-year institution played in their transfer transition, many mentioned the level of advising support they received from faculty and staff. For Dana, the required advising appointments each semester were a time she was able to ensure that she was taking the necessary steps to prepare for her new institution.

Every semester we'd get together and figure out what worked... [My advisor] basically took care of all my classes with me. I felt like he could handle it, so I didn't feel the need to go elsewhere... He knew what he was doing. I don't think it could have been easier had he just came and did it himself. He definitely made it very easy. (Dana)

Though not all students were obligated to participate in these required advising sessions, students from each sending institution referenced the role of the staff and faculty in ensuring their transfer would be successful as possible. Kristin discusses the help she received from her advisor at the two-year institution.

I set up a meeting with him and I showed interest in coming to La Crosse, and so he pulled out all the paperwork and he explained it... Really, it seemed too easy! Just kind of...he'd take away all the stress and the panic about it; he's just like 'It's not as hectic as it sounds.' You know, to kind of calm down and it just happened. That's what really helped me out. (Kristin)

Abigail also discussed the important role that the sending institution played in preparing her for the transition.

Well, I don't know if [La Crosse] has a step-by-step process, but at Richland they had it down, you know, where to look for things and how to do that. And how to get the forms, and they had no problem if you called and had a question about something on the forms or anything. (Abigail)

Despite the positive experience many students talked about having at the two-year institution, several students also mentioned their desire for more information and assistance from the sending institution to prepare them for what they would face at their new campus. Henry discussed the additional assistance he would have appreciated from his sending institution.

[I would have liked a] list of classes and how or what I would need to do especially for gen. eds. Knowing what I would have to take to get the degree that I wanted because the gen. eds. I needed at Baraboo and the ones you need here are different. So they aren't all the same transferring. And knowing which classes I needed to take to take the next up class. (Henry)

While Henry discussed his desire for a more clear-cut process from the sending institution, Kristin provided insight into her need for more general information from the two-year institution about what to expect, and her desire for them to facilitate a connection with the new campus.

A warning would have been nice to know how hectic it would be almost, or maybe if they would have given resources to take people to campus in La Crosse or maybe a tour like that. Or maybe they did. That would have been nice; like a field trip, get something organized for maybe a weekend, say, 'Ok, we're going to different campuses and we'll show you around and stuff.' If they would have set something up like that it would have been nice. (Kristin)

Faculty members provide help. Despite some areas of concern on the part of their preparedness, several students discussed the helpful role that faculty advisors played in their educational career while at the two-year institution. Elizabeth felt confident that her professors would be there to support her throughout the process. "I could talk to anybody if I wanted to. Like any one of my professors would have helped me."

In addition, Sabrina elaborated on this connection by discussing the common, and frequent, conversations that she had with her faculty advisor.

I had a really good advisor...He would just sit me down at the end of the semester and say "this is what you've taken and you need so many credits of this." Like, he just kind of talked me through what I needed to take. That was really helpful for me. (Courtney)

Four-year campus's assistance. Another common topic of conversation during student interviews related to the assistance and support students were offered by the four-year institution to which they were transferring. A few students shared positive thoughts on this support, noting that they felt well-assisted by the receiving institution throughout the process.

However, a more common conversation revolved around the feeling of wanting more from the new campus. When asked if she would like to have seen more coming from the receiving institution, Abigail addressed her desire for more from the four-year campus. "Yeah, definitely, especially during the transfer instead of afterwards."

Henry reiterated this point as he discussed the supports and information that he would like to see shared with future transfer students.

You know, just, have more information about the campus in general as far as what classes are like. And then, if you know what your major is, helping get them started while they are still at the 2-years. Like, having that foot-in-the-door if you have an idea of what you want to do. And as far as the dorms, it would be so great to know about the dorms. Like have an idea what each one was like...I didn't really understand the meal system either... With the ID cards, knowing the difference between Higher and Tower. I mixed that up too. Everything has been kind of guess-and-check. It's those little things for them to know. (Henry)

Feeling of being a transfer student. Tying in directly with many of the ideas mentioned above, several students commented on what it felt like to be a transfer student at their new institution. Alluding to a positive experience, James discussed the friendly

and open reception he felt in coming to the new institution, illustrated through what was offered to him. “Well, just because the tours and the new student days, just more welcoming. “Hey we’re here for you.” instead of “Hey, come find me” type of thing.”

In spite of James’ experience, a few students talked about being received slightly less openly by the new institution. Henry explained his transition to the four-year campus as being welcoming once here, while not so prior to arriving on campus.

As far as before, it’s kind of vague. But, as soon as I got here the information was available. Once you’re here, it almost felt like...they’re almost expecting a lot of people to apply and then not come here is the feeling that you get. Then once you get here, you’re a part of the system now. ‘Come ask questions, we have an advisor for you now.’ So it kinda went lower when you first apply and once you got here, they helped you big time because you became a part of the group. (Henry)

On the other hand, other students still did not feel fully welcomed or accepted by the receiving institution well into their first semesters on campus. Natalie mentioned a lack of openly-available support. “I was just by myself in trying to figure things out. And asking things of my family. If there was someone, I don’t know who they were.”

Along the same vein, Elizabeth talks about the limited opportunities available for transfer students and her desire to feel more connected to the campus.

And it’s not like this place, I don’t know, I don’t want to sound like I’m talking to... I don’t feel like they offer me, you know, ‘Hey, transfer students and new students gathering of some sort.’ There was one at the beginning of the school year, but I worked so I couldn’t go to that, and I don’t think they had another one. (Elizabeth)

Overall commentary. Although specific areas of the overall experience emerged in conversations with each of the students, many also presented succinct views of their perception of the overall process of transferring. James presents an assortment of thoughts on his overall experience.

I honestly don't really know. I was winging it. Yeah, I don't know. It was something online, I can't remember which website it was where it basically had step by step - what you have to do. I can't remember whose website it was. At the same time, after following all those steps, I was still pretty much in the dark in half of it, and I was winging a lot of it. I guess I probably should have asked a little more information from my advisor, but in the same token, I don't think there was too much to do, really. It was just kind of, when you apply for the school, you just had to click transfer from where ever with an Associate's degree... And after that it was just like a normal application. It wasn't that I can remember anything that stuck out saying hey, this is kinda a pain in the butt. (James)

While James' varied experiences throughout the process were not uncommon, not all students had the same confusion and uncertainty while transferring. Many students expressed an overall positive transfer experience with both their sending and receiving institutions. Thomas had no grievances as he provided a review of his transfer experience on both sides. "I thought my transfer process was pretty easy."

Abigail summarized her experience by suggesting that she had a fairly smooth transition to the new institution. "I think they did pretty good actually. I didn't have any problems transferring or anything like that. So I can't really complain."

Henry echoed both of these sentiments and included an observation of the collaboration he saw between the two institutions. "And as far as, like, dealing with the overall transfer it seemed to go really smoothly. The two offices kept very good contact with each other."

Seeking Out and Utilizing Supports

A second theme that emerged in the student interviews was a review of the extent to which the students felt they sought out and utilized the supports and assistance that were provided to them throughout the transfer process. Several students provided thoughts on the role they felt they should assume in finding and making use of these supports. Additional subthemes examined specific experiences at both the two- and four-

year institutions, while many also discussed the additional sources of information they utilized throughout the transition.

Student's role. In regards to seeking out and utilizing supports, recurring comments suggested that many felt the responsibility lay in their own hands. Commenting on the overall process, Henry states that he took it upon himself to make use of everything that he was aware of for fear of the repercussions of not being prepared as the transition drew closer. "Anything that was available I kind of jumped on. Going from a small 2-year to up to UW-La Crosse was a big step, and I realized that and didn't want to be caught unprepared."

Dana also discussed her independent attitude when it came to completing the necessary tasks for the transfer. "...I took a lot into my own hands. I didn't need to, but I just did."

Nevertheless, there were also multiple students who admitted to underutilizing the supports made available to them. Abigail blatantly states that she was one of these students while at the two-year institution. "I'm pretty sure they offered a lot of things, but I didn't get into it..."

Two-year campus experience. Although many remarks included a generalized overview of the transfer process in its totality, several students commented on the specific experience they had with seeking out and utilizing supports while at the two-year institution. Several students suggested that they would have appreciated the information being presented more openly. Although it was made available to them through individual interactions with staff members along with other means, they would have liked to see the information more openly available. At the same time, many students also admitted to

exerting a limited effort searching for the assistance and guidance. Elizabeth commented on this as a factor in her transition.

I guess, uh, I think that maybe I just didn't utilize it as much, but I think they had a lot of things that we could have done there. Cause, they did have a lot of stuff for helping transfer students. (Elizabeth)

Four-year institution experience. In many ways a stark contrast to the ideas discussed regarding the two-year institutions, many students talked about the assistance and help they were offered at their new institution. Natalie maintains that although the support was available at the four-year campus, accessibility to those resources was as openly offered as compared to her sending institution.

The support that I got was pretty much the same as at Baraboo. Other than not knowing the people, generally who to talk to, when I hit on somebody to talk to, they were really helpful in directing me and trying to help me figure out what to do. (Natalie)

Discussing his experience with finding answers to specific questions, Henry provides a deeper insight into the supports that he searched for on the new campus.

There have been so many people I can't remember names. I would...ask a question and they would say, 'That's not us, that's them.' And they would give me the link for the person. So I would email them and they would let me know if they could help me out, and if not they would give me the link to someone else. So it was easier to get the information but it still wasn't really personal. It was still guess-and-check finding out who can help me out with what I need. (Henry)

Reaffirming Henry's comments, Dana mentions her wish for more outright offering of information at the four-year campus. "I'm not saying it was difficult because I chose to do it on my own, but I'm sure I could have gotten assistance. But had I had that option, it would have been a lot easier."

Additional sources of information. Aside from the on-campus sources of information that were utilized during the transition, students also cited several other

resources that were crucial throughout the transfer process. Many students referenced the online resources that were made available and proved useful in their search for necessary information. Sabrina, providing her views on the information available on the website, felt that the receiving institution fully met the needs of transfer students. “The website is really helpful.”

Kristin discussed using the websites of both campuses to gather the necessary information for her transfer.

I went to the UWL website and just kinda looked through everything, their programs and majors and stuff so...I just looked what I needed to take for my major and what classes I already taken care of at UW-Richland and how they would carry over. (Kristin)

In addition to these web resources, several students, such as Natalie, cited parents or friends as an important source of information while navigating the transfer transition. “I talked to my mom about stuff. And I talked to my sister, because she had [transferred too].”

When asked where he gathered the necessary information for his transfer, Thomas expressed his gratitude for the guidance that he gathered in talking to current students who had gone through similar experiences. “My roommates and my sister. Just because my sister’s been here and she knows what to do and same with my roommates because they were already here for a year.”

Academic Concerns

Throughout the interviews, numerous remarks were made related specifically to the academic concerns of the students. Specifically, students discussed the issues surrounding credit transfer, as well as the concerns that arose without an assigned advisor

at the time of transfer. Students also commented on the support and assistance they were offered by the Dean's Offices for their respective areas of study.

Credit transfer. Several students suggested that the process of determining which credits would transfer to the new institution provided a large amount of uncertainty. Henry elaborated on this idea when discussing his credit transfer experience.

Um, as far as transferring credits, that was a bit of a pain because it was kind of a guess-and-check as to which credits would go through. And then which ones weren't and then they kind of changed their minds after they had already done it. So that became kind of a hassle. A lot less credits transferred than I thought would. (Henry)

Natalie had a similar experience and went on to discuss the process of ensuring a proper evaluation of the credits she was attempting to transfer with.

