A Study of the Influence of Structural Environments on the Success of the Student Transition Process From a Community College to a Research University

by

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A Study of the Influence of Structural Environments on the Success of the Student Transition Process From a Community College to a Research University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to explore through a constructivist lens, the influence of university structural environments on the transition process of community college students to a research university. The findings of this study will help to inform the development of university programs and services that will assist community college transfer students.

This study consisted of one-on-one interviews with students and staff at Western University and a document analysis. It was determined that the structural environments in place at Western University included academic support, faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication, all of which influenced the transition process of community college students. This influence was positive, negative, or neutral. The university provided strong academic support through academic advising and other support programs and services. Everyone interviewed acknowledged the challenges of the semester to quarter transitions due to the accelerated pace and academic expectations of a research university. Faculty were generally seen as distant and unapproachable, making it challenging for students to connect with their academic environment. Social support was effective if utilized, but needed improvement to better address the unique needs of community college transfers. Orientation contributed to a successful transition, but needed to better address the varied needs of a largely heterogeneous transfer student population. Preenrollment programs provided an early familiarity to the new environment contributing to transition for those who participated. University communication was framed by a comprehensive website that served as a virtual transfer center, providing a comprehensive source of transfer student
information and support services. Unfortunately, university communication did not clearly articulate the attributes of a research institution in comparison to other 4-year colleges and universities. Some recommendations for improvement were provided.

The findings from this study may also contribute to the improvement of the community college student to university transition process at other 4-year institutions due to the structural environments this study identified and needed to influence successful community college student transition.
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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Introduction

One of the cardinal missions of a community college is to prepare students for transfer to a baccalaureate institution (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). With more than half of all first-year college students attending community colleges (Clemetsen & Balzer, 2008), and as student enrollment in institutions of higher education continues to increase (Horn & Nevill, 2006), the need for universities to provide adequate support for that transfer transition increases.

The research will be conducted at Western University (WU), an institution that is part of a state university system, with a student enrollment of nearly 30,000. Western University was selected because it has a large proportion of traditional-aged native students with a large contingent of traditional-aged transfer students. According to the *Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Education Institutions, 2003-04* (Horn & Nevill, 2006), traditional-aged (24 and under) community college students have been on the rise, and those who are on the collegiate track (planning to transfer) tend to persist toward the goal of attaining a bachelor’s degree. Western University is a highly selective research university, a culture that emphasizes high academic expectations, graduate education, and the development of new knowledge. This environment is distinctively different than the culture of a community college, where admission is open, the mission is varied, classrooms are smaller, and the emphasis is on teaching. These disparate environments can exacerbate the challenges of student transition (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).
According to Handel (2007), providing greater access to higher education, including those from disadvantaged circumstances, is the hallmark of community colleges. However, many of these students fail to make significant progress toward a bachelor’s degree due to their lack of successful transfer to a 4-year institution.

According to a 2006 U.S. Department of Higher Education report, only “about half of community college students who indicate a desire to transfer to a four-year institution eventually succeed” (Handel, 2007, p. 38). “This number of students lost in the transfer process represents both a waste of individual talent and a failure of America’s higher education establishment” (Handel, 2007, p. 39). These increasing numbers of transfer students, and the challenges with transfer rates, indicate some problems with the transfer process to a university. Thus, a better understanding as to what contributes to the successful transfer transition of a community college student to a university is needed. This transition is critical because “community colleges are indispensable to any effort to educate more Californians because they serve the majority of undergraduates, including large shares of the students who pursue a bachelor’s degree in the state’s universities” (Shulock, Moore, Offenstein, & Kirlin, 2008, p. 2).

Significant differences in institutional culture and academic expectations exist between a community college and a research university (Cohen & Brawer, 2008) and these disparate environments can contribute to the challenges of transition. Cohen and Brawer (2008) found that the broad mission of a community college and open admission encouraged students of all academic abilities to enroll and pursue their career and life goals, while the culture of a research university is more selective in nature due to its academic rigor and focus on research.
Due to these institutional and environmental distinctions, universities must take an active role in the smooth and successful transition of community college students (Clemetsen & Balzer, 2008). According to the available literature on this topic, the university role with articulation agreements, communication, student counseling and advising services, academic and social adjustment, all impact the student transition process (Davies & Casey, 1998; Handel, 2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). These institutional differences can also contribute to transfer shock (Cejda, 1994, 1997; Hill, 1965) which is the decline in students’ grade point average during their first term in this new university environment.

This study explored the challenges faced by community college students in their transition to a research institution with an examination of the environmental structures, programs, and support services needed to mitigate those challenges to improve student success. This exploration examined a variety of theoretical concepts including a transition model and environmental theory, and how these theories influenced the student transition to the environment of a research university through intentionally designed environmental structures within the new institution. These real-life phenomena involved with this transition process will be systematically analyzed through a case study.

**Problem Statement**

Although transitioning from a community college to a research university can be a challenging experience for a student, many university attempts to address the special needs of transfer students are overlooked due in part to their focus on the matriculation of new freshmen (Bartlett & Abell, 1995; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Transfer shock (Hill, 1965) also contributes to the challenges of transition. Researchers (Flaga, 2006; Handel,
2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) have posited that community college transfer students need specialized academic, as well as social support, services to assist them in their transition to the senior institution.

A majority of the limited empirical research regarding the transition process has focused on the academic transition, while very little attention has been placed on the community college students’ social and psychological transition to the university (Flaga, 2002, 2006; Laanan, 1995; Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000). While these various factors are critical to student success, there are varied perspectives on the institutional influences that contribute to successful transition experiences. All of these transition challenges should be addressed in order to have the greatest impact on the students’ successful integration to the new institution. If the transfer transition is to be successful, the university must approach environmental support structures holistically. Flaga (2002, 2006) found that transfer student studies have focused on academic performance and not how the students integrate into the university community. Laanan (1995), and Eggleston and Laanan (2001) found that the literature concerning community college transfer students focused on transfer shock, while little research has been done on the psychological and social adjustment at the university. Laanan (2007) goes a step beyond his previous research and challenged senior institutions to reconsider the traditional measurements of achievement and persistence. He encouraged assessment based on the overall college experience, including psychological and social aspects, and students’ perceptions of the overall college experience. In this regard, Laanan was recognizing the importance of the students’ holistic adjustment and the influence these environmental
structures had on the students’ overall transition, and the types of campus experiences that contributed to the adjustment process.

Research on the community college transition process from the university staff perception was also lacking. McGowan and Gawley (2006) framed their entire study on the student transition from a staff perspective. Their findings reinforced many key student perceptions found by other researchers, including the importance of strong college-university liaisons, accurate and consistent information from both institutions, and an orientation program designed specifically for transfer students.

Involvement on campus and level of effort within that engagement seemed to contribute to transition, adjustment, and satisfaction. “For students to be successful in their social adjustment, it is important that they become engaged on campus through their involvement in campus organizations” (Laanan, 2007, p. 55). Laanan (2007) also found:

It is likely that what a student brings to the college environment will have an impact on their academic and social experiences. However, it is what the student does once arriving that will determine the extent to which a successful adjustment experience will be achieved. (p. 55)

Astin’s (1984) research confirmed the importance of involvement for adjustment, persistence, and satisfaction. Astin (1993) also found that campus environments, such as programs and services, influenced student satisfaction and success. Transfer students were able to gain information about these involvement opportunities and successful transition strategies through university orientation programs (Laanan, 2007) and through participation in other campus environmental support structures and programs.
According to Rhine et al. (2000), information regarding psychosocial university transition issues impacting community college students was lacking. Tinto (1988) reviewed the stages of transition and the importance of where support is needed for student adjustment. Since a significant number of community college students were transferring, it was imperative that both institutions contributed to the transition process. Rendon’s (1994) validation theory found that faculty, counselors, coaches, and administrators must reach out to students and design programs and activities (environmental structures) that promoted learning and interpersonal growth to assist with adjustment and a sense of belonging. Braxton and Mundy (2001) discussed the importance of an institutional commitment to student retention and developed a list of recommended actions including a commitment to transition support programs and services. Universities needed to take an active role in this transition process to enhance transfer students in their adjustment, persistence, and satisfaction. Without that support, these students may not have a successful or satisfying experience at the institution. Townsend and Wilson (2006) emphasized transfer student integration from both an academic and social perspective. They discussed the need for transition support services for the community college transfers. According to Bartlett and Abell (1995), universities must provide specialized support to transfer students at the same level being provided to native students.

All of these studies emphasized the need for a higher level of commitment on the part of the university for the transition process of community college transfer students. Handel (2007) stated that “the heartening news is that four-year institutions are beginning to take responsibility for the success of the transfer function more seriously” (p. 39). This
study specifically examined this transition process holistically, through the influence of university environmental structures, and from the perspective of both the student in transition and the university staff who were directly involved with the transition process.

**Significance of Study**

Student enrollment in community colleges and 4-year colleges and universities has continued to increase over the past number of decades (Horn & Nevill, 2006). Nearly half of all students in American institutions of higher education are enrolled in community colleges (Clemetsen & Balzer, 2008; Merrow, 2007). According to the *Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Education Institutions: 2003-04* (Horn & Nevill, 2006), 36% of community college students plan to transfer to a 4-year college.

Success for community college transfer students can be challenging due to the disparate cultures and expectations between a community college and a research university. Transfer shock (Hill, 1965), defined as a drop in grade point average following the student’s first term at the 4-year institution, was indicative of the challenges faced by the transfer student. However, transfer students also faced the psychosocial adjustment issues associated with their new environment (Flaga, 2002; 2006). Many universities assumed that transfer students did not need support in their transition since they have already experienced college. Research has demonstrated that although community college students do not require the same level of transitional support needed by new students from high school, they did need both academic and social support services to assist with their transition and persistence (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that the research university needed to provide assistance to these community college students, especially with their initial transition
through a transfer student orientation program. They also found that research universities in particular needed to be clear in their research mission and the academic and social implications of this mission. Unfortunately, much of the literature on community college transition focused on universities in general and not research universities. This study focused on the structural needs of the community college students and the role the research university played in creating a smooth transition for these students. A university environment that was supportive of transfer students and their transition would assist these students in their adjustment and success.