You're given a list of the classes that you've had and how they transfer and that was helpful, to at least know that. The different campuses call each class a different thing, so my advisor here advised me to find all of my syllabi from Baraboo and talk to the heads of the department and see what it might transfer as and how I might start and go from there. I've just started in the generals that I missed and one psychology class last semester. (Natalie)

Advisor assignments at four-year institution. A second area of concern for many students related to the confusion caused without an advisor assignment at the time of their transfer. Kristin commented on her apprehension at selecting courses without the guidance of an advisor.

An advisor would have been nice... It kind of didn't help not to have a person to talk to for what I needed to do to pick a major... The advisor would have been nice... I was a little nervous that I was doing things out of order and that I kinda did it wrong without having advisors tell me 'Oh, you should do this.' But, um, after I got the advisor it was okay. It could have been bad though. (Kristin)

Along the same lines, Henry articulated his views on the importance of connecting with an advisor early in the process.

Knowing what classes to go, like, if I would have been able to sit down with somebody and tell them this is what I want to do and knowing which classes would be best for that to set up. Beginning steps. (Henry)

Assuming much of the responsibility herself, Natalie expressed her desire for an advisor to help her map out a plan for the future.

I wish I would have taken the initiative to figure out beforehand who I needed to talk to ask the question of ‘Does this class that I took at my old institution transfer?’ and ‘Where does this fall in with everything else?’ and ‘Where would I go from this one?’... I wish I had somebody to sit down and maybe map out a couple of semesters instead of just one by one. (Natalie)

Abigail commented on her thoughts regarding the connection between students and advisors earlier in the transition. “Maybe more communication between students and their advisors if they needed it. That might be good.”

Utilized Dean’s Offices for advising. While many students expressed frustration at the lack of early advising support from their receiving institution, many did find help and guidance in working with the Dean’s Office for their respective college. As James stated, many students were able to create a long-term plan in working with these advisors. “I met with [an advisor] and he helped with kind of leading me in the right direction as far as scheduling and what to think about planning-wise, long-term.”

Some of the participants expressed deep appreciation for the advisors in the Dean’s Offices, who provided them with direction and support during the transfer process. The following comments clearly illustrate this gratitude.

Yeah. I talked to [the advisor in the Dean’s Office] about six times because she was very helpful. She was very good. I really like her. She was good. I went and talked to her because I looked at my transfer credit whatever thing and she was like “this will either transfer as this or as this.” But I took them both, so I had to convince her that I took them both so she said “OK. We’ll let you go. We’ll transfer both.” So I didn’t have to take them over. She was really good. If ever I had a problem, [she] was the one I went and talked to. (Sabrina)

Yeah, when I got here, and I was setting up my first semester, I did it with [the advisor in the Dean's Office]. I did it myself, but then I went in and ran it by her. She said everything was good and it was good. She was very good...because I wasn't familiar with academics here; I mean it varies from institutions... She was a big help in that aspect. (Dana)

Supports and Opportunities Beyond Advising

Aside from advising supports, students also mentioned several other opportunities and resources that were made available to them as they made the transition to the new campus. Many of these comments centered on the orientation program that was offered for transfer students as they began their journey at the new institution. At the same time, students also provided several comments and suggestions for improvements or additions to the current supports being offered from incoming transfer students.

Orientation program. Although not all students attended the orientation program, those that did provided helpful insight into the perceived usefulness of the session. As a student who had previously attended two other campus orientations, James felt that the program was directly in line with what a transfer student would need to know.

The tour was very helpful and orientation was helpful, but in the same token, I had gone on two other ones, so I just heard the stuff I heard before. But for like a new student, it definitely would have been helpful. (James)

Natalie and Elizabeth each expressed thoughts on slight improvements to the orientation program to align it more appropriately with the needs of incoming transfer students. Elizabeth articulated that having multiple sessions would have been more convenient for many students. "Maybe in the beginning having another sort of thing. There was only one chance for, like, people to be, like, informed as a transfer student."

Natalie expanded upon this idea to an even greater extent by suggesting a more involved orientation program.

Something akin to the freshman orientation would not be completely lost on a transfer student, especially when they are coming from...smaller campuses where stuff is more contained and possibly a little easier to go from semester to semester rather than having to lay things out a little more. And definitely for people, like me, who tend to do it more one semester to the next, definitely have someone sit down and help you figure things out a semester beforehand and help you figure out where you're planning to go. That would definitely be helpful. (Natalie)

Improvements and suggestions. Additional areas of support and assistance were also explored by students during the interviews. One area that received a large amount of attention was in relation to building stronger social connections on the new campus.

Elizabeth conveyed her feelings of isolation by discussing her personal struggles connecting to others.

I wish I would have known other transfer students, that would have been cool to know. I bet you probably received positive responses from some people, and I would like to know what they did different. (Elizabeth)

Discussing her own feelings in this area, Kristin suggested that the campus assume a stronger role in facilitating connections among students, specifically those transferring into the institution.

Maybe a meeting to meet up with other transfer students... That would have been pretty cool. I definitely felt alone in it for a while because I didn't have anyone to talk to. I don't know, I know it would have been nice to meet new people. I know freshmen; they get to live in the dorms, and a whole new environment. I don't know, just living off campus and being a transfer student- it's kind of like everyone already knows each other and so you don't get to know anyone as well. So meeting with the new people...something fun, so you can take a load off a little. (Kristin)

Abigail also expressed a desire for more guidance in connecting to other transfer students as the receiving institution.

Yeah, it would be kind of nice for more opportunities. It's difficult to get to know people when you live off-campus because you don't get to spend as much time with them. But otherwise, most of the people seem pretty friendly here. (Abigail)

Closely related, students also expressed a need for continued support at the four-year institution once classes have started. Dana, like many other students, communicated a level of support and comfort that would come from this type of continued contact. "It's kind of reassuring to me when somebody says 'How's it going here? You've been here for a month and a half now, do you have any questions? Is everything going okay?' That's a good idea."

Kristin shared a similar point of view.

I think for some people it would be nice...just kind of check up on transfer students because I know the first semester would have been nice if someone was like, "Ok, how is your transfer going, is everything all right with you" you know, that would have been a good like thing so I can ask questions or have someone to talk to about it. I got lucky though because both of my roommates are transfer students so I kinda talked to them. But you know, it would be a big help if someone checked up from the school. (Kristin)

Several students also suggested additional programs, such as transfer students panels, to increase their connection and improve the transition process. Many, such as Elizabeth, saw this type of program as a helpful means of communicating the expectations and realities of the new institution.

I wish they had, like, a way to, like, make other students from that particular school...Ok, say I transfer from Richland, and they have, like, a group gathering, whatever, of other transfer students from Richland come and tell the new transfer students from Richland about that. Or past transfer students coming here, telling us things that we should know as transfer students. (Elizabeth)

Kristin also viewed this type of program or event as a way to learn more about the overall process of transferring to a new institution.

Like maybe a question and answer type thing so you can, like, talk to people who have been through the experience and so you can be like ‘Okay, how was this for you?’ or ‘Am I doing this right?’ or, you know, that would be nice. (Kristin)

As mentioned earlier, many transfer students came to their new campus from a smaller institution where personal interactions were much more commonplace. In many cases, students were able to gather nearly all necessary information in one, centralized location. However, once they transitioned to the new campus, this centralized site for information was no longer available. Because of this, many students commented on the need for a specific individual or office dedicated to assisting transfer students once at the new institution. Discussing her frustration with finding answers to several questions, Natalie suggested that the four-year institution provide a central place to go with inquiries and concerns. “Having someone in general to ask these questions who would be able to connect you to the people you actually need to talk to. That would be nice.”

Elaborating on this same point, Henry voiced his frustration with this aspect of the transfer transition.

Yeah, a place for general questions. Like if you needed something. Like if not, just take you there to help you out because you just kind of feel like you go from a small campus to here – it’s a big place. You’re wondering where to go for this and that... It was nuts first learning where everything was. Just a general guide telling you to go here for this... Just somebody. (Henry)

Connection to Campus

Connections to campus emerged as another important theme in the student interviews. Participants commented on the levels of communication at both the two- and four-year institution. In addition, they also discussed the personal connection they felt on each campus.

Two-year institution's communication. In a few cases, students stated that the communication and information they received at the two-year institution fell short of their expectations. James mentioned that although the information was available, he would have liked to see it communicated more clearly from staff at the two-year campus.

I think just having it more openly available. I'm sure it was there, it's just the fact that it wasn't right there so I didn't go search for it so much to where it could have been right there and I wouldn't have had to do much of anything, but that's being lazy on my part. (James)

In many cases, however, students felt that the communication they received at the two-year institution was exactly what they wanted to see. Sabrina talked about the large amount of information that was available in the campus's resource room for students preparing to transfer. "There were pamphlets everywhere on campus about transfer. There was a room, a resource room, which was like a door away from his office that people could go in."

Henry felt much the same as he discussed the wide variety of resources available.

There were, like, brochures and stuff that you could go flip through. They gave you the different colleges and then they gave you a general on what colleges were the best to go to for certain classes. And then they, themselves, the ladies in the Student Services office, would go and if you had any questions of them they were more than willing to tell you what they knew or find someone who did know. That was very convenient. (Henry)

Henry also described the consistent communication he received from advisors in the Student Services office.

"I would get emails telling me any new updates, any new things I had to get in there, whether it was if I had to come in there to fill out certain paperwork. They kept checking up, you know "how's it going?" They let me know how everything was going. Especially if I needed anything else. I was never not in the loop on what I needed to do." (Henry)

Four-year campus's communication. In much the same way, students also commented on the information-sharing and communication they felt was present at the four-year institution. In these conversations, it became apparent that several students were pleased with this aspect of their new campus. Sharing her thoughts on the information that was provided by the Admissions Office, Kristin discussed the usefulness of the materials she received. "The packet in the mail really helped me a lot. Getting everything in order – a checklist. I remember the checklist. That definitely helped."

Several students also expressed an appreciation for the ease with which they have been informed and assisted at the four-year institution. Abigail has remained connected to the campus through regular emails providing her with a variety of information. "There's a ton of emails that UW-L sends out that talk about who you can go to, and get-togethers, and sports, and pretty much everything that campus has going on."

Thomas communicated a similar sentiment by commenting on the ease with which he received responses from staff members at the four-year institution.

Just kind of any other like odd ball questions like random questions that came up for me, and they were really good about getting back to me and that kinda stuff too so the whole transition was really smooth for me. (Thomas)

In spite of this, several students discussed a poor communication experience with their new institution in a variety of ways. Natalie elaborated on the communication differences between the two institutions.

Somewhere warning you that things are a little more scattered here. Like, because it's a larger campus, each office has a subdivision of everything. Whereas at Baraboo, there was only like 500-1,000 tops. So the offices that handled things were more contained. And if you went to one you could easily get what you needed. (Natalie)

Both Sabrina and Henry expressed a desire for improved communications regarding crucial information for their transition. Their comments below clearly articulated this point.

I got a lot of random stuff. Stuff that was like ‘I don’t need this. I don’t know why it’s here.’ I got like ‘Welcome to UW-La Crosse. And I hope your years here are enjoyable.’ And it doesn’t give me any information and I was like ‘Yeah, they’re going to be enjoyable.’ But I don’t know. And then I stopped getting stuff all together. That’s why scheduling for classes was so hard. (Sabrina)

They don’t really do a whole lot as far as telling you any information. It’s more them saying ‘Okay, you’re transferring. You need to pick out this for your hall. After you pick out your hall, you need to know you move-in date.’ It wasn’t really anything you didn’t already know from the information that they sent you. (Henry)

Several students also voiced a frustration with the timing of the communication they did receive. For Sabrina, the information came too late in the process, which she viewed as a genuine problem.

Just make sure that people who are transferring get information sooner, maybe. But not like, you know, like a semester too soon. ‘Cuz I lose things and I’m sure other people lose things too. So we can our start looking at the course book at least... And I had friends transfer from Viterbo and they were so confused too. So it’s not just Richland that’s confused. It’s the transfer process in general. (Sabrina)

Connection with faculty and staff. Another subtheme related to the students’ connection to both campuses related directly to the relationships they were able to develop with staff and faculty. Several students discussed the apparent differences in this area between the two institutions. Discussing her experience at the two-year institution, Elizabeth expressed dissatisfaction with the stark change she felt when coming to the new campus.

Like the advisors there, or just, like, anybody there, is actually really helpful. Since the school is so small, they can talk to any student at any time. Whereas here, nobody’s ever around, I feel like. Like, you could talk to anybody there.

Like, if you have at that school you pretty much know half the people there, and half the professors, 'cuz it's so small. (Elizabeth)

Henry expanded on these thoughts by discussing his appreciation for the stronger connection he felt across the board at his sending institution. "I understand that there are a lot more students here, but that personal thing. You kind of feel accepted."

Henry later provided a more detailed look at his views regarding the connection to campus.

There was so much stuff that was different and it's almost...even if you have the information, it's overwhelming to try and get it figured out yourself. And you might think you have something figured out right and you might be wrong, so it would be nice to have that person there to ask just to make sure. (Henry)

Thomas also shared his views on the connection to campus aspect by providing an example of the one-on-one relationships he grew accustomed to at the sending institution.

Like the professors up here were a little...like you get a lot more one-on-one in Baraboo like if you wanted to. I mean, I could still easily ask my professors, but I think like in my opinion [Baraboo], they're more kinda like more open to it. Here, a lot of it's just kind of like, 'Just send me an email, and we'll talk.' And at Baraboo, 'Come, feel free to come down to my office and chat there.' (Thomas)

Abigail and Kristin also referenced the personal relationship they fostered at their previous institutions as compared to their experience on the new campus. Kristin mentioned her feelings of connectedness through an exploration of her classroom experience. "Yeah, the classes are so big; they don't really get to see you one-on-one as often or get to know you by your first name even sometimes."

At the same time, Abigail had a similar experience outside of the classroom at the four-year institution.

Well, La Crosse is a bigger school than Richland and I kind of like it that way. But I also liked having the smaller kind of school because you get more one-on-one attention and they are able to help you with more things specifically with what you are asking for. (Abigail)

Adjustment to New Institution

The final emergent theme that surfaced during the student interviews were ideas surrounding the process of adjusting to the new environment of their receiving campus. While several students discussed the difficulties they felt as they attempted to navigate a new institution, many described their rather quick assimilation to the new environment. Closely related, students also frequently referenced the idea of independence throughout the process and how this played into their ability to adjust.

Areas of concern. Many students felt that adjusting to the setting and expectations of their new campus was one of the most challenging aspects of their transfer experience. Students discussed a variety of areas that led to this confusion and concern, ranging from building locations, to course expectations, to the size difference from their previous institution. Each of the following quotes provided a clear view of these concerns.

I didn't know where things were. I didn't know what I should be taking; that would be just talking to an advisor though. I think the whole advisor meeting thing you had this, like, semester, I didn't go to that either. I should have gone to that. I understand that that would probably be a lot more helpful. (Elizabeth)

Maybe a little more warning about the big lecture halls because everything is so one-on-one there. It's like, once you get thrown into these huge classes and, you know, you don't get as much one-on-one with professors as you do at UW-Richland 'cuz classes are so small. (Kristin)

Maybe it wasn't as smooth as I would have wanted it to be, because I was confused a lot for the first couple weeks. Classes were pretty confusing. I know where the buildings are now, but that's a semester in. (Sabrina)

As far as classes themselves, I didn't understand. There's a difference at UW-Baraboo classes and the numbering compared to here and the numbering. As far as for difficulty and what they need. I was in a 400, two 300 classes and a 200 class this semester. I had my work cut out for me. It was alright but it would have been nice to know, this is what you're cut out for. (Henry)

So, I don't know, maybe because Baraboo was smaller, the business office or the cashiers, that whole thing was contained in the commons and they wrote stuff on the board and you knew. So that was kind of different I suppose. I'm not sure what else." (Natalie)

However, many students shared additional adjustment experiences, highlighting the optimistic view they have of the overall experience. Kristin admitted that the transition was not initially smooth, but suggested that after a short amount of time, she became more accustomed to the four-year campus. "Sure, it was really crazy at first... But, now that I'm settled in, it's getting better. But it was definitely crazy the first half of the semester... Now that I'm settled, it seems like it worked out pretty okay."

Kristin later elaborated on this comment.

I'm so used to Richland Center, you know and the campus cuz I've lived there my whole life. But um, yeah it was just the change - everything was different. The city - being in a city instead of a small town. But um, yeah, I don't know. The curriculum - that was a big difference too because it was a little different because all the profs at Richland talk to each other and kind of know what exactly they're covering in each class. It wasn't too bad - just an adjustment at first. (Kristin)

Abigail shared a similar experience, and provided insight into the resources she utilized during the transition.

Since I wasn't familiar with the campus, the map that you guys had online was amazing because I didn't know where I was going so I could get really lost. So that was really, really helpful. And I think it was pretty much simple after I was here and settled in. So it didn't take too long to get adjusted. It was really home-like and pretty easy to adjust to. (Abigail)

Preparation for the transition. During more in-depth discussions regarding their adjustment to the new campus, several students expressed views on the levels of independence they felt during the transfer process. In many cases, students commented on the outright support provided and the stark contrasts between the sending and

receiving institutions. Henry shared his experiences in being offered support and guidance at the four-year campus.

They [2-year] send you emails about any questions and stuff. Like when I first started wanting to go there... Anytime I had a question, they were like 'Okay, go here, talk to this person.' You know, it was just like hand-walked me through it all because I would have been lost if I didn't have that. (Henry)

Also explaining his interactions at his previous school, Thomas described the highly involved level of support he felt at the two-year campus as compared to his experience after the transfer.

With me, I had someone holding my hand. I don't know what you have to offer here, as far as booklets about transferring, but I never went out of my way to find out anything. Just people...the people at Baraboo told me everything I needed and to check that you're a transfer student. (Thomas)

Relating back to the idea of being prepared to work more independently, many students discussed the process of finding help at the four-year school. Having grown accustomed to the high level of support at the two-year institution, Elizabeth described her experience when first transferring to the new campus.

If I searched out somebody then I would receive help, but otherwise, if I didn't search out help or ask, I don't think I really would have received any help... Maybe eventually somebody would have emailed me, but I don't feel like anybody else would have helped me, unless I looked for it. (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth's thoughts suggest that she felt an adequate amount of support and assistance at the two-year institution, while this was not necessarily the case at the four-year campus. Expanding on these ideas, Sabrina suggests that the two-year campus may have assisted too much prior to her transfer. In her views, a higher level of autonomy throughout the process would have prepared her better for the transition.

They babied me too much at Richland, maybe. Because my advisor was someone I had class with everyday and he knew me really well so he was like 'Okay, you need to take this and you need to take this.' And I don't have that here now, so

I'm like 'Crap.' I think they maybe babied me too much... Maybe if I would have learned to do it better myself then I wouldn't have had such a hard time doing it here, maybe. (Sabrina)

Two-Year Campus Staff Themes

Interviews with staff members from the two-year campuses provided an additional level of information regarding the supports that are made available to students at their respective institutions. During these conversations, several themes also emerged, often aligning closely with the same ideas presented in the student interviews.

Connecting to the receiving campus, setting students up for success, and the types of supports offered to transferring students were all themes that materialized from the staff interviews. They also discussed staff and faculty connections, student issues and concerns, and communication in several ways during the exchanges.

Connection to Receiving Institution

All of the support staff from each of the two-year institutions referenced the importance of connecting with the four-year campus. This connection, however, was discussed in two distinct ways. First, the two-year staff emphasized the importance they see in building and maintaining connections themselves to the campuses to which students are frequently transferring. In addition, they talked about the significance of encouraging students to connect with their receiving institution prior to the actual transfer.

Campus-to-campus. Several staff members shared their views on remaining connected to the campuses that students regularly transfer to. A number of these comments indicated that the schools feel an overall positive relationship with UW-La Crosse. One advisor illustrated this point as she shared her views on the importance of

remaining connected to the receiving institutions. “I know that, having good relationships with the four-year campuses, and being able to meet them face to face is really important.”

Another staff member voiced a similar opinion regarding the positive, helpful relationships he sees as vital to student success when he said, “Communication is the key. Because we don’t want our students to have problems. It doesn’t do them any good and it doesn’t do us any good.”

This same staff member also discussed the negative repercussions of missing crucial information from other institutions. In particular, he felt that information is often presented too late in the game, negatively affecting his ability to assist students.

Sometimes we find out after the fact. And so that’s not good. But I think for the most part, schools are pretty good about letting us know when something is coming down the pike. Schools are supposed to inform each other when there are changes and I think there have been times in the past when that hasn’t happened. So it can be a little frustrating at times.

All things considered, the overarching message from all staff members remained consistent. As one support staff shared, the general notion was that both the sending and receiving campuses need to continue to find ways to work with one another in mutually-beneficial ways.

It’s really trying to operate more as a system, collaborate...because we’re all in here for student success and whatever that takes. I think the two-years and the four-years are doing a much better job of talking about what those might be and how to best prepare our students for the next step. So, we’re working on it.

Both two-year institutions mentioned that an effective means of building and maintaining these fundamental campus connections is through yearly visits hosted by receiving institutions. Many discussed the benefits they have felt after being invited to a four-year campus to learn about changes in requirements and expectations. One support

staff expressed his outright desire for UW-La Crosse to begin hosting this type of program for advisors from two-year campuses. “[Some campuses] do a transfer advisors workshop every fall and they do a really nice job. People from all the different programs come in and update us. I wish La Crosse would do that.”

A colleague at the other two-year campus expressed a similar need for receiving important information in this way, while also mentioning the additional benefits gained from these programs. “We jump on the chance to go there, both to get updates on any changes going on, but more to establish contacts.”

Another advisor expanded upon these same ideas by sharing what she gets from attending these programs at other institutions.

I think the single most valuable thing you get out of those transfer programs, is the connection that you get out of those people, because that’s who I go to. La Crosse has made a lot of changes in the last 5 years and I feel pretty disconnected.

Student-to-campus. Staff members also shared their thoughts on guiding students to connect with their new institution throughout the transition. Students are encouraged to build relationships early with the appropriate people at the new campus, allowing them to achieve a smoother transition. One support staff’s advice for students looking to transfer out of the two-year institution was to begin early. “We just encourage them to start looking and thinking fast. Visiting the four-year campuses and start deciding where they want to go because, of course, requirements are different.”

One advisor, using a simple analogy, described a common conversation that she has with many students regarding this same idea.