**Theoretical Concepts**

When considering the transition process of a community college student to a research university, an understanding of environmental influences was an important consideration. According to Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), moving from one environment to the next had transitional implications. Other research considered environmental and involvement influences on the student. This study examined the student transition process through the lens of environmental theory (Astin, 1991, 1993; Lewin, 1936; Moos, 1976, 1979; Strange & Banning, 2001), and transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006). This framework allowed the researcher to investigate university environmental structures and the influence these structures had on the community college student transition process. These structures included articulation agreements, university communication, academic advising departments, student programs such as orientation, and other campus support services and activities. All of these structural environments influenced the student in transition. The university needed to be aware of these potential
influences and be engaged in the development and maintenance of intentional environments that assisted students with transition, persistence, and success.

Gaining a better understanding of transition challenges and successes were best garnered through interviews with the students in transition and the university staff who were most intimately involved in the transfer student transition experience. These data were reviewed in concert with the review of literature to enhance understanding of this transition process through a constructivist lens to develop a case study. The constructivist method allows the researcher to interpret meaning based on data analysis and interpretation. According to Charmaz (2006), it “places a priority on the phenomena of the study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (p. 130).

Purpose Statement

The majority of previous empirical investigations regarding the transition process of a community college student into a research university has focused primarily on the academic indicators as the sole measurements of a successful transition. Although some progress in the transfer student transition process has been made, there continues to be a need to better understand the unique challenges faced by these students beyond academics, and the types of environmental structures needed to provide the necessary support for successful integration into the new institution. Additional research provided insight into the development of these needed support systems. Therefore, this dissertation research used a case study to investigate the environmental structural support needs of community college students as they transition into a research university. A case study model with a constructivist approach informed the design of a conceptual framework
from which the research institution could enhance the student experience through support programs, services, and enhanced management of environmental structures.

**Research Questions**

In order to better understand how research university staff can assist in the environmental transition process of a community college student, this research will specifically explore:

1. What university environmental structures do community college students describe as significant to their successful transition to a research university?
2. What university environmental structures do university staff describe as significant to a successful community college transition experience?

**Definition of Terms**

The terms listed below are the definitions of key concepts utilized in this study. They should provide the reader with a better understanding of these concepts.

*Academic transition.* This particular type of transition involves the transfer students’ ability to successfully persist in their coursework at their new institution. Students tend to continue following their initial “transfer shock” a drop in grade point average during the first term, but recover and persist to graduation (Hill, 1965).

*Aggregate environments.* Aggregate environments are informed by the collective characteristics of those who compose that particular environment. A university has many aggregates or organizations of individuals interacting with or on the campus. These groups often develop a group norm or characteristic defined by the dominant features of that group (Strange & Banning, 2001). Campus aggregates include student organizations,
the group of students and instructor(s) within a particular course, and an orientation group including the student orientation leader.

*Articulation agreement.* This term refers to an agreement between a community college and university that outlines the specific courses and letter grades that will transfer to the university. This agreement assists the transfer student to align their community college academic plan with that of the university.

\[ B=f(P,E): \text{Behavior is a function of person and environment.} \]

\[ B = \text{behavior}; \ P = \text{person}; \ E = \text{environment}; \]

This formula illustrates a behavioral theory based on the interactions of an individual within different types of environments. How a person interacts with their environment will influence their pattern of behavior (Lewin, 1936). In this study, environments include: aggregate, constructed, organizational, and physical.

*Constructed environments.* Constructed environments influence those within an environment based on the individual and collective perceptions of those within that environment (Strange & Banning, 2001). Examples of this type of environment include: a perceived highly academically oriented university, a student organization that sponsors fun and socially engaging programs, or a department website that is easily navigable.

*Organizational environments.* Organizational environments are created based upon the goals of the organization and those structures that influence the behavior of the individuals within those environments. These types of structures include their degree of complexity, centralization, formalization, stratification, production, efficiency, and
morale (Strange & Banning, 2001). An organizational environment can be the staffing structure of a department or a program, such as orientation, a transfer student honor society, or mentorship program.

**Physical environments.** Physical environments focus on the role of design and space and their impact on those groups and individuals within that space. Behavior is based on the interaction of the person with their physical surroundings (Strange & Banning, 2001). These environments include a campus residence hall, a classroom, or Student Center.

**Psychosocial transition.** Psychosocial transition refers to the manner in which a student transitions to the research university from a psychological and social integration perspective. The students’ level of comfort and ability to create social networks is the focus of this type of transition.

**Structural environment.** A structure is any environment created intentionally or unintentionally that influences the behavior of the individuals within those environments (Strange & Banning, 2001). In this study, a structure includes the four types of environments—aggregate, constructed, organizational, physical—described by Strange and Banning (2001) and include any university program, service, communication, website, or campus department designed to engage and assist transfer students in their transition to the university. Such structural environments would include the institutional website for transfer students, the university articulation agreement with community colleges, an academic advising department, an orientation program, a transfer student organization, and so forth.
Traditional-aged. Traditional-aged students refers to the 18-24 year old demographic of the research university student. For the 2009-11 academic year, WU’s undergraduate student average age was 21 years—17% were 16-18, 37% were 19-20, 41% were 21-25, and 5% were over 25 (Armstrong, Carty, Martin, & Thornton, 2010b).

Transfer shock. This term is used to describe the appreciable drop in grade point average during the first term in the new institution following transfer, and noting that grades tend to improve in relation to the length of the students’ schooling (Hill, 1965). Many students experience a drop in grade point average as they navigate the transition process in their new environment.

Transition. Transition refers to “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). In this particular context, transition refers to the process by which a student moves from a community college to a research university, and what occurs during that move from one environment to the next.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are conditions that cannot be controlled by the researcher that may restrict the scope of the study (Qualitative Research Forum, 2008). Transfer students at this particular research university are predominantly traditionally-aged college students due to the nature of the university and the requirement of being a full-time student. Western University requires students to be enrolled full-time. Students can request part-time status through a petition process. Approximately 4% of students were part-time at WU during the 2010-11 academic year. This requirement can discourage nontraditional transfer students from applying.
Limitations in this study included student interviewees who may have not been completely honest about their transfer experience. In addition, some of those students interviewed may not have participated in enough of the transfer student support services to have benefitted from those services, or may not have even known the services they utilized were specifically for transfer students and therefore not be able to provide adequate information about some of the transfer transition programs and support services offered at WU. In addition, since the students who were interviewed had completed their first year of coursework, they represent a group of students who experienced a successful transition.

Interviews were conducted at the end of the academic year and during the first part of the subsequent academic year. Findings may have varied if a longitudinal approach to interviewing had been utilized to illustrate the progression of the transition. Interviewed staff may not have distinguished if the transfer student had come from a community college or from another 4-year institution. Staff may have also embellished their response to avoid a critical or unfavorable perception of their department’s services to transfer students.

**Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations are boundaries that are imposed by the researcher in order to narrow the scope of the study (Qualitative Research Forum, 2008). Western University has unique demographics not shared by many other research institutions outside of the state. There is no ethnic majority on campus and Caucasian students were not the largest ethnicity. Asian-Americans represented the largest ethnic group on campus. Geographic diversity was also limited; 90% of the student body came from a single state.
Due to the scope of this research plan, including the number of student participants, and the involvement of a single university, the implications of this study for WU or for other research universities in general would need to be approached with caution. The findings of this study may not apply to other institutions.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher in this study has had significant experience working with and designing programs for transfer students. Due to this high degree of familiarity, the researcher was cognizant of the potential bias this experience may present. However, this knowledge of transfer student issues and concerns also provided the researcher with additional insight and the ability to probe further into the transitional and support services needed for this population of students. Questions for the individual participants were vetted through the dissertation committee to ensure objectivity and avoid any potential bias. Additional attention to the interpretation of the interviews was also carefully assessed to provide the most objective analysis possible. Interviews with university officials with responsibility for transfer students were compared to the student interviews to determine where there was consistency or dissonance regarding transfer student needs.

As the number of transfer students continues to increase at WU, this researcher is committed to providing the necessary environmental structures to support these students in their transition. A greater understanding of the challenges faced by these students is essential in order to develop the appropriate programs and support services to improve their integration into this new environment. This study informed university staff regarding the steps needed to develop a successful community college transfer student transition and positive university experience.
Being cognizant of potential bias was an important admission in order to avoid a nonobjective approach. This researcher was fully aware that past experiences with transfer students could influence the interpretation of data. Allowing the data to speak for itself was a key principle in constructing a case study (Yin, 1984). Honesty and objectivity were also characteristics of this researcher, important traits in qualitative research. Significant attention to this concept of analysis assisted the researcher in the review of this particular phenomenon and report of the findings.

According to Torres and Baxter Magolda (2002), critical analysis and reflection were important components of a qualitative study. The role of the researcher was to ensure that interpretation of the data accurately reflected the views and perceptions of the participant. An effective researcher understands how their experiences and views could impact the objectivity of the study. Regular reflection helped the researcher to understand personal biases and consider their impact on the findings. Establishing a degree of familiarity with the participant(s), while maintaining a certain distance to allow objectivity, was also an important goal. Trust was essential for the participant to feel comfortable in the interview process in order to provide comprehensive information. Asking questions that allowed the participant to shape the interpretation of data was necessary. Questions such as: “What do you mean by that? How does that make you feel? How did you come to that conclusion? Do you have anything else to add?” could prompt the participant to elaborate and provide more reliable and valuable data. Ensuring confidentiality also assisted with obtaining their personal experiences and honest feedback (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002).
Developing a better understanding of the challenges faced by community college students in their transition to WU was the goal of this researcher. Thus, there was a true commitment to an objective examination of how this transition can be improved.
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Nearly half of all students in American higher education are enrolled in community colleges (Laanan, 2001), and many of these students plan to transfer to a university (Merrow, 2007). Although the transfer function plays an important role in maintaining accessibility to higher education for many students who may have been initially ineligible to attend a 4-year institution (Laanan, 2001), only about half of those community college students who plan to transfer eventually succeed (Handel, 2007). Students who transfer face a variety of academic, psychological, and environmental challenges (Laanan, 2001) and, according to Townsend and Wilson (2006), these students need assistance from the university in order to adjust to this new culture and environment.