I always use the analogy, all the time, with the students. It’s like a relay race, you know. You are at the point here that you are handing the baton off, from me to you, for you to give to [another advisor] on a campus, you know. If there is a

specific person, or you know somebody while you're still here, but you've started that line of communication with them.

Support staff also mentioned having a similar conversation with students, illustrating to them the implications that this preparation may have for them in the future. “And the sooner they start building a relationship with...people who are in these departments, the better off they are going to be as far as knowing what [the new campus] needs.”

Again, furthering the previous thoughts, one advisor called upon the receiving institutions to increase their outreach to transfer students prior to their arrival on campus.

We have campuses that put on transfer programs for prospective transfer students, and I think that will happen more and more... We can alert students to those programs and dates and encourage them to attend and I think they really welcome that because they are prospective and they are making the decision of where to go and there are usually comparing places and so what I encourage students to do, I really talk about things to look for as you comparing how to make judgment decisions.

Setting Students Up for Success

Throughout the staff interviews, another common point of conversation revolved around the fact that the ultimate goal is to set students up for success at the new institution. Although success can be defined differently by everyone, the sentiment remained constant throughout the interviews: the two-year campus is aimed to serve as a point of access to further education.

Talking about transfer. Staff members discussed the degree to which transfer preparation is wrapped into everything at the two-year campus. Support staff clearly articulated this point when asked how transfer conversations and preparation were wrapped into the work of the two-year advisors. “It runs through everything we do.

Again, it comes down to, people aren't going to come here if they don't make a successful transfer, with everything we do."

Several coworkers echoed these ideas by stating that the advisors work around the premise that all students will eventually transfer out to another institution. "Every student who gets admitted here, we assume is going to transfer. So with that mindset going in, everything we do is geared towards the transfer student."

One advisor expanded upon these comments as he discussed the institution's philosophy on working with and assisting transfer students.

Basically everything we do is geared toward transfer. And so, even from the moment we first talk with a prospective student, we're talking about the time they're going to be leaving, because you can start here, but if you want a Bachelor's Degree, of course, you can't finish here, currently. So, everything, I mean. I just think our whole mindset is helping students from day one understand that why they do here impacts what they're going to be able to do later and how what they do here fits in with what they're going to do to achieve the goal of a Bachelor's degree. So we do that through our STAR sessions; that's our summer advising and registration sessions for new students.

In addition to the previous statements, several staff members also mentioned the need for these conversations early in the game, hopefully before the student even enters the two-year institution for the first day of classes. As numerous colleagues discussed, the conversation about transfer begins even with future students. "Well, I think even from the time we first talk to prospects, we're asking them 'What majors are you looking at and what transfer colleges are you looking at?'"

The additional quotes from other support staff provided below also illustrate this point.

And so advising is really starting to look a little bit more at pre-college things we can do. We have roughly 200 students that are admitted for next fall already. What can we do with those 200 between now and June when they come on campus to register? What can we do with them on the day? And what can we do

with them from June to the start date? And then, now we've had maybe 3 or 4 different opportunities to advise and get some of the pre-college things and you should know type things to where we can really hit the ground running that first semester. And so it's ongoing...

Thinking way back to when they first matriculate and go through orientation and our registration program, I think there is help starting way back there in understanding what the process is and the steps to earning a degree and spend time talking about that.

Taking it one step further, one advisor shared her views on how students may perceive the conversations and recurring messages about the transfer process.

Probably it's more indirect, than directly, uh, because we talk about their progress towards the degree, we talked about they can do here and they can't do here, what they'll have to be doing at the transfer institution, or plural... So, I mean, it's directly talked about, but, I don't know that students see that as real direct.

Preparing students for the transition. Staff members also discussed their role, as advisors, in preparing students for the new atmosphere of the receiving institution. In a few instances, advisors discussed how they feel the deeply individualized attention students receive at the two-year campus may become a hindrance once the students have made the transition. Many support staff talked about the conscious effort to encourage each student to take initiative on their own behalf.

We try to put them in touch with people because they have got to take the initiative. I think sometimes, I try not to do it so much anymore, but I think we have sometimes done too much for the students and then they don't learn how to advocate for themselves. Because I can call [a campus] and say 'Hey.' But the student needs to do that.

One advisor discussed his approach in working with transfer students as a progression through the two years most will spend at the first institution.

We're trying to equip them and spoon-feed them the resources that are going to help them be successful. And we'll do a little more hand-holding and a little more supporting than we may necessarily prefer to, and then we'll save the challenges for sophomore year once they've navigated that first year and shown they can do it. Build up some success and some confidence.

Another staff member recommended a better way to prepare students for the transition to the new institution.

We tend to hold hands here, maybe a little bit more. I don't know if should is the right word. Students expect it from us, families expect it from us, and that's why they are here, but, maybe we need to do a better job of letting go of some of these kids, maybe... I think, sometimes, we need to be a little more hardnosed too, because they are going to need to be prepared, just because of sheer size. I don't know exactly how we do that, but, that's something I have always felt that that's an issue or a hurdle the students have to get through when they make the transition.

However, many conversations with support staff suggested that they need to prepare students for a new environment which generally requires a higher level of independence than they may be accustomed to. The following remarks plainly illustrate the responsibility that staff members feel for assisting students in this way.

But, we always try to underscore everything with, we are hopefully teaching them the things to look for, to ask, to take, so that when you do get to that institution you are ready to rock and roll and you are the best advocate, for you, as you can be.

I think just helping students recognize what our office is here for and that sometimes they need to take it upon themselves to ask the questions. It's that whole challenge and support thing, and where they're at developmentally, and getting them to move a little but, because we know that when they get to that four-year campus, they're going to have to have that initiative to ask questions and find the spot and that's not necessarily going to be handed to them. And it may be taken for granted that they know where to go and where to ask, and so, in a lot of respects, that's what we're here for too is to let them fail or let them miss an opportunity so that we can help them maybe recognize what needs to be done next time in terms of moving forward and what those expectations might be on the next campus or in that next program... And so helping them recognize that even though it's a bigger place, there are people there who do exactly what we do here. It's just a matter of taking the initiative and not assuming that someone is out there looking out for them.

We make students better self advocates, so that when they land at the next institution and the transfer institution, they are a little more outgoing maybe, then when they came in here, and can seek out resources and help for themselves.

Types of Support Provided

A third theme that emerged in the two-year staff interviews centered on the information and thoughts regarding the supports that are made available to students transferring out of the institution. As was the case with the student interviews as well, one of the most common areas of conversation in this realm related to the advising students received while at the two-year campus.

Advising. Several staff members discussed the structure of advising on their respective campuses. Although both institutions are part of the UW System, each handles advising with a slightly different attitude. One advisor shared information about UW-Baraboo's advising structure, while also commenting on the differences at UW-Richland.

I think that's a difference between us and Richland, even though we are the same, basically, the same institution and the same mission and same, pretty much, curriculum, the way that they do it there, I believe, they even put a hold on your record, until you have met with an advisor, we do not do that here.

Another staff member from UW-Baraboo provided insight into the advising arrangements where students, with few exceptions, are not required to meet with an assigned advisor.

Our at-risk students are assigned advisors, but others can pick and choose. [Most] of our new freshmen take a freshmen seminar course, and whoever their instructor is for that course is their advisor for the first term. Many of them will continue with that advisor, and of course, faculty instructors, will work with our advising staff in the office.

Conversely, several staff member shared that students at UW-Richland are assigned a specific advisor, either in the Student Services Office or a faculty member, and are required to meet with them each semester prior to registration. One advisor clearly discussed this practice at the institution. "Every student on our campus has an assigned advisor. They cannot register without meeting with an advisor."

Another UW-Richland staff member developed this idea further by discussing what he feels students get from these required advising interactions.

We put holds on their record and they have to meet with an advisor every semester. So every semester they are getting feedback from their advisor on their progress towards that transfer goal. [At some other campuses], the advisors are available, if they seek out the help. But here we make them get the help.

Regardless of the particular advising method being utilized, staff members from each institution discussed the personal, one-on-one interactions that they are able to have with students. When asked about the type of advising appointments most typically employed at the two-year institution, several mentioned the individual meeting most central to their mission. “It’s really the more one-on-one. We’ve talked about some small group sessions... But we haven’t done it yet. So it’s really pretty much one-on-one between student and advisor.”

Another staff member also discussed the one-on-one interactions she commonly has with students, and what the students can take away from the appointments. “I think we not only advise the students, but I think we train them to get accustomed to talking to an advisor before making big decisions.”

As an illustration of the highly personal conversations many advisors mentioned, one staff member offered an overview of the preparation for an appointment in which a student looks to learn more about the transfer process.

If a student comes in to meet with an advisor to discuss transfer, when we’re preparing for their appointment to come in and meet with an advisor. We’ll ask where they’re planning to transfer and what they plan to major in so the advisor has time before the appointment to get onto that website to look up the information for that transfer school, what is needed for admission, and what classes are needed for that major before the student even comes in.

Additional supports. In addition to advising, there are also a wide variety of supports offered to transferring students at the two-year campuses. Some of the initiatives discussed include summer orientation or registration programs and first year seminar courses which focus on helping students through the initial adjustment to college. In addition to these supports, staff members discussed several additional programs and services in greater detail.

Many of the resources discussed are available to students at any time. Support staff shared information about a resource room contained within the Student Services Office at UW-Richland which provides students with an opportunity to explore options for their transfer. “We have our resource library out here and that has information from all the state schools, technical colleges, and even out-of-state schools. So that’s there for them to go through anytime.”

In addition, advisors at both campuses were quick to discuss how much they appreciate the Transfer Information System (TIS) offered as an online resource by the UW System. This particular resource has proven useful for advisors who are able to work with more confidence as they assist students. However, as one comment suggested, it is also a helpful resource for students to utilize as well.

And of course TIS. We use it all the time. And when students come in, I sit with them and I say ‘You are familiar with TIS, right?’ And most are... Because it’s really kind of the bible for transferring to UW System schools.

Another advisor also shared an appreciation for this program, while also suggesting that it offers students an increased level of assurance during an often difficult transition.

The other thing I use continuously is TIS. The guides are great, but just the wizards are wonderful too. The whole thing is just super, and I think, it’s just

valuable to students because they build a level of confidence in what they are doing here.

A component of TIS that many advisors also commented on are the transfer guides that have been prepared, to varying degrees, by each of the four-year campuses in the UW System. These guides provide course equivalencies and information that can be used by both students and advisors. Support staff stated that the guides are used regularly in interactions with students, particularly when looking for courses to suggest for upcoming terms. “We can go to these transfer guides, and advise a student exactly what courses to take, which ones can be taken here, which ones we do not have...”

Many advisors also discussed the additional online resources that they utilize and regularly suggest to students. Several support staff stated that the websites of the receiving institution are invaluable resources for the student’s transition. “So I can say ‘Here is what I know, but you always need to make sure you are going on and becoming familiar with the website of where you are going and the major you are looking to.’”

Although not readily available at any time like the above-mentioned supports, several advisors shared information about annual transfer fairs held on their campuses. “There is a transfer fair... Other campuses are invited to come in and set up a table in the commons and student can just circulate amongst those tables.”

Another advisor described the fair as an annual event, held each fall, that allows students to interact with representatives from a variety of four-year campuses.

We do a transfer fair the first Tuesday in November. So representatives from most UW campuses, Viterbo comes, others, come and set up in our student center. And people can come any time and set up, but this transfer fair is a focused event where representatives of the baccalaureate campuses come to talk with students.

Utilizing these supports. Several advisors shared their views on the extent to which they believe students are utilizing what is being offered. One advisor offered an optimistic observation, suggesting that students are taking advantage of the efforts of the staff members.

And I think the students who know what they're doing and have navigated that first semester and first year well have done so because they are prepared and know where to go for answers and they take advantage of all the things we offer.

The staff members at UW-Richland also shared similar views, although for slightly different reasons. As a direct result of the required advising appointments for each student twice per year, these support staff felt that the students could not get away without taking away at least a small piece of information or help. "Do they use it? I would like to think that for the most part they do. Because, as we said, clearly every student has to utilize it to some degree."

A colleague echoed this idea, while recognizing that each student is different. "I feel like there is so much that's built in that they can't get away without some of it. I think some take advantage more than others...but we talk about it every semester."

Oftentimes, however, advisors acknowledged that services are not being utilized by every student. One staff member suggested that the students need to be willing to look for and accept the help being offered by advisors. "The philosophy is that we have VERY good advisors who are VERY knowledgeable and willing to help if the students will come in and seek it."

Connection to Staff and Faculty

Another common theme in conversations with advisors centered on the connection that they feel students gain with faculty and staff at the two-year institutions.

Several shared their thoughts on the inevitable relationships that are built with students in a smaller campus atmosphere. Many also discussed the one-on-one attention that is commonplace in these institutions.

One-stop shop. Advisors from both institutions referenced the impact that a smaller environment has on the ability to connect more personally with students. Many expressed views of the Student Services office as a central location for nearly any question or concern. “I guess I think this is a type of one-stop shop here. If it’s a financial aid question, or if it’s a transcript, or if it’s an application, or it’s a campus visit, they just come here.”

Another advisor discussed the personal relationship that he sees as a direct result of this type of interaction.

Well, I mean, everything from admission to graduation is us and everything in between so that’s the beauty of a place like this. If you have a question, there’s just one place to go. If it’s not there, I’ll find one of the other three buildings to take you to. But it really is everything, so we are that place here and that’s what Student Services is for.

Staff and faculty relationships. In addition to the comments about the Student Services Offices, many advisors also shared their observations of the one-on-one relationships that are commonplace between students, staff, and faculty. Support staff suggested that the advisors work to maintain the relationships that have been built with students, but are also more than willing to assist any student in whatever way necessary.

When a student comes in, sometimes they’ve worked with one of us before and want to keep that relationship, but, on the other hand, they make appointments for whoever is available at the time they need... Everybody knows what everybody else does.

After discussing a similar viewpoint, one advisor also described the benefit made available to students through the personal relationships they also develop with faculty members.

And I think the fact that the faculty are not just involved in the profession, but they are in contact with other faculty members from the transfer colleges, and so they will often give a call to Dr. So-and-So at La Crosse or at Madison or wherever and say, 'I'm sending you a student, and this is what we've done here, and what should he do about whatever.' And I think that's really invaluable.

Issues and Concerns of Transfer Students

For students on the verge of transferring, there are a variety of common questions and concerns. Students bring these inquiries to the advisors, who work to the best of their ability to answer them completely. These concerns range from academic to non-academic and everything in between.

Academic concerns. As shared by many advisors, one of the most common, and earliest, concerns voiced by students relate to the admissions requirements and practices of the institution they hope to transfer to. Support staff mentioned that students will often contact them to determine what steps they need to take for their application and what their chances of being admitted are. "They're usually asking 'How do I do it? What's the process?' And the second major concern is 'Am I admissible to the campus, to the major I want?'"

Prior to their transfer, many students are also concerned about selecting classes that will make for the most effective and efficient transfer possible. As one staff member explained, this is a common concern of the students she interacts with.

They want to make sure they are taking the classes they need to, in order to be admitted into that program or major. What they are doing here isn't wasted when they go there. Then it's 'What do I need to do to apply?'

Another common concern of transferring students relates to the manner in which their credits will transfer to the new institution. One staff member referenced those students who may not have worked closely with an advisor in previous terms. “The part that I have noticed the most difficulty is that students will go through and register for their own classes, and when they are ready to transfer, their credits don’t go with them for their major.”

On the other hand, many students utilize the guidance of advisors and other resources throughout the transition, so their concerns shift slightly. “I hear more, I guess...it kind of changes from ‘Will my credits transfer?’ to ‘How will my credits transfer and what do I need to do next?’”

Non-academic concerns. Students’ concerns do not end in the academic realm. Staff members also shared several common student concerns in addition to those mentioned above. By and large, the most common issues for transfer students centered on their impending transition to a new campus and environment. Several advisors referenced the idea that although these students bring previous collegiate experience with them to the new campus, they are still often unsure of what they are about to encounter. One advisor provided a very clear description of the factors that may come into play for these students.

Because there are assumptions that transfer students should know what they’re getting themselves into. They’ve already been on a college campus for two years. But, you can prepare as much as you want, but until you get there, oftentimes you don’t know what you’re in for. This is an access campus. They’re living at home. They’re still working their old job. They’ve got a lot of their old friends around. They’ve still got mom or dad. They’re commuting. They aren’t getting the same transition issues that a traditional student at a four-year campus, living on-campus, living away from home is getting. And that’s good and bad. It’s a positive for most, but it’s not for all. And so the issues are very different. So, in a lot of ways, it’s like starting over... Just like a new freshman, there’s going to be

that difficult first semester, first year at that new institution, even as a junior. Once they get to that new campus, they still don't know what they're doing. They know where they're doing it and they know they've been successful before, but they still don't know what they're doing. So in a lot of ways, they're starting over as new freshmen with junior status in a strange place.

Another advisor shared a similar view and revealed what she feels to be a necessary means of assistance for transfer students at receiving institutions.

I think it's really important that at a campus, a bigger campus, that students have a place they know they can go to get their questions answered, a transfer office, or somebody who will be their advocate, I mean, they really, some of them are going to need just transition, personal adjust, student adjustment help.

Communication

The final theme that emerged from the two-year staff interviews related to the information-sharing and communication that takes place at each institution. In several cases, advisors stated that they are keeping in touch with students about a variety of topics in many different ways. Several support staff maintained that students receive consistent and regular communication from the institution in an assortment of ways. "So I think in a lot of ways, I think we're always trying to do something. I mean every week there are communications of some sort."

More in-depth conversations about these methods of communication provided insight into the modes of messaging that are used on each campus. Staff members at UW-Richland remain in touch with students through regular emails, including a weekly newsletter with a variety of articles relevant to the student body. In addition to the newsletter, table-top displays are also placed in common areas of the campus notifying students of important information and upcoming events.

In much the same way, staff members at UW-Baraboo also discussed the variety of methods they employ to remain in touch with students. They also utilize emails, while

commenting on their newly launched Facebook page for the Student Services Office. Advisors also discussed more traditional means of communication including bulletin boards and on-campus television monitors. They also mentioned the face-to-face interactions that they have with students during degree audit programs in common areas of the campus. In addition, the advisors rely on word of mouth, largely facilitated by their strong connection to a variety of student organizations. One UW-Baraboo advisor shared an anecdote regarding the important role that peers play in sharing information with students.

Students tend to be the best resources for other students, just like anywhere. That can be good or bad, depending. But it is helpful that if somebody who intends to go to Platteville is in a class with somebody else and they get talking... Those exchanges are usually pretty good and they end up leading them here [to Student Services].

Simultaneously, advisors at both institutions also discussed a more recent development in terms of communicating with students. As two staff members shared, parents have become an integral part of the college experience for many students. Their comments illustrate their willingness to embrace this new system of communication.

We invite parents, or significant others, to come to SOAR [Summer Advising and Registration] and we try to use them to promote some of the services that we offer, to encourage students, friends, or spouses, whatever, to take advantage. Parents are a big resource right now.

From a communication flow standpoint, we gather email addresses of parents... So rather than eliminating parents from the process, recognizing the role that parents play in a student's life, and especially on campuses where they're still living at home. Trying to involve the parents a little more. We can connect them with resources, whether that be via the web or whatever it might be. And I think something we've got on our website that wasn't here a year ago is a resource link in the upper left corner geared specifically towards parents. So, letting parents be able to find the information they want as well, questions parents can ask, things parents should consider, and how they can work with their student to move forward in those pursuits. So I think parent involvement is the one thing that may have been mentioned, but we are going to do a lot more of because they have just

a tremendous role. I'm still not going to let them into the computer lab to help the student register. But I think, everything short of registration, we want them to know what we're telling their son or daughter, because it might actually register with the parents a lot more effectively than it does for a new student.

Four-Year Campus Staff Themes

The final group of interviews conducted examined the practices, attitudes, and insight of advisors at the receiving campus. Emergent themes from these interviews mirrored many of the same ideas and concepts that surfaced during the previously discussed interviews as well. Institutional views on transfer and connecting with students as well as staff members from the sending institution all proved important. In addition, they also discussed the supports being offered for transfer students and the concerns they commonly hear transfer students express.

Institutional Views on Transfer Students

The first theme that emerged from the interviews with staff members at the four-year campus related to the institutional view that they feel surrounds the transfer student experience at UW-La Crosse. Support staff touched on the reason they see transfer students being admitted as well as the increase in numbers they have noticed in recent years. They also mentioned the attitudes they see regarding transfer students at the institution and the focus and attention being paid these students.

Meeting enrollment targets. For many of the advisors interviewed, the opinion is that transfer students serve as a means to meet an enrollment target for the University. One staff member clearly stated her views on this very idea during the conversation. "Transfer students are commonly used to fill the gaps."

A colleague elaborated on the same point by sharing her opinions on the institution's philosophy toward transfer students.

I think that the institutional attitude toward transfer students has been one of filling our enrollment needs at the institution, and when we tend to fall short of our targets, often times the strategy is to increase the number of transfer students that we're going to accept.

During each of the five interviews conducted with staff members at UW-La Crosse, it became apparent that this is not a limited view on the campus. One staff member elaborated on the admission policy for transfer students, which stands differently than that for incoming new students who have a specific application deadline. "We don't have a deadline [for transfer students]. We have what's called rolling admission, which means that we continue to accept students until we meet our target."

Numbers are increasing. Keeping these ideas in mind, it can be expected to see the numbers of transfer students to continue to increase each year. In fact, the institution has committed to increasing the number of transferring students admitted for the upcoming academic year. "I've heard that in order to keep our numbers up we'll probably be accepting more transfer students."

Another advisor revealed her knowledge in this area by providing the figures she has recently heard regarding the number of transfer students that will be admitted for fall semester.

They are going to try to increase the number of transfer students. What they're looking at for fall from my understanding is probably about 750 to 800 is what they want to accept with the idea that probably about 450 to 500 will actually come here.

Not new to higher education. Aside from discussing the increasing numbers, several advisors shared additional views regarding the transfer student populations they have worked with in the past. Support staff shared multi-layered thoughts on the

experience that transfer students bring with them to their new campus, and the potential negative effects this may have for these students.

So, I think that truthfully, often, transfer students are certainly not treated like new freshmen in the process. And maybe that's because there's an assumption because they've gone someplace else that they're not new freshmen, they know the processes and everything. But, I would say that it's not as joyful as the new freshmen perhaps.

I think the biggest disadvantages that the transfer students face is that they come to their new campus with the operating system of their old campus in mind and the expectation that the operating system is going to be the same or similar. And as I've said to transfer students over the years, they really need to erase the hard drive, erase that operating system. And really, start over because as soon as you assume that your new campus is going to function in any manner, policy, procedure, whatever, the way your old campus did, it's likely you're going to make a mistake and be wrong about that. So, there's a certain assurance that I think transfer students have in coming to their campus... They're college students, so they know, they don't necessarily need the assistance of the new campus when the reality is, they probably need it even more than a first year student who's hyper-aware.