A number of researchers have documented the challenges of the transfer process experienced by community college students (Cejda, 1994; Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1998; Flaga, 2002, 2006; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 2001, 2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Transitioning from a community college to a research university can be a challenging experience. While many of these students need assistance with their integration into the new campus environment, some are still unable to make a successful transition (Tinto, 1988). Community colleges and research universities have distinctively different missions and campus cultures adding to the challenges of the transfer transition process (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Laanan (1995) described the community college as an environment with smaller more intimate classrooms, less academic rigor, and instructors who focused on teaching, while the university had larger more impersonal classes, inaccessible professors, and a highly competitive academic environment.
Chapter 2 of this study presents an overview of the literature regarding the community college transition process to a university. An emphasis on the particular challenges of student integration into a research institution is provided. This chapter contains five sections. Section one describes the challenges of transition through the presentation of several theoretical models, including Lewin (1936, 1946/1997) and Moos (1976, 1979), who described the impact of various environments on behavior and implications for adjustment to a new environment; Strange and Banning (2001), who further described the types of environments that can support transition; Astin (1991, 1993), whose Input-Environment-Output model reinforced the concepts presented by Lewin regarding environmental influences on behavior, adjustment, and satisfaction; and Goodman et al. (2006), who discussed the transition process from one environment to the next. A synthesis of these models helps to explain the importance of university programs and support services (environmental structures) on the transition process of students between the two desperate environments of a community college and a research university. How a student interacts with their structural environments—articulation agreements, university websites, academic advising, orientation program, student organizations, and other campus engagement opportunities—all influence the transfer students’ success, and thus, their transition to the university.

Section two examines the environmental differences in mission and culture between the community college and the research university and the implications of this disparity for student transition. Community colleges have multiple missions with open admission and a focus on teaching, while research universities are selective, academically
rigorous, and focus on research (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Davies & Casey, 1999; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1995; Rhine et al., 2000; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Section three will consider the challenges of transition, including impact of university articulation agreements, university communication, counseling and advising, and the student’s academic and social integration, including transfer shock. All of these university environmental structures can impact the process involved with the quality and effectiveness of the student transition (Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1998; Flaga, 2002, 2006; Handel, 2007; Tinto, 1988; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

The importance of campus involvement and engagement with faculty is the focus of section four, where the influence of this student interaction with the campus and faculty is explored. Research has consistently shown the significant impact student involvement has had on student satisfaction and persistence in college. Alexander Astin (1975, 1984, 1985) has conducted numerous studies supporting this finding. Faculty interaction with students both inside and outside of the classroom has also impacted student satisfaction and persistence (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2007). Astin (1984) also found that the level of student involvement on campus directly influenced their level of adjustment and success.

Section five discusses the variety of transition program and support strategies to enhance the student transitional experience, including orientation, mentor programs, student organizations, and on-campus housing. These programs and services can have a significant impact on the success of the transition process in addition to student satisfaction and persistence (Astin, 1984, 1991, 1993; Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey,
A number of theoretical concepts have been identified to explain the influence of environmental structures on student transition. The synthesis of these concepts provides the framing for this research and will contribute to a better understanding of how research universities can develop and enhance the needed campus environmental structures that will enhance the transfer transition process of a community college student.

**Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The conceptual framework for this study was informed by a convergence of environmental theory and transition theory (Astin, 1991, 1993; Goodman et al., 2006; Lewin, 1936, 1946/1997; Strange & Banning, 2001). Each of these theories is individually described and explained in context to the other theories and the transfer student transition process. Framing these environmental, transition, and involvement concepts will help to explain how environmental structures and student engagement influence the transition process of a community college student to a research university.

**Environmental Theory**

Lewin (1936, 1946/1997) introduced environmental theory to understand the interaction of person and environment and how that interaction influenced behavior. Subsequently, Astin (1991, 1993) presented a theory describing a similar concept. Both theories assert that the interaction of an individual with their environment will influence their behavior (Astin, 1993; Lewin, 1936). Strange and Banning (2001) further defined specific types of environments to provide additional clarity to environmental theory. This study is synthesizing these theories into a comprehensive and holistic approach to better
understand the environmental transition process of a student from a community college to a research university.

Kurt Lewin (1936, 1946/1997) was the first to forward the supposition of environmental influences on behavior. Environmental studies that followed further developed this theoretical concept and identified applications for the environments of higher education (Astin, 1991, 1993; Strange & Banning, 2001). According to Lewin (1946/1997),

Behavior is a function of person and environment. In summary, one can say that behavior and development depend upon the state of the person and his environment, B=f(P,E). In this equation the person (P) and his environment (E) have to be viewed as variables which are mutually dependent on each other. In other words, to understand or predict behavior, the person and his environment have to be considered as one constellation of independent factors. (p. 338)

For the purposes of this study, this interaction between person and environment equates to the interaction of a transfer student with the various university environmental structures on the campus and how these structures influence the student transition process (Astin, 1991, 1993; Lewin, 1936, 1946/1997; Strange & Banning, 2001).

Strange and Banning (2001) discussed types and impacts of campus environments, including physical environments, aggregate environments, organizational environments, and constructed environments. These defined environments enhanced Lewin’s (1936) B=f(P,E) formula and applied his theory to students in a higher education context by further defining environments, the E of the formula. Strange and Banning’s study infers that the interaction of a transfer student with a particular university
environment would influence their transition and contribute to their adjustment and success.

**Physical Environments**

According to Strange and Banning (2001), physical environments focus on the role of design and space. Behavior is based on the interaction of the person with their physical surroundings. The physical features of a campus are significant in the creation of a first impression for a college campus. What is the layout of the campus? Is it easily navigated? Are the classrooms large or small? Is it park-like or urban? For example, if campus signage does not contribute to a visitor’s successful navigation to the admissions office, the message sent to those visitors is that they are not important.

Moreover, the physical arrangement of a classroom impacts the behavior of those present. If chairs are fixed to the floor in rows facing the front, a lecture would be suitable activity. However, if the goal is for group interaction, it would be more appropriate to have chairs situated in a circle. If the goal of a residence hall is to encourage interaction and community building, the physical design can either foster or impede those goals (Strange & Banning, 2001). “The physical environments we create affect our behavior. By recognizing this relationship, and by closely examining both our objectives and the ways in which our designs function, we can create environments that are more congruent with our goals” (Moos, 1976, p. 137).

**Aggregate Environments**

Aggregate environments are informed by the collective characteristics of those who compose that particular environment. “The collective characteristics of environmental inhabitants, whether demographic or psychological, is predictive of the
dominant features of the environment” (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 36). This study continued to discuss the impact of various theories of personality type and their impact on an aggregate environment. An aggregate that is dominated by a particular personality type will encourage a certain type of behavior, while discouraging behavior that is in the minority. An aggregate that has a balance of personality types will encourage a wide range of behavior. A fraternity or other student organization with a dominant personality of hedonism will dramatically impact its membership by reinforcing a highly social behavior. A floor in a residence hall with a highly academically oriented focus will encourage academic excellence among its residents. An orientation group interaction among itself or with the orientation leader, or with university staff or faculty, can influence the transition process of those group members (Strange & Banning, 2001).

**Organizational Environments**

Organizational environments are created based upon the goals of the organization and how those structures influence the behavior of the individuals within those environments. “Organizations can be thought of as environments with a purpose” (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 61). These types of structures include: complexity, centralization, formalization, stratification, production, efficiency, and morale. Complexity refers to the level of stratification, degree of specialization, and the extent of knowledge and experience required. Centralization concerns the breadth of decision making and how power is distributed within an organization. Formalization is about the degree of rules, regulations, and procedures in order to operate. Stratification considers the number of layers within an organization and the degree of mobility to move among them. Production concerns the degree to which an organization can effectively
accomplish its goals, while efficiency refers to the manner in which an organization can effectively accomplish its goals. Morale is about the level of satisfaction of the individuals within an organization. Organizations range from the dynamic to the static. According to Strange and Banning (2001), these seven components of structure all impact the ability of an organization to respond and change. They further explain:

Thus, colleges and universities exhibit these characteristics as academic departments are organized, and units and offices report to deans and administrators about assigned responsibilities and allocated resources; administrators, staff, faculty plan, guide, and implement policies, programs and practices designed to meet institutional goals . . . these environments are all designed to achieve certain ends, and their success is often gauged by the extent to which they do, or in other words, by their effectiveness. (p. 60)

Therefore, the admissions process, academic advising, transfer student transition programs such as orientation, can all be considered organizational environments (structures) developed to influence the behavior, satisfaction, transition, and persistence of the new students within their new institutional environment.

**Constructed Environments**

According to Strange and Banning (2001), constructed environments influence those within an environment based on their perceptions: “Constructed models of the environment focus on the subjective views and experiences of participant observers, assuming that environments are understood best through the collective perception of the individuals within them” (p. 86). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) presented constructed environments through a strong foundation in cultural anthropology and social psychology.
where environments are defined by the occupants’ perceptions of the setting’s characteristics. An individual’s experience with and perceptions of the university are far more significant than how the institution is presented in formal materials. Impressions and perceptions of an institution’s values, symbols, and artifacts are viewed from different perspectives by different people (Strange & Banning, 2001). Therefore, a constructed environment could be based on the transfer students’ perception of the university’s articulation agreement, which impacts course transferability, the navigability of the university website concerning transfer student issues, or the timeliness of university communications. If these communications are perceived as comprehensive, effective, and efficient, the transfer student transition process should be enhanced. If they are perceived as untimely, unfocused, and incomplete, the transition process could be impeded.

Within this study, these four types of environments are being combined into the single concept of a “structural environment” that will encompass all environments defined by Strange and Banning (2001). Examples of these structural environments include the institution’s articulation agreement, university website and other forms of communication, academic advising services and interactions, campus support programs, such as orientation and student mentoring, and student organizations. Every type of interaction or engagement with a structural environment can influence the transfer student transition to the university (Astin, 1984; 1991, 1993; Lewin, 1936; Strange & Banning, 2001).