Lost in the shuffle. Although many advisors shared their concerns for students who are making the transition to the new institution, this was not the only observation mentioned during the interviews. In many cases, staff members also disclosed the limited consideration they give to transfer students in many situations. As one advisor stated, it is not that transfer students do not deserve help or assistance, but they seem to get grouped with all other students during the shuffle of the semester. "They're not high on my radar... Once they're here, other than that contact I make in the first week or so in the semester, I don't think about them, unless they surface again."

Along the same vein, support staff also shared their opinions on the views they see the institution have on working with and helping transfer students.

I don't think that the institution perceived itself to be, um, I don't want to say a transfer destination because we are a transfer destination, especially for the two-year campuses – all of the comprehensives are going to be destinations for the

two-year colleges. But I'm not sure that the institution really focuses in on what that really means... I think the expectation is that they're a part of the fabric of the institution.

I feel that some of the problem is that we are such an institution that we only reach out to the typical four-year students coming in that I think we kind of forget about the transfer student. And we assume that they're about to just slide in and figure it all out and we don't look at the issues tied in.

During these conversations, another interesting point of conversation revolved around the lack of push for improving and furthering the supports offered to transfer students. Several advisors stated that, to the best of their knowledge, there has been no University-wide push to foster better supports for transfer students. One advisor commented on this idea while also suggesting a glimmer of hope for these supports to be implemented at some point in the future.

I don't see [an increase in services]. Not that there's a bad attitude towards them, but I don't see a move to offer more services to them... I mean I haven't seen it. It doesn't mean that it's not happening. If there's a particular office that feel responsible for transfer students...if Admissions...gets alarmed about the services not being out there, it might raise a flag. Other than that, we aren't really working together enough to really propose that solution... We are all talking about [it, but] we aren't having a let's help the transfer students summit.

Another advisor expanded upon this idea to discuss the potential she sees for the future of these supports, as various individuals take the initiative to assist transfer students.

I think we're creating more awareness because of some of the things that we've initiated. I've been doing orientation now for four or five years, and what it is doing is, I think, it's helping to create some sort of awareness. And Admissions continues to increase the numbers. 'What are we doing?'... The Provost is able to ask those questions and be able to say 'We have this.'

Connecting with Transfer Students

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews at the four-year campus related to the connection that staff members felt they are able to build and foster

with incoming transfer students. Advisors discussed the outreach efforts they see being extended to incoming transfer students, as well as the role they feel students should play in their own transfer experience.

Outreach efforts. As mentioned above, many advisors discussed the limited outreach that is done to assist transfer students. Support staff discussed the materials that are provided to newly accepted transfer students as a part of a larger packet of information sent by the Admissions Office. One advisor's description best summarized the information that is included in the packet, which is essentially the same for each college.

We provide the admissions office with, really it's a letter from the college. It identifies the programs of study, plans, majors, minors that are offered in the college along with some basic instruction on selecting courses - some steps if you will - that we ask the transfer students to complete.

Nevertheless, aside from this informational piece sent to students, there is very little additional outreach for these students. Staff members suggested that the ball is in the student's court once the information has been sent. "We kind of leave it up to them to contact us. We don't reach out to them... As far as outreach goes, we have no outreach."

Students assuming responsibility. Staff members also emphasized the importance they see in the student assuming independence and responsibility throughout the transfer process. This idea was touched on to some degree in each interview, often suggesting that the students may be used to being taken care of to a greater extent than they can expect at the new institution. One advisor provided a succinct view of what she hopes to see from the transfer students she interacts with. "We want the student to contact us. We also want the student to contact us prepared... We're really depending on the transfer student to take action upon received information."

Others shared these same ideas and expressed a more in-depth description of the issues in working with students who aren't prepared to work independently through the process.

I will tell you that often times students from some campuses, perhaps smaller, where they were babysat if you will, where people did everything for them, including registering for classes - that there will somewhat be an expectation that someone will tell them everything. So they're a little lazy in reading the material that they get and don't pay attention to it, and I think they find it frustrating when they call and say I don't know what to do and it's clear they haven't read anything. So, I have to tell them, get this out and let's go through it...a lot of them are very mature, less than half of them call me anymore, but there are groups that are very, very dependent on someone else doing it for them. So, I don't know, sometimes I think that they think by us telling them that they have to read the stuff and figure it out too, that it's tough. So, I've actually noticed an increase in the dependency from smaller schools over the last decade... Often times they're going to school at a place close to home and they're used to being taken care of and this is quite a big change for them to move on.

At the same time, advisors also commented on their desire to remain available to incoming students, and not put forth the impression that they are not willing to help students during their transition.

I don't ever want to get to a state where everything we're doing is to keep the student from bothering us... But I want to make sure that they've at least tried to look at something so it's more productive.

Connection to Sending Institutions

UW-La Crosse staff members mentioned the connection to the sending institution in several capacities. In some cases, they mentioned the relationships they have been able to build over the years and the benefit this has for themselves as well as for the students they are working with. One advisor discussed this precise idea while referencing an especially strong connection with the two-year schools in the UW System.

I feel like we have a better connection with the UW Colleges than we do with other schools in the system or outside the system... And I think that makes the

student feel more connected when I let them know [I know] where they've come from.

This view of the connection, however, seems to be slightly different than that of most other staff members at the four-year campus. Although each mentioned the importance of these types of connections, several felt that the relationships with the two-year campuses are not well-established at this time. One advisor stated that she used to have a stronger connection, but that has died off over time. Another staff member mentioned the limited connection she feels to other institutions. "I do work with the other institutions, but not particularly as far as processing goes."

Despite this, one advisor provided her take on the personal connections that can prove useful in working with students who are transferring to the institution. While most information can be found on websites, the personal interaction that is gained through face-to-face meetings can be invaluable.

You can never replace with technology that face-to-face, and making that human connection. So if the concerns of the transfer student really are more of making connections with people on campus, then I think there's much more value in having sessions like that.

How Transfer Students Are Supported

From the time of application through the first semester of classes, staff members discussed the supports that are made available to transfer students. Generally speaking, most advisors shared similar views regarding this idea.

I think that [UW-La Crosse is] very committed to bringing in transfers and making sure they have the support services that they need... So, I think that's the most important thing. You just don't bring students in, you bring them in and then you educate them in a certain way.

Staff members provided a variety of comments that centered on the idea of necessary support systems for the students entering a new institution. These supports may

range from advising assistance to targeted programs and others in between. Several staff members also provided insight into the areas they feel are being neglected at this time and their ideas of what could improve those supports.

Dean's Offices. One of the most commonly addressed areas of support related to the advising opportunities that are provided for transfer students. Staff members shared their interpretations of the role that the advisors in each of the Dean's Offices play in assisting transfer students through this often complicated process. Describing her view on the institution's philosophy of working with transfer students, one advisor alluded to the support that many students take advantage of in the Dean's Offices.

I believe the attitude is they probably aren't going to get this information anywhere else so we try to give them as much information as they're going to get. They don't have a faculty advisor yet... I think we kind of assume that we don't really have an advising structure [for transfer students] other than the Assistant's to the Dean. There isn't a special person on campus who is the transfer advisor.

A colleague shared a similar view as she discussed how she sees the Dean's Office coming into play early in the game for most students.

Well, I certainly think from the Dean's Office perspective, we really do want to be that initial contact for new transfer students. You know specifically in terms of helping the student plan that first semester of courses, reviewing the transfer evaluation.

Another advisor commented that she feels that transfer students receive more in-depth advising assistance as compared to incoming first-year students.

Compared to freshmen, it's probably more. I spend more time on this and the issues in talking to students because it's individualized than the time I spend freshmen wise because they're all in the group and it's here and it's done, but transfer students twice a semester and twice a year in terms of clock hours. Spending a bit of time as students go, I'd say quite a bit on transfer students on thought processes, on what they need to know, on what we can provide them to help them register. And provide information that they need to know in advance if they haven't already been to our website. Then, the follow-up, if they have

questions, then they need to come in and get those answered. So, actually quite a bit.

Admissions Office. In addition to the assistance that is provided in the Dean's Offices, students are also provided support through the Admissions Office. The office sends each newly accepted student a packet of information which contains a variety of resources, including the letter from the student's respective college Dean's Office mentioned earlier.

In addition to these materials, students are also able to utilize the guidance and support of the Transfer Admissions Coordinator. Several comments were made by those interviewed indicating that they encourage students to work closely with this advisor throughout the process.

We have [the advisor] in the Admissions Office, and I think we all rely on her – and she relies on us – but we rely on her to be giving the students kind of the beginning, 'Here's the website. Here's someone to call. I have your application. I need your transcript...' You know, like kind of be the first contact for the person.

During her interview, this Admissions advisor revealed the support she provides to students through a comment regarding the dedication she has to remaining available at all times.

They call. They call all along the process. And I return phone calls constantly. I do email, you know. I've allowed people to have my cell phone number, to call me at home, if it's a serious issue. So, you know, just about any way... Probably more than anything else is the email and the telephone.

Transfer student orientation. Another support system commonly discussed were the Transfer Orientation sessions that have been implemented over the past few years. As the individual responsible for developing and presenting these sessions, one advisor provided an overview of the program.

What we do through the Academic Advising Center is provide the transfer orientation, and that is offered once each semester, and that is offered usually the day before classes begin or a couple days before classes begin; that weekend leading right up to it. We do it that way because we know the students have moved here and in the process of coming to orientation they can also get their books, their ID, that type of thing.

Several comments were made during the other interviews regarding the support provided through these orientation events. One advisor shared her thoughts on the enhancements that these sessions have provided for incoming students. "I think the transfer student orientation that the Academic Advising Center provides has been a welcome addition."

Additional supports. In addition to the supports mentioned above, several other programs and services were also discussed during the interviews. Also mentioned by staff from the two-year institutions, the Transfer Information System emerged as an important resource for advisors at the four-year institution as well.

Certainly if they're transferring from an institution in-state, we can use the Transfer Information System to our advantage, and we do that. We certainly make that known as a tool we use, and we encourage students to use that as well.

As discussed earlier, outreach efforts for transfer students have traditionally been limited. However, two new initiatives were implemented this year to find additional ways to connect with transfer students once they have arrived at the new campus.

I took those transfer students, the list of those that did not attend [the orientation program] and sent them a follow-up email with 'What questions do you still have?' and 'Are you feeling connected?' Just to see if there's anything additionally that they need... [Our] graduate student...also put together a [question and answer] session for transfer students... I think it's something we can continue to try and tweak. Is there something we can do differently in the fall? It's something we need to discuss and build on.

Although transfer-specific programs may be offered, they are not the only types of support utilized by these incoming students. One advisor cited the Career Services

office, Murphy Library, the Office of Multicultural Student Services, academic department offices, and more as she talked about the needs of the students who have recently entered the University.

More can be done. Though a wide variety of supports were discussed during the interviews, several staff members also shared their thoughts on what else could be done to assist transfer students. As discussed by several support staff, improved communication with transfer students would prove beneficial when it comes to specific dates and deadlines. “I think that we, as an institution, can do a better job of encouraging transfer students to be aware of our [academic] cycle.”

Another common point of discussion revolved around the notion of having a specific advisor employed to assist transfer students, both prospective and incoming.