Astin’s (1991, 1993) Input-Environment-Output model also provided a framework to understand the impact a college environment has on a student. Within this
model, an *Input* was defined as the students’ background, demographics, abilities, motivation level, and previous experiences. *Environment* factors included *academic influences*—courses and major, faculty interaction in the classroom, *co-curricular experiences*—place of residence, participation in student organizations and other campus involvement, informal contact with faculty, peer group, work or family obligations, and *institutional characteristics* such as mission, size, culture, physical resources, and selectivity. *Output* included behavior, attitude, values, beliefs, achievement, motivation, career plans, and overall satisfaction. A student’s input not only has a direct influence on their output, it also has a direct impact on the environment, which in turn affects the output (Astin, 1991, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

**Figure 1.** Astin’s I-E-O Model (Astin, 1991, p. 18).
Simply put,

Inputs refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of entry to the institution; environment refers to the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed; and outcomes refers to the student’s characteristics after exposure to the environment. (Astin, 1993, p. 7).

According to this model, the university’s environmental structures, including programs and services, can play a key role in the development and ‘outcomes’ of its students. Astin’s (1991) Input Environment Output I-E-O model (Figure 1) can be related to Lewin’s (1936, 1946/1997) behavior is a function of person and environment, \( B=f(P,E) \) model. Both theories consider the interaction of the person with an environment and the resulting behavior. Person or “P” would be similar to the input or “I” of Astin’s (1991) model. Astin (1993) described input as the students’ background, demographics, abilities, motivation level, and previous experiences. This definition of input also characterizes the essence of person or “P” in Lewin’s (1936, 1946/1997) theory. Environment “E” is described by Astin (1993) as academic influences, co-curricular experiences, and institutional characteristics. In a similar description within a larger context, Strange and Banning (2001) frame the environment in terms of aggregate, physical, structural, and constructed. Astin (1993) defines output as behavior, attitude, values, beliefs, achievement, motivation, career plans, and overall satisfaction, all of which equate to the “B” behavior in the Lewin (1936, 1946/1997) model.

For this study, the four types of environments defined by Strange and Banning (2001)—physical, aggregate, organizational and constructed—will be merged into a
single environmental structure that will consist of all types of environments, including campus articulation agreements, university communications, academic and social support services, orientation programs, student organizations—“environments with a purpose” (p. 61). The concept being explored considers how a community college student interaction with the university structural environment will impact (behavior) satisfaction, persistence, and success. Goodman et al.’s (2006) Transition Theory also considers the concept of how the person and environment interaction impacts behavior, and in this case, the behavior is the process of transition; support is the coping resource of a structural environment.

**Transition Theory**

Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006) also considers the concept of how the person and environment interaction impacts behavior, and in this case, the behavior is the process of transition; support is the coping resource of a structural environment (Figure 2). Goodman et al. (2006) defined transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). In order to more fully understand the transitions process, a model was developed to explain the three major parts of a transition. These parts included: (a) approaching transitions, (b) coping resources, and (c) strengthening resources.

Approaching transitions identified the type, context, and impact of the transition. Is there a relationship change, a personal change, a career change? Is the change anticipated? What change is occurring and what is its impact on the individual(s) involved? Having a good understanding of what will be involved with the transition will assist the individual going through the transition, as well as assisting those who may be
supporting the participants in the transition. Once the transition is identified, coping strategies need to be explored. In this study, the transition is the move from the community college to the research university. Although this transition is anticipated, the impact on the individual would be partially predicated on the environmental transition process designed by the university.

*Coping Resources* involves the Four S System—Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies. *Situation:* Every person’s situation is different. What type of transition is occurring? How does the person perceive the transition? Is it positive, expected, exciting? Or, is it stressful, unexpected, and perceived as negative? *Self:* What are the person’s demographics, and how do those characteristics frame the persons’ psychological resources. What are their strengths and weaknesses? What are their
previous experiences with similar transitions? What is their level of optimism? Support: People or systems in place will either enhance or hinder the transition. It is important for the helper to provide the needed support. “Social support is often said to be the key to handling stress” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 75). Those experiencing transitions must be able to identify and utilize the support systems needed to be successful. Strategies for coping involve enhancing strengths and developing skills to approach or respond to situations that cause stress, and, in this case, to more effectively manage transition (Goodman et al., 2006; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). This study would define coping resources as the environmental structures available, designed, and facilitated by the university. These coping structures would include programs, services, and engagement opportunities—orientation programs, peer mentoring, academic advising, student organizations, and web-based information and support—facilitated by the new campus that would provide the support needed for a successful transition.

Strengthening Resources demonstrates that new strategies can be utilized. Transitions can be managed through strengthening resources—The Four S’s. The transition process usually occurs over a prolonged period of time, even when associated with a specific event. Sometimes it may take 6 months to 2 years for an individual to fully move through a transition. It takes time to leave one set of relationships and assumptions and adapt to a new environment with new expectations (Goodman et al., 2006). Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) stated that “a sense of belonging is that calm and positive feeling you have when you feel part of things, when you know the ropes and what is expected of you” (p. 59). Thus, continuing transfer student involvement in university programs, services, and engagement opportunities throughout their first year
should enhance their ongoing transition to the university (Astin, 1984). In order to better understand the needed student support to transition between two disparate institutional environments, we must first gain a better understanding of what contributes to these differences.

**Differences in Institutional Mission and Culture**

Institutional differences in mission and culture are fundamental factors contributing to the challenges of transition from a community college to a research university (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Davies & Casey, 1999; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1995; Townsend, 1995; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). A comparison of mission statements from the Association of American Universities (AAU), a consortium of leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada, and the American Association of Community Colleges, an organization representing the nation’s community colleges, illustrated the vast difference in focus and priority of these institutions of higher education. These disparate missions frame the challenges associated with moving from the culture of a community college to that of a research university.

As a research university and a member of the AAU, WU has a primary role with research and the creation of new knowledge. According to the AAU (2011), “The purpose of the American research university is to ask questions and solve problems. . . . By combining cutting-edge research with graduate and undergraduate education, our research universities are also training new generations of leaders in all fields” (para. 1).

In contrast, community colleges emphasize open access, broad-based educational programs, lifelong learning, and serving the needs of the local community (Cohen &
According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2011), “The community college’s mission is the fountain from which all of its activities flow. In simplest terms, the mission of the community college is to provide education for individuals, many of whom are adults, in its service region” (para. 2). Understanding and appreciating the differences in these two types of institutions can assist in understanding what is needed in the transition from the community college to the research university.

**Community College Mission**

According to Cohen and Brawer (2008), the mission of a community college is broad and encompassing, including vocational education, developmental education, community education and the collegiate function—preparing students for transfer to a 4-year institution. Each of these following roles of the community college illustrates their broad and diverse mission.

Vocational education provides an educational pathway for students to acquire entry level jobs in business and industry. This path often involves the completion of a certificate program or an associate’s degree and prepares students for a particular vocation. Developmental education is designed to enhance student ability in literacy and basic skills in order to pursue their educational objectives. Unfortunately, many students do not possess the basic skills needed to be successful in the classroom. Merrow (2007) found that 60-80% of all new community college students needed developmental education. These developmental courses provide students with the support and assistance needed to succeed academically and move to the next steps in their education.

Cohen and Brawer (2008) found that community education is broad in scope and includes contract services, adult and continuing education, and a variety of other activities
that are not typical college programs. These courses may be for credit or noncredit, vary in duration, be sponsored by an outside organization or coordinated by the college. They may be held on or off campus, benefit the entire community or designed to meet a personal interest. The wide range of offerings is intended to meet the diverse needs of the local community.

The collegiate function provided students with the general education courses needed for transfer to a 4-year institution to acquire a baccalaureate degree. Open admission and low cost is the cornerstone of the community college admission philosophy, drawing a student population that is diverse academically, socioeconomically, ethnically, and in age. Many students that do not have the resources or academic credentials to be admitted to a university are able to attend a community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In their study, Cohen and Brawer (2008) inferred that the management of the transfer function can greatly influence the community college students’ ability to transition to the university environment despite the decidedly different institutional missions. This transfer function is critical to students with the goal of a bachelor’s degree.

**University Mission**

Research universities have a distinctively different mission and culture. Admission standards are selective, cost is significantly higher, and their ability to provide resources and services to students is greater. Classes are larger and academic expectations are high. Their primary focus is on research and graduate education, whereas community colleges focus on teaching (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). University faculty tend to be leery of the academic standards of community colleges (Handel, 2007),
contributing further to the elitist culture of these institutions and the marginalization of transfer students. The cultural environments of these two institutions are significantly different (Rhine et al., 2000), adding to the challenges of transition.

**Institutional Cultural Differences**

Davies and Casey (1999), Laanan (1995), Townsend (1995), and Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that the significant cultural differences between these institutions contributed to the challenges of the transfer student transition to the university. These cultural differences, including academic standards and expectations, faculty accessibility, and the focus on research instead of teaching, had implications for the types of university programs and support services needed for transfer students.

Laanan (1995) received extensive feedback from community college transfer students about their experience at a major research institution (University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA]) in comparison to their community college experience. Student responses were categorized in two broad areas: academic culture and campus culture. The responses indicated a mixed experience concerning the transition with some students extremely satisfied: “Overall, I am happy to be at such a great institution and now that I have adapted, my grades are rising and my classes have become interesting” (Laanan, 1995, p. 46). While others were not connecting to the new institutional environment and expressed dissatisfaction:

Personally, I have become very dissatisfied with the UCLA experience because of the difficulty in meeting new people and because I also commute. There are certain needs and resources I don’t get, which prevents me from enjoying my college experience. (Laanan, 1995, p. 46)
Varied student experiences illustrated the challenges associated with the transfer student transition for many students and demonstrated a need for the university to be more proactive in its programs and support services for these students, especially academically and socially (Laanan, 1995). Having a better understanding of these cultural differences could contribute to the development of these support programs.

**Academic Culture**

Academically, the feedback was consistent regarding the level of challenge. University of California, Los Angeles was much more rigorous, with some students responding that they studied five to six times more than at their community college; the students found it difficult to absorb the material. Competition was much tougher at UCLA. The courses were much more demanding, especially with critical thinking and analysis. The fast paced quarter system of the university was also seen as a significant challenge due to the harder classes and heavier workload within a short period of time. Adjustment to the university was seen as difficult, but occurred over time (Laanan, 1995).

Students stated that it was difficult to talk with faculty. University of California, Los Angeles professors tended to be distant and arrogant. They missed the personalized experience at the community college where the instructors were more approachable. The university faculty were too focused on research and relied on their teaching assistants for instruction and grading. The community college classes were smaller, and the teachers were better. Although students noted the higher caliber of academics and stimulation at the university, they indicated that more services were needed to support the adjustment process. Although perceptions were mixed about the community college experience,
there seemed to be greater overall satisfaction with the environment at UCLA (Laanan, 1995).

Qualitative research conducted by Townsend (1995) also found significant cultural differences and expectations between the two types of institutions. The community college transfer students believed that there were different academic standards at the university. Classes required more writing and a higher level of critical thinking. Tests were different and more difficult. One student stated that the multiple-choice test she took at the community college would have one right answer for each question. In the university exam, all of the answers were correct, but one answer was the most correct—an entirely different academic expectation. Students were also less likely to help each other due to the highly competitive nature of the university. Perceptions of faculty were also very different. Community college faculty were accessible, easy to talk with, and tended to interact with the students in the classroom. University faculty were perceived as aloof, intimidating, and not interactive. One student noted that he did not want to participate in class for fear of asking a stupid question. Most of the students believed that the community college did not adequately prepare them for university level work (Townsend, 1995).

A subsequent study by Townsend and Wilson (2006) reinforced earlier findings regarding institutional differences between the community college and the research university. Again, faculty were more accessible at the community college, especially for one-on-one interaction. The smaller classes encouraged more interaction and a friendlier environment. Students believed that university faculty were primarily focused on research and did not care about teaching. However, faculty at a research university are
supposed to focus on research, and the university needed to do a better job of communicating this research priority versus the role of community colleges and of other 4-year institutions. Student understanding of this differentiation may help to mitigate their concerns about faculty priorities with research over teaching (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). This testifies to the need for the university to better articulate this research focus to potential transfer students.

Townsend and Wilson (2006) also found that homework assignments were seen as different. Transfer students noted that regular homework and graded assignments throughout the semester at the community college encouraged them to keep up with their assignments, while the university’s course grade was based on two exams. This grading reality was shocking to most community college transfer students. Students also felt like a number at the university due to the large class sizes and their virtual anonymity within the class. At the community college they would know everybody in the class, and their instructor knew them by name. The studies by Townsend (1995) and Townsend and Wilson (2006) demonstrated that transfer student transition issues have not changed significantly over time.

In the classroom, Davies and Casey (1999) found that students appreciated the more individualized attention at the community college with instructors and counselors. There was more one-on-one interaction—a more intimate environment. At the university, the student felt like a number. Students had mixed reaction regarding community college instruction. Most appreciated the quality of instruction and the focus on teaching. Some were disappointed with the quality of teaching at the community college, calling some of the instructors immature and unprofessional. Students also were disappointed in the
university faculty—being tested on lectures summed up their teaching-learning experience. Some wondered if the faculty actually reviewed their assignments and others expressed frustration at their subservient role when communicating with a professor. Coursework was seen as more challenging at the university while community college classes were seen as less demanding. One student noted that the community college seemed like high school again.

According to Merrow (2007), about two-thirds of community college students need remedial education, contributing to a student attitude of not being good enough to be admitted to a 4-year college. Although remedial education can contribute to academic preparation for transfer to a university, the student self-doubt can become an obstacle to their success. The student-centered approach at the community college was seen as beneficial to students due to more one-on-one interaction with faculty and emphasis on teaching versus research. Community college faculty concentrated on teaching, whereas the research university environment puts a premium on faculty research. Merrow also found academic implications for institutional funding levels. Students can take up to 5 years to complete a 2-year degree due to course availability. Community colleges do not have enough funding to provide the courses needed by the students to prepare for transfer to the university.

Campus Culture

Davies and Casey (1999), Laanan (1995), and Townsend and Wilson (2006) all found that the transition to the university campus social environment could be challenging. Some students were excited about the expanded opportunities of the
university, while other struggled to find their niche and the support needed to integrate. This challenge suggested the need for a better understanding of institutional differences.

Davies and Casey (1999) conducted focus groups and found a variety of institutional differences including campus comfort, the academic experience, social involvement, and financial concerns. Student perception of campus comfort varied. One transfer student stated that if their community college had offered a 4-year degree, she would still be there; it was more relaxed, more comfortable, easy to navigate, and more fun. At the university, students felt lost and overwhelmed. However, other students talked about their love of the university environment. One discussed their amazement of the available services, the number of computers, and the strong learning environment. Social involvement opportunities seemed to meet or exceed expectations. Many students found the university to be friendly and offer a plethora of social opportunities. However, some found the social life to adversely affect their academic pursuits; it was easy to overindulge. Students were mixed about finding social support systems. Some connected to their academic departments, classes, or with others within their cohort of transfer students. Still, others had limited social lives either by choice in order to focus on academics, or by having difficulty meeting other students due to the sheer magnitude of the university. “Students need strong support systems . . . social and institutional sources all contribute to, or detract from, a good college experience” (Davies & Casey, 1999, p. 71).

Laanan (1995) also found that social involvement opportunities were abundant at the university, encouraging students to stay on campus. At the community college, it was typical to attend classes and then leave. Some of the feedback described the difficulty in
getting involved at such a large institution with the competitive nature and many cliques that had been established. These students were more comfortable with the more intimate environment of their community college.

Social integration was seen as challenging. Many university courses are too large, making it difficult to meet people in class. Native students had already established their circle of friends or found their campus niche. This study highlighted the challenges of transfer student integration based on the differences in institutional mission and campus cultures and the need for the research university to better articulate its research priority to potential new transfer students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Handel (2007) found that, although community colleges have opened the doors of higher education to many students who otherwise would not have had an opportunity to attend college, they were still seen as the poor stepchild of higher education in America. They received less funding than universities and are forced to compete for limited resources with the K through 12 school system. Many faculty at 4-year institutions, remain skeptical of rigor and academic expectation at 2-year colleges, further contributing to the differences in the institutional cultures. Students also perceived the disparity between the campus cultures and academic standards of the university and community college and the challenges those differences presented.

**Challenges of Transition**

Why are so many community college students unable to successfully transfer to a 4-year institution? Tinto (1988) discussed the importance of the first 6 weeks of college regarding student persistence toward the bachelor degree. He reviewed the rites of passage according to Van Gennep (1960)—separation, transition, and incorporation.
Separation involved the decline in associating with previous affiliations. Transition initiated interaction with a new environment. This phase involved learning new skills to navigate within the new group. The final phase was incorporation where new interactions are established, and competency in the new association was confirmed through ceremony. Therefore, the environmental support structures available, especially during the first 6 weeks of the term, will influence the student transition and the challenges associated with the transition process (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Handel (2007) stated that the low numbers of students who made a successful transition from a community college to a 4-year institution has been an ongoing concern for educators and policymakers. He found that only half of the community college students who expressed their intent to transfer to a university eventually succeeded as documented by the U.S. Department of Education (2003), and the American Council on Education (ACE, 2003); the ACE described the transfer rate at only 25% of the potential students. Cejda and Kaylor (2001) found a number of barriers to the transfer process, including the transferability of credits, which illustrated the need for articulation agreements that clearly outline course requirements. Alpern (2000) described the need for 2-year and 4-year institutions to work together to improve articulation agreements and support services. Creating a clearly defined and smooth process for the community college student transition to a 4-year institution has long been a priority for many administrators, faculty, and enrollment management specialists (Clemetsen & Balzer, 2008). Piland (1995) explained the need for state policy makers and higher education authorities to “do everything possible . . . to facilitate transfer” (p. 43). Effective policies
and programs are the essential components for academic success and the persistence of community college transfer students at the university (Rhine et al., 2000).

According to these studies, numerous challenges exist to a successful transition for a community college student to a research university. Articulation agreements need to be in place and clearly defined (Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1998; Handel, 2007; McGowan & Gawley, 2006). University communication must be accessible, accurate, and timely (Davies & Casey, 1998). Effective counseling and advising can greatly assist students who are moving between disparate academic expectations (Davies & Casey, 1998; Handel, 2007). Programs and support services need to be offered to assist these students in their transition from the culture of a community college to the new and different environment of the university (Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 2001; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

**Articulation Agreements and Course Transferability**

A significant concern of transfer students is whether or not a course will transfer to the university. Cuseo (2000) found that curriculum contained conditions that caused difficulty and confusion regarding course transferability due to the multiple mission of the community college and implications for the number of courses that are nontransferable, rigid curricular requirements impacting course transferability and/or courses accepted as electives instead of as general education requirements, university curricular changes without consideration of the implications for the community colleges, articulation agreements not followed by university academic divisional deans or department chairs, and a nonidentifiable articulation officer at either the community college or university. “Articulation agreements describe how the courses students complete at a community
college will transfer to a four-year college or university” (Handel, 2007, p. 43). Thus, problems with these agreements can impact student transition.

Davies and Casey (1998) and Handel (2007) found that transfer students expressed frustration over coursework completed at their community college that was not accepted by the university. Although this concern was sometimes due to insufficient academic advising, it was also due to the absence of or problems with the articulation agreement. These agreements are a challenging issue between the 2- and 4-year institutions. Due to the complexity of state higher education systems, the resources needed to develop and maintain these agreements are limited or do not exist. Although policymakers would like to see a seamless transition of all courses, the faculty at both institutions have significant challenges coming to agreement with the coursework standards needed for transfer.

Handel (2007) found that articulation agreements are difficult to develop due to differing views of faculty and the near impossible effort needed to maintain and keep current due to the high volume of courses involved. However, he also determined that some type of overarching agreement must be developed to support the transferring students and encourage transfer. His study described the California database that has clearly defined articulation agreements among the state’s universities and community colleges making it much easier to see what courses will transfer (Handel, 2007). Davies and Casey (1998) mentioned Florida as another example of a state with a comprehensive and uniform articulation agreement with clearly identified courses that transfer. Many states have agreements between individual institutions. Their study emphasized the need for clearly communicated information about what courses will transfer. A student in one
of their focus groups spoke very positively about his community college’s catalogue and their system of noting all courses that would transfer with an asterisk. The information was clear and straightforward, contributing to the transfer of all courses. Unfortunately, Davies and Casey found that some states do not have comprehensive articulation agreements between the universities and community colleges and instead have individual agreements. This approach “provides limited assurance to the transferring students” (Davies & Casey, 1998, p. 102). According to McGowan and Gawley (2006), “A standard student record system for listing and categorizing types of transfer credits should be adopted across all university-college articulations” (p. 12). Some type of overarching agreement must be developed to support the transferring students and encourage transfer (Handel, 2007).