I would want to have an individual in the office that worked specifically with transfer students. Those that are, have made a commitment to attend the institution, those that are perspective transfers, those that are not necessarily the perspective - they might be in the more global shopping category, and I would extend that to other populations that fall into the shopping categories as well.

We would have our own dedicated person dealing with prospective students, transfer and maybe incoming....I think that the challenge of not having that person is if a transfer student calls during registration, they're not going to get much help because it's too busy.

After discussing several of these ideas herself, one advisor presented an overall summary of her thoughts on the assistance the four-year institution offers to transfer students. “We are helping with what we do provide, yes. But I feel like there's so much more we could be doing to reach out and let them know we're here.”

Student Concerns

Throughout the interviews, staff members at the four-year institutions expressed a variety of concerns that they commonly hear from incoming transfer students. Expressed

during conversations with students and staff members from each institution, many of these concerns relate to academic factors associated with the transition to a new campus. However, additional concerns were also discussed pertaining to the transfer experience.

Course transfer. Several advisors mentioned the initial student concern of how credits will transfer from their two-year campus. However, the apprehension does not end there. The same concern is often still a source of anxiety once the student has made contact with the four-year campus. Staff members stated that the initial contact with an incoming transfer student often centers on credit transfer, and may also branch into other related concerns. “Usually the first call ends up being ‘I’m transferring in, I need to register, I have no idea what classes to take.’”

Each of the other advisors expressed the same type of interaction with students, while one staff member shared what she often discusses with an incoming transfer student.

I talk to students about the transfer. What they need to do to transfer...the application process, as far as credits and classes, I can talk to students about general education credits, but generally we are talking about credits, or classes, or courses for their particular major.

Course selection. The students’ academic concerns do not end once an understanding of course transfer has been achieved. Although the student may now know how their courses will transfer, they are still often concerned with selecting courses that will help them to progress toward their degree. One staff member shared her experience in how the conversation changes at this point. “So, if you’re talking about someone who has been accepted and has their evaluation, you probably aren’t spending as much time on how classes transfer as you are on what should they exactly take... Those conversations definitely come up.”

Overwhelming information. A final student concern discussed by the staff members at the four-year institution varied slightly from the ideas presented by the advisors from the two-year campuses. Many advisors felt that the students are inundated with a large amount of information at the receiving institution. Although the information is valuable for the students' transition, it also may lead to an overwhelming feeling, especially for a student coming from a smaller, more personalized campus environment.

I think this year was especially difficult because we didn't have an advisor report. And so, we were referring them to all kinds of stuff that probably was useful, but probably was overwhelming. I mean, 'Look in the catalog for your major requirements, look in your catalog for the gen. eds.' And our current students can seldom figure that out from the catalog so I don't know how a transfer student who doesn't deal without course number system and stuff like that - I don't think that they see that as helpful.

And, of course, then there's also this expectation that the student is going to read this information that has been sent, and you know, I call 'read' the other four-letter word because it's one we all neglect to do because we're bombarded with so much information and being able to prioritize that is a challenge.

Chapter Summary

The emergent themes presented above provide an in-depth picture of the supports offered throughout the transfer process. Both students and staff presented information regarding the supports that are made available during this important transition. Included in their comments were discussions of the connections that are made on both the two- and four-year campuses, as well as the adjustment process that students must go through. Each group also identified specific supports being offered to students as well as common issues and concerns that transfer students typically face. In addition to these ideas, each group also offered thoughts and suggestions for further improvements to create an even more supportive process in the future.

In the following chapter, these ideas will be integrated in a manner that presents the overall conclusions that have resulted from this research. Furthermore, the consistencies and inconsistencies that materialized between staff and student remarks will also be examined in greater detail. Recognizing and understanding these similarities and differences will also allow for a discussion regarding potential recommendations for future improvements to the transfer process.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative investigation was to gain a comprehensive view of the support systems made available to transfer students during the transition from a two-year to four-year institution. Though a variety of studies have been conducted related to support for transfer students in the past, few have made use of student voices in the research (Davies and Dickmann, 1998). Therefore, the ultimate goal of this study was to explore transfer supports through the words of students who have experienced the process themselves. In preparation for this study, a review of the wide range of literature surrounding the transfer process was conducted, and included a review of several college student development theories that provided a framework for the study. In addition to this review, several theories related to the topic were also examined to provide a framework for the study.

Utilizing a qualitative approach, this research was centered on the proposed question: What perceptions do students have about the transfer support systems offered by two- and four-year institutions? Interviews were conducted with nine student participants, as well as nine staff members from two UW Colleges and five support staff from UW-La Crosse. Interview guides with specific questions were created for each group of participants, while probing questions were also used to clarify and expand upon responses.

By discussing this topic with both students and staff members at the involved institutions, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions held regarding transfer support, as well as discover a variety of suggestions for improvements. The subsequent sections of this chapter provide a discussion of the major conclusions of the research, as well as recommendations to create enhanced support systems at both two- and four-year institutions. In addition, suggestions for future research are also provided based upon the findings of this study.

Conclusions

Taken as a whole, the results of this research closely align with what could have been expected after reviewing previous literature on the topic of transfer support. Both the two- and four-year institutions make support systems available to students, albeit in varying capacities and structures. It is important to note that supports were recognized and appreciated by students, as well as staff. At the same time, there were many comments suggesting improvements and additions to expand the transfer support systems being offered throughout the process.

Communication

Both the student and staff participants frequently referenced communication-related ideas as they discussed the transfer process. Student thoughts generally centered on the communication that they experienced with both their sending and receiving institutions. Many viewed the communication from the two-year institution as more comprehensive and complete than that of the four-year campus. Supporting this notion, many discussed the more personal interaction that they experienced at the sending

institution. This one-on-one contact offered more opportunities for information-sharing, which the students view positively.

While staff members from each institution mentioned this type of communication with students as well, it was not the only form of interaction that they discussed. Support staff also focused on the communication they have with other institutions, and the implications that this has for them in working with transfer students. Two-year staff members referenced the importance that they place on remaining connected to comprehensive institutions as it allows them to provide more complete information to the students they are preparing for the transfer process.

In much the same line of thinking, staff members from the four-year institution also mentioned that they appreciate a connection to the sending institution. In their view, the communication allows them a way to better understand the background of the students that are transferring into their institution, while some also mentioned that it serves as a point of connection with students as well. While staff members from the four-year institution did discuss this in several ways, they did not emphasize it as much as the two-year support staff.

Types of Support

As one of the central components of the research, it was not surprising that the types of support provided throughout the transfer process were openly discussed by student and staff participants in great detail. These discussions offered information regarding the support systems that have been implemented at each institution. In addition, they frequently provided thoughts on what is missing or could be improved.

The important role that these supports have for students became exceedingly apparent in hearing them share their experiences at both the sending and receiving institution. At the same time, staff members also shared their views regarding the supports they offer students while revealing their views of student perceptions as well. Notably, staff members and students provided strikingly parallel responses regarding the types of supports offered at each institution, as discussed below.

Throughout the interviews, students consistently suggested that there is a great deal of support provided at the two-year institution. They shared their experiences with receiving information through multiple channels, including Student Services staff members and faculty advisors. They also discussed the wide variety of additional resources that they utilized during their time at the two-year institution.

Largely echoing these ideas, staff members from the two-year campus shared the importance they place on providing students with numerous types of support. In addition to those mentioned above, they were also quick to point out that they begin supporting students before they have even stepped foot on campus. This support, wholly centered on transfer preparation, is the central mission for the staff members at the two-year institutions. In talking with the student participants, it became apparent that this dedication was not lost in translation, but, rather, was felt and appreciated.

Shifting into the resources at the receiving institution, students stated that there are supports available at the four-year campus. However, in contrast to their views of two-year institutions, students see these supports as more limited. Their comments focused on the systems currently in place, including orientation programs and assistance

with advising. Regrettably, though, many students also mentioned noteworthy gaps with other crucial supports.

Interviews with staff members from the four-year institution reaffirmed what the students claimed. In most cases, when discussing the support systems in place, staff members were unable to provide any examples beyond the orientation program and advising assistance that is made available to students. Staff members, like students, also suggested a few changes and additions that could improve these support systems for those entering the university.

Levels of Support

Relating directly to the types of supports that are offered to transfer students are the levels of support provided as well. Throughout the interviews, students offered opinions on the levels of support they experienced as they transferred from the two-year institution. While many students provided an overall positive response, they also illustrated their concerns and issues with the degrees of support throughout the process.

In general, students claimed that they were extremely well-supported by staff and faculty while at the two-year institution. They frequently commented on their perceptions of the high levels of care and concern put forth by faculty and staff when working with students. They felt a strong personal connection and discussed how this was fostered through the one-on-one relationships and interactions that are commonplace at these smaller campuses. Support staff also reiterated these thoughts as they discussed the importance that they see in fostering these personal relationships with students. For the advisors and staff at the two-year institutions, working closely with students in this setting is key to their work.

Expanding upon this notion, an interesting topic that continued to surface related to the students' abilities to feel some level of autonomy and sense of competence in making decisions as they move into the new institution. Students expressed their appreciation for the personal attention they received at the two-year campus time and time again, but several also suggested that this may have ultimately hindered them as they transitioned into the new campus environment. Reflecting upon their experiences, a number of students commented that they felt they had been "babied" at the two-year institution. Some students did feel somewhat unprepared for the transition because they were assisted too much during their time at the two-year campus. Although they appreciated it at the time, in retrospect, they feel that they were not completely prepared to deal with the new environment at the receiving institution. This proved to be a point of incongruity between students and staff as it is in direct contrast to what several advisors declared in their interviews. Many two-year staff members suggested that they place a high emphasis on preparing students for the new campus by fostering a feeling of independence and responsibility in the students while they are still at the smaller institution.

Although this is an apparent goal for these support staff, it is clear that this is not fully realized by students in many cases. However, it is important to note that several support staff were cognizant of the reality of the situation, understanding that they may not be fully preparing students for the atmosphere at their new institution. These staff members shared their hopes for improving in this area as they continue their work in preparing students for the transfer transition.

Students also frequently referenced the lesser level of support they felt at the new campus. Although many discussed eventually finding the information or assistance they were looking for, it was not as apparent to them as they had experienced at their previous institution. Students felt that the four-year institution did not provide the resources in an open or welcoming way, leading many to feel underappreciated at their new campus.

In this way, student thoughts aligned almost completely with what four-year staff members stated. Their comments suggested that students can find support and help on the four-year campus, as long as they are willing to seek it out. Each individual interviewed from the four-year campus stated, to varying degrees, that transfer students must become more independent and assume the responsibility for their own experience. In other words, students should become advocates for themselves to ensure a more successful transition.

Overall Experience

For most students, an overall positive transfer experience was reported. This sentiment was evidenced in comments regarding the support students felt they were offered at both their sending and receiving institutions. Most felt that each campus's support staff was able to provide them with the necessary assistance throughout the process, although some did discuss the improvements they would like to see. In either case, however, the ideas presented in Schlossberg's Transition Theory became central to understanding the overall experience of student participants.

Through their work, Schlossberg and her colleagues present a framework for understanding the transition process of students. A transition is any occurrence that results in changes regarding "relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27). A brief review of the student comments presented in the

preceding chapter clearly illustrate that many felt their transfer process was a transition in their lives. Despite this, the arbitrary nature of the theory notes that an event can only be defined as a transition if the individual sees it as such. For this study, this relates to the personal impact felt by each student during the transfer experience, which varied for each participant.