Davies and Casey (1998) also identified problems with course transfer; the majority of students were not successful. Students who experienced difficulty did not have a course catalogue with clearly identified transfer courses. Another challenge was that various programs within the university were not uniform in their requirements, creating more confusion with knowing what would transfer. Handel (2007) believed that articulation agreements should help most students most of the time.

Cuseo (2000) also identified problems with institutional admissions and registration requirements. Community college students were being required to take standardized tests regardless of their academic performance as a precursor to university acceptance, completing transcript analysis even after enrollment in their first semester classes, and providing transfer students with the lowest enrollment priority, even after new freshmen. Although articulation agreements and other issues of course
transferability influenced the student transition process, the communication strategies utilized by the university can impact the transition process, as well.

**University Communication**

According to Davies and Casey (1998), effective communication by the university was seen as a combination of caring and informing, with an emphasis on timely and accurate information. They found that the initial contact was significant in setting the stage for a positive transfer experience. Their study further expressed the importance of having university staff who specialized in the transfer process going to the community college and meeting with students who planned to transfer. Following the initial visit, students appreciated the follow-up material sent to their home from the university. One student commented on receiving a checklist which provided them with all of the necessary steps in the transfer process. Visiting the university campus also provided extremely helpful information and added to the smooth transfer transition. Students who were successful took advantage of the many forms of communication provided by the university. However, less than a quarter of the students who were interviewed in this study took advantage of these support services. These students expressed frustration with the communication from both their community college and the university. One student described the problems with the delivery and receipt of his transcript. He had requested that a copy of his transcript be sent to the university, but was unaware that this document was being held by the community college; they failed to notify him of the hold on his record. The university was unable to process his application due to an incomplete file because they had not received his transcript, and they had not notified him of the deficiency. He was caught in the middle due to poor communication on the part of both
institutions. Institutional communication was seen as the most significant student concern because it was often difficult to identify a spokesperson for the university. Students felt a need to be connected to someone at the university and wanted that connection to be easily identified.

Handel (2007) found that universities must focus on communicating the most important issues of the transfer process to students and their parents—academic ability and college costs. Many students believe they cannot compete academically at an elite research university, and they tend to overestimate the cost of attendance. In his study, the university’s communication outreach to these prospective students emphasized the important message that community college students admitted to this university performed just as well as native students in upper division courses. The messaging also emphasized the availability and accessibility of financial aid.

Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that the university website was instrumental in creating a more seamless transfer process. This electronic communication detailed the transferability of courses and the steps needed for a successful transfer. Students were less dependent on university representatives and more self-reliant regarding the transfer process when this resource was available. While effective communication was seen as important, counseling and advising services also provided a personalized connection to the university and the opportunity for a seamless transition.

Counseling and Advising

Advising was another area identified in the Davies and Casey (1998) study. When the advisors at the community college or university were well versed in all aspects of the transfer process and provided timely and accurate information, the transfer process was
smooth. Students expressed frustration when the advisor did not know about course transferability. Many students in the study talked about being advised to take certain courses only to find out later that those courses would not transfer or would only transfer as electives. There were also times when the advisor was rushed or lacked basic transfer information, causing challenges with the transfer.

This study found that students had differing expectations of the advisors at each institution. Community college advisors were responsible for knowing what courses would transfer and providing information on the transfer process, while the university advisors were expected to confirm the transferability information, assist with the development of their upper division program, and support the transition process to the university. Students particularly appreciated one-on-one time with advisors (Davies & Casey, 1998).

Handel (2007) discussed the importance of supporting community college counselors in their professional development. This would assist them in providing the most relevant information and greatest assistance to their students who plan to transfer. In order to more fully support outreach to community college transfer students, a professional development conference for community college counselors was established to create a stronger relationship between the transfer student support staff at the community colleges and the University of California system. This conference offers educational sessions and provides opportunities for the community college counselors to interface with the university representatives to discuss transfer issues and develop a more seamless transition process (Handel, 2007).
Counseling and advising can provide needed support for community college students in transition. However, a university academic and social environment conducive to a smooth transfer student transition would also be of great benefit to this population.

**Academic and Social Adjustment**

Academic and social adjustment may be the most important part of the transition process. Laanan (2001) found that most universities do not provide formal transfer specific support programs although transfer students continue to face challenges adjusting to their new environment. His study indicated that few of these senior institutions are making an effort to address these students’ needs. In previous research, Laanan (1995) conducted a quantitative study with a cohort of 717 students who transferred from 64 community colleges to a large research university to gain a better understanding of the complexities of this transfer process. He found challenges with the social transition to the university in addition to transfer shock, the academic adjustment.

According to Flaga (2002, 2006), students face five dimensions of transition regarding their academic, social, and physical environments. The academic environment included faculty interactions both inside and outside of the classroom, advisors, and study groups. The social environment included interactions (both formal and informal) with other students through residence halls, student organizations, campus activities, and campus common areas. The physical environment included the actual physical structures, as well as campus program and service structures, parking, and campus culture. These environments are similar to the environments defined by Astin (1993) and Strange and Banning (2001), and the ‘environmental structures’ being utilized with this study.
Flaga’s (2006) five dimensions include: learning resources, connecting, familiarity, negotiating, and integrating. *Learning resources* were defined as the tools students used to learn about campus services and academic systems to gain information about the campus environment. Three types of resources were identified. Formal learning resources were components of the formal university structure, such as orientation, advisors, faculty, and staff. Informal learning resources consisted of those who knew a lot about the campus, including alumni and friends. Initiative, the third resource, consisted of sorting out needs and finding the service of information needed to succeed (Flaga, 2002, 2006). *Connecting* involved relationship-building with others in the academic, social, and physical university environments. Academic connections consisted of class interactions, faculty office hours, and group projects. Social connections with friends who were current students helped to expand social networks and connect with campus activities. Physical environment connections occurred by visits prior to enrollment and by taking the time to experience the campus before and after classes (Flaga, 2002, 2006). *Familiarity* developed “as students internalized the information they gathered and felt more comfortable with their new environment” (Flaga, 2006, p. 7). After some time, a transition to the new environment occurred, and the university became their new home. *Negotiating* consisted of the behavioral adjustments that occurred to succeed in the academic, social, and physical environments of the university. For example, a student in a large classroom sits in the same seat every day instead of moving around to begin to establish social networks within the class. *Integrating*, the final dimension is “a developmental change resulting from the students’ relationship to the three environments. . . . This is similar to Tinto’s (1987) theory of
freshmen integration, but Flaga’s study also includes the physical environment” (Flaga, 2006, p. 8).

Handel (2007), who is the former director of transfer enrollment planning and outreach for the University of California system, outlined an approach for the successful transfer of community college students. This strategy included the importance of academic preparation, communicating the most important information (presented under University Communication within this section), supporting community college counselors (presented under Counseling and Advising), implementation of articulation agreements (presented under Articulation Agreements), priority admission for transfer students, community college transfer student enrollment targets, and the creation of a transfer-going culture.

Research contends that the most important factor in determining student success is academic preparation (Adelman, 2007), so the faculty of the UC system and the community colleges focused on determining the type and number of courses needed for community college students to successfully transfer (Handel, 2007). Community college students need to have priority admission over those students transferring from another 4-year institution, because they have no other way of achieving a bachelor’s degree. The UC system does provide priority to community college transfers students over those transferring from other 4-year institutions. Four-year institutions typically consider transfer students after enrolling their freshman class or when missing freshman enrollment targets. Universities who develop transfer student targets demonstrate a commitment to community college transfer students. Community colleges and universities must develop a supportive environment for the transfer process through the
creation of a transfer-going culture. At a community college, the presence of a transfer center, counselors specializing in the transfer process, and a commitment to being linked to 4-year institutions promoted a culture of transfer. Universities that develop orientation programs, transfer student-specific housing, and other support services that are specifically designed for community college transfer students, demonstrate a transfer-friendly environment. This supportive culture within both institutions was seen as critical to the successful transition of a community college student to the university (Handel, 2007). All of these support programs and services can be considered university environmental structures needed to assist in a transfer student’s transition.

A study by Townsend and Wilson (2006) interviewed students who transferred from a community college to the state’s large research university to gain a better understanding of the transfer process. Their findings illustrated the student perception of the level of assistance provided by both the community college and the university, the university effort to assist the students in their transition including orientation, and a comparison of student and faculty interaction both inside and outside of the classroom between the community college and the university.

Most students indicated that the assistance provided by the community college was limited or nonexistent, although few asked for help. A majority of the students utilized the university website to determine course transferability and had worked with an advisor. However, some of the students did not ask for help, because they were unsure of whom to ask due to the complex structure of the university. Most of the interviewed students participated in a university welcome, orientation, or other transition activity and found these programs to be effective. However, some indicated the need for further
assistance in adapting to a new environment. Although these students were accepted into a research university, it appeared they did not fully understand the differing cultures and expectations—larger classes and faculty with a priority on research over teaching. University academic expectations involved fewer graded assignments contributing to a more stressful academic environment. Social integration was also more challenging due to not living on campus and not having the smaller, more intimate classrooms at the community college (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Based on their findings, Townsend and Wilson (2006) had a number of recommendations. First, both the community college and university needed to provide specific support services to transfer students, including designated staff and a comprehensive virtual transfer center. Second, the university needed to recognize the special needs of the community college transfer student in the orientation process. “Some students may need a hand hold during their initial weeks” (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 452) in order to adjust to the new environment; university programs needed to be designed accordingly. Third, the university needed to be clear in all communication about the mission of a research university in comparison to that of a community college (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). These university support programs and services, or environmental structures, can influence student satisfaction, persistence, and success (Astin, 1984, 1993; Strange & Banning, 2001).

Although these students have experienced college, the university presented a new institutional culture with classes larger and more impersonal than what they experienced in the community college, and where faculty focused on research more than teaching. The students needed to understand this difference in determining their best 4-year
institutional fit. A fourth recommendation focused on the need for university faculty to adjust their pedagogical approach to the classroom and consider the creation of smaller learning communities through occasional assignments involving student dyads or small groups. This approach would facilitate the academic integration of the new transfer students, as well as begin to assist with the development of their social network. Finally, the university needed to formally facilitate the academic and social integration of these transfer students through a variety of programs and support services, including learning communities, transfer student organizations, and peer support groups (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

A subsequent study conducted by Townsend (2008) included additional student focus group interviews to review the actual transfer process and the adjustment process experienced by the community college transfers. Students identified a number of factors in their decision to attend the university, including cost, distance from their home, influence of friends or relatives, the degree of course transferability, and academic programs. The transition and adjustment process to the university begins with orientation, which may or may not be specifically designed for transfer students. Following orientation, they continue with course selection and class attendance, as they connect socially with their fellow students and academically connect with faculty. Being part of this new environment was reminiscent of being a freshman again, but these students did not want to be treated like first-year students; some commented that “there is a big difference between eighteen and twenty” (Townsend, 2008, p. 73). The interviewees also acknowledged the growing up that occurs following the first year. Community college transfers also indicated the new challenges they faced—campus size,
academic expectations, and attitudes of faculty. Socially, they also struggled, unless they had friends or family already in attendance.

Townsend (2008) offered some suggestions to enhance the transfer student transition. More scholarships for transfer students, the need for understanding credit transferability in advance, better communication between the university and students, and community college faculty understanding of 4-year college expectations to ensure adequate academic preparation, were key recommendations. She also encouraged an orientation program specifically designed for transfer students with opportunity for faculty interaction; this would create an academic connection and demonstrate faculty care and concern for these students. Transfer students should also have the opportunity to live on campus with other transfers, not freshmen. In general, the university needed to develop programs and services to meet the particular needs of this population and to create a welcoming and supportive environment.

Cuseo (2000) identified barriers to the smooth transition of community college students to a university. These included the curriculum (presented under Articulation Agreement), financial aid, admissions and registration (presented under Articulation Agreement), and student housing and residential life, as factors or conditions that interfered with the transfer transition process. Barriers included limited financial aid portability for students transferring between institutions, limited scholarships designated to transfer students, and letters of acceptance sent to transfer students after financial aid deadlines. Challenges included little to no on-campus housing for transfer students, providing students with their admissions acceptance after the housing deadlines have passed, providing transfer students low priority with on-campus housing or offering them
housing only after meeting the needs of the new freshmen, and little to no assistance with off-campus housing services. Astin (1984) also discussed the importance of enhanced student involvement and engagement through on-campus housing.

**Transfer Shock**

Transfer students experiencing a decline in their grade point average following transfer is a phenomenon known as transfer shock (Hill, 1965). According to Hill (1965), community college transfer students experience an appreciable decline in their grades following transfer and that recovery from this decline is as prevalent as the transfer shock itself. Although some transfer students outperformed or were equal to native students, the overall study found that native students performed better than their community college counterparts. Transfer students from other 4-year institutions also outperformed the community college transfer students, and native students also graduated sooner and in greater numbers. This academic decline implies a need for university support programs and services or environmental structures to mitigate this transition challenge.

According to Cejda (1994), faculty collaboration was found to have an impact on transfer shock. This study consisted of two groups of community college transfer students—one group of education majors and the other group of noneducation majors. A majority of the education majors experienced an increase or no change in their grade point average, while 75% of the noneducation majors experienced a decline in their GPA. Faculty collaboration between the two institutions had occurred for the education majors, while this type of faculty interaction did not occur with the noneducation majors. Implications for this study included the need for faculty collaboration between community colleges and universities to improve the transfer student transition process,
the findings that transfer shock can be mitigated, and that transfer student academic performance should to be measured to provide the academic data needed to confirm important transition support services.

Further research conducted by Cejda (1994, 1997) and Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998), found that although transfer shock occurred, it needed to be put into context. Many previous studies had measured the change in transitional grade point average for a particular sample without regard to the discipline or major. Cejda (1997) found that although transfer shock occurred, it was discipline specific. Students majoring in mathematics, sciences, and business experienced a decline in their grade point average, whereas students with majors in education, fine arts, and humanities actually experienced an increase in their grade point average—a transfer ecstasy (Cejda, 1997).

Glass and Harrington’s (2002) study of a sample of students in the College of Arts and Sciences in a large public university, supported the findings by Hill (1965) in that transfer students experienced a decline in grade point average during their first semester at the senior institution, but recovered as they persisted. They also noted the importance of university support services and outreach programs to mitigate the experience of transfer shock.

Alpern (2000) found that the student’s grade point average at their community college influenced their academic performance at the baccalaureate institution and that the student may not experience transfer shock. She also noted the importance of university communication regarding financial aid, contact with academic advising, transfer and orientation procedures, and general transfer student support services to assist with the academic transition.
Rhine et al. (2000) reviewed the concept of transfer shock, but also addressed the social and emotional transition issues, as well as the academic challenges. According to their study, universities needed to understand the institutional cultural differences in order to provide the appropriate support services for these students. Townsend (1995) also noted that the student-centered and more personalized environment of the community college could be a contributing factor to the transitional challenge or “shock” due to the differing expectations and standards of the university. Becoming involved on campus and engaged with faculty can also contribute to student satisfaction and persistence, both of which can contribute to transition (Astin, 1985; Rhine et al., 2000).

**Importance of Faculty Engagement and Student Involvement**

Student interaction with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom influenced student persistence and satisfaction (Astin, 1984). Involvement in general contributed to student success and, thus, transition. These involvement opportunities included living on campus, participation in a student organization or activity, or engagement with faculty (Astin, 1984).

**Faculty Engagement**

Faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom has a significant impact on a students’ persistence at a college or university (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Tinto (2007) also found that faculty actions within the classroom also had a significant impact on student retention. He discussed the practice of most institutions having the least senior faculty teaching the first year courses instead of “putting the best first.” A change in teaching assignments, with more experienced faculty teaching first-year students, could have an impact on student retention. When a student is exposed to organized and clear
instruction during their first year of college, student satisfaction is greatly enhanced (Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008). Astin (1984, 1993) also discussed the importance of faculty student interaction. He concluded that, with the exception of a students’ peer group, faculty are the most important aspect of a students’ development. Environmental structures designed to enhance student-faculty engagement are important for the satisfaction, persistence, and thus transition of new students.

A study by Kuh and Hu (2001) concerning student-faculty interaction had four conclusions. First, they determined that over a 4-year period of time, student-faculty contact increased due to the smaller class sizes as the student progresses to upper division courses and that upperclassmen developed a better understanding of the material in their major, which contributed to an expanded intellectual capacity with the faculty. Second, the degree of student effort toward their “educationally purposeful activities” (p. 326) contributed to a stronger interaction with faculty. Third, the type of institution had “limited influence on the manner in which faculty-student interaction affected student satisfaction” (p. 327). Although small liberal arts colleges offered greater frequency and quality of interaction with faculty, students attending a research university were the most satisfied. Fourth, “the effects of student-faculty interaction were conditional” (p. 327). Students who were prepared better academically had more frequent interaction with faculty. However, substantial contacts occurring outside of the classroom had a positive influence on the student college experience and overall satisfaction.

According to Kuh and Hu (2001), the more interaction a student can have with a faculty member, the better. Student contact with faculty outside of the classroom seemed to positively contribute to their perception of the institution’s environment. This positive
perception directly contributed to their degree of effort and general satisfaction with the campus. “The most important finding from this study is that student-faculty interaction encourages students to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college” (Kuh & Hu, 2001, p. 329).

Astin (1993) found that, with the exception of the peer group, faculty had the most significant impact on the undergraduate development of a student. Such interactions included participating with faculty research or assisting with teaching, and interacting with faculty outside of the classroom. This faculty-student interaction also contributed significantly to a student’s grade point average, persistence to a degree, and pursuit of further education in graduate school.

In a study by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the quality and frequency of faculty-student interaction significantly influenced student persistence at their college or university. Not only were classroom interactions important, but the quality of the classroom instruction played a significant role, as well. A pedagogical approach that enhanced learning also increased student satisfaction, and, thus, persistence (Pascarella et al., 2008). Although student involvement and faculty interaction play a significant role in student satisfaction and persistence, university programs and support services are keys to the ongoing student transition. Student involvement with other programs and activities also enhances success (Astin, 1984)

**Student Involvement**

Astin (1984) discussed the importance of students’ involvement in their learning and personal developmental while in college: “Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience”
“Freud believed that people invest psychological energy in objects and persons outside of themselves (Astin, 1984, p. 298),” a reinforcement of involvement theory. Pace (1984) found that “the quality of effort is the best predictor of students’ progress toward the attainment of important educational goals” (p. 96). Astin’s (1984) involvement theory has five main postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects (the student experience).
2. Involvement occurs along a continuum.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.
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.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 298)

The final two postulates are particularly significant due to their focus on effective educational program design. In this study, the design would be the environmental structures available or facilitated by the university.

Student involvement theory focuses on the student being an active participant in their learning. Some of the traditional pedagogical approaches to learning tend to be passive in nature and depend on factors other than the student’s degree of involvement, such as the content of the curriculum, the level of resources utilized, or an individualized approach that matched teaching methods with learning style. Student involvement theory focuses on learning instead of teaching. It also emphasizes that students have a finite
amount of time and the type of environment created and managed by the institution will have a significant impact on the time students devote to participation in those environments. A previous longitudinal study by Astin (1975) established a foundation for this theory. Its purpose was to determine the environmental factors that contributed to persistence. “It turned out that every significant effect could be rationalized in terms of the student involvement concept” (Astin, 1984, p. 302). He explained that a variety of involvement activities had significant impact on persistence in college. These factors included living on-campus, involvement in a fraternity, sorority, or other extracurricular activities, holding a part time job on-campus, participation in an honors program, or frequent interaction with faculty. “According to the theory, the greater the student’s involvement in the college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development” (Astin, 1984, p. 307), and university programs and services can be evaluated based on the degree in which student involvement can be enhanced. Involvement and engagement in transitional programs and other university environmental structures also contributes to the transfer student transition according to Astin’s Involvement Theory (1984).