The transition process is best described as a circular progression, without a clearly defined beginning or end (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Utilizing the three stages presented by the Transition Theory, it becomes clear that students transferring to a new institution may find themselves experiencing multiple transitions simultaneously. Schlossberg et al. first present the moving-in stage. At this point, students are becoming acquainted with the new situation and are becoming familiar with new expectations. The students' original transition into the two-year institution may have been viewed as moving-in. In addition, beginning as a student at the receiving institution was also suggested as moving-in during participant interviews.

In much the same way, students may also experience the moving-through stage multiple times throughout the transfer process. During this stage, students typically become accustomed to the environment or role they entered into earlier (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Participants in this study referenced their involvement at the sending institution, clearly illustrating the ideas of the moving-through stage. However, it is speculated that a majority of the students fell into this same stage at the time of their interviews. For most, they had become adjusted to the new campus, at least to a certain degree, and were becoming more comfortable with their role and position on the new campus.

However, the process does not end there. The final stage presented by Schlossberg et al. (1995) is moving-on, or the conclusion of one transitional period leading into another. This was perhaps the most easily recognizable stage in discussions with the students as they often talked about the actual shift from the two-year campus to the new institution. Interestingly, though, a few students also commented on future plans, suggesting that they are already beginning to consider the next transition in their lives.

Providing greater detail, Schlossberg et al. (1995) reference the three main types of transitions that may be experienced by students: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event. As a planned and deliberate process, transferring from one institution to another is classified as an anticipated transition. As both students and staff shared, enrollment at a two-year campus is assumed to be a step in preparing for further study at a comprehensive institution. Therefore, this anticipated transition is expected from day one, allowing the student the opportunity to employ one or more of the coping strategies discussed by Schlossberg and her colleagues.

The use of these coping strategies became evident in talking with student participants, as well as with staff in some cases (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Students, likely unintentionally, employed the self strategy in managing the transition to the new institution by virtue of their own personal characteristics. Their demographic and personal traits were sources of coping as they entered a completely new environment at their receiving institution.

Another tactic employed to manage transitions relate to supports that are utilized during the process (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Clearly central to this research study, students and staff members provided numerous comments on the supports that are offered

and used throughout the transfer transition. Advisors, online resources, and orientation programs are just a few of the many supports that were discussed during participant interviews.

Another support, primarily revealed by staff, include individuals outside of the institution (such as parents, friends, or previous transfer students) that provide help and assistance as the student transfers to the new campus. These connections are an example of the strategies that may be employed during a transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). It was clear that several students had made use of this coping strategy, whether knowingly or not, as they reached beyond the traditional supports to work through the transition.

Recommendations

Based on the thoughts presented by both student and staff participants, along with the information gathered during the review of literature, several recommendations have been developed for both the two- and four-year institutions. These recommendations have been designed to address the concerns of the students regarding their perceptions of the support systems in place during their transfer experience. Suggestions have been divided into those recommended for both the two-year institutions and four-year campus.

Although specific to the three institutions directly involved in this study, these recommendations should be considered by any institution struggling with providing the most effective supports for transfer students.

Two-Year Institution Recommendations

1. Enhanced preparation for students looking to transfer is crucial to providing a positive experience. Several participants expressed a desire for the two-year campus to facilitate visits to potential transfer institutions so they are able to

connect before the transition. By implementing this type of support on a larger scale, two-year institutions may be better-preparing students for the ensuing transition.

2. Two-year campuses must intentionally present students with opportunities to gain insight into what can be expected upon entering the doors of the new institution. In addition to facilitated campus visits, staff members at the two-year institution should provide realistic information for students preparing to transfer during individual appointments. Workshops and presentations outlining the new environment that can be expected at the four-year institution are essential in preparing students.
3. These preparatory sessions should maintain a personal component by inviting previous students who have transferred to come back to their original campus. By offering students an opportunity to learn from and connect with students who have experienced the transition, institutions will better serve this population as they prepare for the transfer.

Four-Year Institution Recommendations

1. In order to realize any of the following suggestions as feasible, administrators, faculty, and staff at the four-year institution must first begin to recognize transfer students as an important constituency in the university environment. In many cases, transfer students have traditionally been viewed as a means of meeting enrollment targets. This institutional view must shift, instead, to place a high level of importance on supporting this unique group of students.

2. As the numbers of students accepted as transfers continues to rise each year, it is imperative that the receiving institution acknowledges them and provides additional resources to support them through the transfer process. As with any other group of students, as the numbers increase, so do the needs for additional supports. By utilizing student voices, studies such as this provide crucial information that will assist the campus in improving and developing supports for transfer students.
3. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that connections between the sending and receiving institutions are crucial to providing ample supports for transfer students. Although the effort must be collaborative between institutions, four-year campuses should take the initiative to foster development of inter-institutional relationships and share necessary information. Mentioned repeatedly by each staff member at the two-year campuses, UW-La Crosse must investigate the feasibility of implementing a transfer advisors day for staff members at the two-year institutions. Already common for several UW System universities, these days provide an opportunity to share important updates to two-year advisors. More importantly, however, these sessions allow staff members to connect with one another, something that was discussed as an important factor in assisting students at both the two- and four-year institutions.
4. Though already in place to a certain degree, orientation programs for incoming transfer students must be expanded to include the components that students view as crucial. Current orientation sessions provide basic

information to days before classes begin, but more is needed. Students suggested that this support is useful, but expressed a desire for earlier opportunities with expanded information regarding academic topics, such as course registration.

5. Students transferring to the four-year institution frequently come from smaller campuses where they are provided more personal attention in nearly all ways. While recognizing that this same level of one-on-one connection is not viable on the four-year campus, the receiving institution should facilitate stronger relationships to provide a higher level of support to incoming students.
6. Although a financially significant suggestion, four-year institutions should consider creating a position focused on assisting and supporting transfer students. Current research suggests that this is an increasing trend on campuses across the country, and the notion would not be lost at UW-La Crosse. Employing a specific support staff member to work directly with transfer students, both prospective and incoming, would facilitate a well-supported transition for this group.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research provided much-needed insight into the perceptions that students have of the transfer support systems they are offered during the transfer process. A great deal was learned about the positive aspects of the transfer that students have experienced, while deficiencies were also discussed by student and staff participants. Despite this, numerous areas of study remain that need further exploration and investigation. Therefore, several suggestions for future research have been conceptualized.

Considering the housing arrangements of the student participants prior to their transfer, it is suggested a study be conducted using a sample of students who had an on-campus living experience at the two-year institution. It is believed that this residential experience could influence the perceptions of student participants, particularly when discussing perceptions of the supports offered at the two-year institution.

In addition, it is recommended that future research also consider the impact of an on- versus off-campus living experience at the receiving institution. Examining this in greater detail could be used to determine whether or not this has an impact on the perceptions regarding the levels of support being offered, specifically in relation to the connection to campus aspect that was so prevalent in this study.

This study was conducted with student participants one semester into their new academic career. It is suggested the future research compare the perceptions of students who have recently matriculated at the four-year campus with students who have had a longer amount of time to acclimate to the new environment. As proposed by Schlossberg et al. (1995), individual students experience transitions differently, greatly depending on the impact they have felt during the event. By expanding the research to examine the longer-term effects of the transfer experience, the relevance of the ideas presented by Schlossberg and her colleagues may become more apparent.

Demographic characteristics of participants did not play a large role in this research. However, after considering the conclusions reached from this study, it could be hypothesized that certain traits and backgrounds have the potential to greatly affect the perceptions students' hold of the support provided during their transfer process. It is suggested that future research take select factors, such as age or gender, into

consideration as they structure interview questions. These characteristics may help provide greater insight into the impact of the transfer experience and shed light on the reasons for the specific perceptions held by students.

Summary

This qualitative research study revealed that transfer students perceive the support systems offered to them in a positive manner. The areas most emphasized during the interviews with both student and staff participants suggest that the types and levels of support provided during the transfer process are key to the students' transition. In order to best serve the transfer student population, both two- and four-year campuses must come to a clearer understanding of the unique experiences and challenges of this group. Furthermore, campuses as a whole must be willing to not only recognize the needs of these students, but put forth an institutional effort to develop and maintain the support systems that are crucial to their success.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

***Student Perceptions of the Transfer Support
Systems Offered at Two- and Four-Year Institutions***
Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this interview is to gather information for research on the perceptions students' hold of the support systems that are offered to them during the transfer transition/process. Your identity will be kept confidential.

1. I have been informed that I will be a participant in a research study regarding the views held by transfer students of the support offered to them throughout the transfer process.
2. I have been informed that results of this research will be presented to students, staff, and faculty members at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.
3. I have been informed that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes.
4. I have been informed that the interview will be recorded and that all tapes and notes will be destroyed upon completion of the research.
5. I have been informed that my name will be omitted or changed in the written portion of this research in order to ensure my confidentiality.
6. I have been informed that there are no known risks involved with participating in this study.
7. I have been informed that participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you need more information, please contact:

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Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the UW-La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, irb@uwlax.edu.

Researcher Signature

Participant Signature

Date

Date

APPENDIX B
STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- Date of original college enrollment:
- Expected graduation date:
- College transferred from:
- Number of credits completed at time of transfer:
- Degree attained at previous institution?:
- Residence (on- or off-campus):
- Major(s):
- Minor(s):

OVERALL

- Tell me about your experiences as a transfer student.
- What were your reasons for attending a 2-year institution?
- What were your reasons for transferring to UW-La Crosse?

UW-COLLEGES

- What services were you aware of at your UW-College to aid you in the transfer process?
- How were you made aware of any services that were available?
- Did you utilize any of these services? Which ones? Please explain why/why not.
- What do you feel was helpful during your transition process?
- What do you think could have been done differently to help you more effectively?
- What additional services could have been provided to help your transition?

UW-LA CROSSE

- What services were you aware of at UW-L to aid you in the transfer process, both before and after you came here?
- How were you made aware of services that were available?
- Did you utilize any of these services? Which ones? Please explain why/why not.
- What do you feel was helpful during your transition process?
- What do you think could have been done differently to help you more effectively?
- What additional services could have been provided to help your transition?

CONCLUSION

- Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 being low-7 being high), how well do you feel your previous institution prepared you for your transition to UW-La Crosse? Please explain.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7 (with 1 being low and 7 being high), how well do you feel UW-La Crosse assisted you in the transition process? Please explain.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Depending on the participants' answers, additional probing/follow-up questions may be asked

APPENDIX C
STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- Institution:
- Name:
- Position/Title:
- Department/Office:

OVERALL

- Describe your institution's philosophy on working with and assisting transfer students.

INSTITUTION-SPECIFIC

- What services does your institution provide to aid students in the transfer process?
- How do you make them aware of the services that are available?
- Who is responsible for working with students who are planning to transfer out of the institution?
- How often do students utilize these services?
- What do you discuss with a student who is looking to transfer to another institution?
- What resources do you make available to them during these discussions/interactions?
- Does your institution assess transfer student services? If yes, please describe.

RECEIVING/SENDING INSTITUTION

- What services are you aware of at the receiving/sending institution(s) to aid students in the transfer process?
- How are you made aware of any services that are available to students at the receiving/sending institution?

CONCLUSION

- What do you think could be done differently to help the students more effectively?
- Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, how well do you feel your institution prepares students for their transfer transition? Please explain.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

****Depending on the participants' answers, additional probing/follow-up questions may be asked****