**Transition Programs and Services**

Universities have a responsibility to develop a culture of support for the transfer student (Handel, 2007). While many of these new students need assistance with integration into the new college community, some are still unable to make a successful transition (Tinto, 1988). Bartlett and Abell (1995) found a need for a more effective approach to communicating information regarding services and nonacademic requirements and identified the need for a required orientation program to ensure
students’ understanding of those services and requirements. Flaga (2002, 2006), Hockey (2009a, 2009b), Townsend (2008), McGowan and Gawley (2006), Townsend and Wilson (2006), Cuseo (2000), and others outlined numerous needed programs and support services specifically designed for the successful transition of transfer students. Rendon (1994) identified the importance of taking an active role in reaching out to students. She found that the institutional role in fostering validation, particularly during the students’ first year at the university could contribute to transition, persistence, and satisfaction. Academic advising, orientation, support programs and services, one-stop center, on-campus housing, admissions process, use of technology and communication, campus involvement, and understanding the specific needs of this population, are among the components of the successful transition of a community college student to a university.

**Academic Advising**

Cuseo (2000), Davies and Casey (1999), and Flaga (2002, 2006), all found academic advising an essential element in the transition from a community college to a 4-year institution. Faculty, staff, and other service providers from both the community college and university should coordinate their efforts to provide a smooth transition for the students who are transferring (Davies & Casey, 1999). According to Cuseo (2000), academic advising services are an important part of facilitating the transition process and could be more effective if both the community college and university had specialized transfer advisors who would work together to assist student who plan to transfer. This collaborative effort from both sides would help to bridge the transition. Flaga (2002, 2006) also found that increasing collaboration and communication between these two institutions would enable the community college advisors to provide more information
about university academic programs and admission requirements. University programs, such as information fairs and meetings or conferences held at community colleges to bring together academic advisors from both institutions, would enhance advisor knowledge about transfer issues and therefore provide better transition support to the transfer students.

Flaga’s (2002, 2006) five dimensions of transition could be utilized by the academic advisor to frame a discussion with students about the transfer process. She found more than one way for students to transition to a university, and her five dimensions of transition (outlined under Challenges of Transition) could assist students to develop an approach unique to their own needs. Community college transfer students who met with an academic advisor tended to have more success in the transfer transition process than students who did not utilized this service. Advisors provided students with the information needed to successfully negotiate their new environment and reach their academic goals in a timely manner.

Orientation

McGowan and Gawley’s (2006) study supported the study by Laanan (2001) who found “transfer students are likely to experience a complex adjustment process academically, socially, and psychologically because of the environmental differences between the two- and four-year institutions” (p. 11). These students have unique needs that require programs and support services designed specifically for them. Including experienced transfer students in group-based sessions can provide the needed social networking and bring the unique perspective of their transfer transition experience (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). In addition to McGowan and Gawley, Cuseo (2000), Flaga
(2002, 2006), Hockey (2009a, 2009b), Townsend (2008), and Townsend and Wilson (2006) all found that transfer students needed an orientation program tailored specifically for their unique needs.

Although not wanting to be treated like freshmen, these students desired an orientation program geared specifically toward their particular needs as transfer students. They also indicated interest in the inclusion of some elements of freshmen orientation, such as a multiple day program, with the opportunity to stay overnight on campus. Incoming students also wanted to hear from other transfer students about their experience with academic and social integration. Time for faculty interaction was also viewed as an important component to demonstrate faculty care and concern for them. Having time to interact with their fellow transfer students to create long term connections was also seen as a priority (Townsend, 2008).

Transfer transition programs, such as orientation, should be customized for transfer students with components designed specifically to the needs of these students. This program should be led by current transfer student leaders to create community and social networking opportunities. Because transfer students are older, any programmatic themes should reflect this more mature student aggregate (Hockey, 2009b).

Flaga (2002, 2006) found that a specific transfer student orientation program was important in addressing the needs of transfer students and providing them with an opportunity to establish a “foundation for future friendships” by meeting other transfer students (Flaga, 2006, p. 13). Some students were concerned about using the name orientation since they had all already experienced an orientation to college. They may better relate to an alternative program title such as Transfer Day.
Orientation program design needed to be based on the transition to greater academic expectations and the move to a completely new environment with a significantly different culture. A variety of transition programs can be offered. A summer or early fall orientation program provided post community college and pre-university can assist with the adjustment process. Transition seminars can also be offered by the university during the first semester to ease transition over a longer period of time. Peer mentoring programs can assist new transfer students by pairing them with an experienced transfer student (Cuseo, 2000).

Many institutions may need to rethink their approach to transfer student orientation. Due to the significant environmental differences between a research university and community college, the university must be prepared to “hand hold during the initial weeks” (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 451). Many of these students have come from a smaller campus with smaller class sizes. The large classes in the university make it more difficult for these students to integrate both academically and socially. Universities must also not assume that these students are not interested in the co-curricular side of campus. This information should be made available at orientation (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

**Support Programs and Services**

In addition to orientation, a variety of other environmental structures should be available for new transfer students, including dual enrollment, mentor programs, skill building seminars, interaction with faculty, validation, and transfer specific student organizations (Flaga, 2002, 2006; Hockey, 2009b; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).
According to Townsend and Wilson (2006), Student Affairs staff will likely be responsible for the integration of transfer students both academically and socially. These integration strategies could include nonresidential learning communities or academically based interest groups where transfer students could meet and interact with faculty and student affairs staff in a small group setting. A peer support system could be developed to facilitate social integration by pairing a new and experienced transfer student. Transfer students need formalized university programs developed to enhance their academic and social experience and connect them to the university (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Mentor programs were also recommended by Flaga (2002, 2006), Hockey (2009b), and Laanan (1995) to assist transfer students with their adjustment. A peer mentor program provided a more informal opportunity for students to connect with peers and increased familiarity with university services and resources (Flaga, 2002, 2006). A faculty mentor assigned during a student’s first term could assist in the integration of their educational goals with their academic program. A student mentor assigned with the same major as the new student could provide an integrated approach to the student’s educational experience. The university should also check mid-term grades to provide intervention where needed (Hockey, 2009b).

Flaga, (2002, 2006) and Laanan (1995) recommended opportunities (workshops or seminars) that provide essential information and skill building regarding the transfer process to a university utilizing former transfer students who were successful in their adjustment and integration to the university. These seminar courses could be used to assist with the transfer transition process by familiarizing the students with the “academic, social, and physical environments of the university” (Flaga, 2006, p. 13).
Such a course could be taught at the community college and/or the university and would include information sessions and university tours. The goal is to increase familiarity and, therefore, enhance transition.

University faculty visits to community colleges to recruit students and talk about their specific discipline can generate interest in the university’s curriculum and encourage students to consider a baccalaureate degree. Community college and university faculty can facilitate successful transfer by team teaching transfer transition courses and seminars offered to transfer students. Collaboration between institutional academic departments can facilitate course transferability through discussion, review, and alignment of course contents (Cuseo, 2000).

Townsend (2008) found that transfer student specific groups and organizations can assist these students to better connect to their new institution. The establishment of transfer student interest groups (TRIG) by major was seen as a way to facilitate academic and social adjustment and ease integration into the campus social scene. When transfer students see established social networks of students in a large class, such as fraternity and sorority groupings, the TRIG helped to create a more personalized campus community for them (Townsend, 2008). Formally recognized student organizations for transfer students would also help these students to connect and establish social networks and support systems (Townsend, 2008). Student organizations such as Tau Sigma, the national transfer student honor society could be established. University support for this type of organization could further demonstrate the institution’s commitment to transfer students. The establishment of learning communities with a transfer student theme could also be helpful (Hockey, 2009b).
One-Stop Service Center

Community college students expressed the need for information about their transfer institutions. Many felt that this information was lacking at their 2-year college, and many of the university websites did not have this information in a central location; it tended to be scattered among multiple offices. Having a transfer center, either physical or virtual, was seen as important (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Creating a university hub where all transfer related information can be easily accessed would assist the students to adjust to the campus with minimal difficulty (Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1999; McGowan & Gawley, 2006). Hockey (2009b) suggested that this one-stop center could be virtual in lieu of a campus facility or department.

Universities can also develop intentional plans to identify needs of transfer students and provide the appropriate support services for this population. This could include a designated staff member to coordinate programs and services specifically designed for transfer students (Cuseo, 2000; Hockey, 2009b; McGowan & Gawley, 2006). This dedicated university—college liaison would serve as an inter-organizational link to ensure that clear and consistent information regarding policies, procedures, and university expectations are relayed to the community college and their advising staff. Staff could then share student concerns and bring them to the attention of the appropriate institution (McGowan & Gawley, 2006).

Housing

On-campus housing provided transfer students with increased opportunities to get involved, to more quickly find a niche, and to integrate into the various environments of the campus—academic, social, and physical. Living on campus encouraged students to
become instantly involved with the milieu of the university (Astin, 1993; Flaga, 2006; Hockey, 2009b). Living with other transfer students either on designated floors or in a residence hall exclusively for transfer students was preferred and another indication of their need to not be treated like freshmen (Townsend, 2008). “Compared with commuters, students who live in residence halls encounter more diverse experiences and people, participate in more cultural activities, develop greater personal and social competence, and are more satisfied with college life” (Moos, 1979, p. 22).

If on-campus housing was not a possibility, a link to comprehensive housing opportunities, including apartments, roommates, and houses for rent, would greatly assist off-campus transfer students (Davies & Casey, 1999). A parking lot designated for commuter transfer students or priority parking was also suggested as a way for their status to be differentiated (Townsend, 2008).

**Admissions Process**

Developing a comprehensive approach to articulation and course transferability was a need identified by Cuseo (2000), Davies and Casey (1999), and McGowan and Gawley (2006). Cuseo (2000) determined that a variety of strategies can be utilized to enhance transfer through the curriculum. Community colleges can offer more transferable courses. Student transition seminars or transfer success courses could be offered to provide a proactive approach to successful transfer student transition. Enhancing the transferability of individual courses through articulation agreements between the 2- and 4-year institutions, or by offering a comprehensive transfer student admission agreement based on the completion of a prescribed program, would greatly assist the transfer process. If a transfer student completed such a program, he or she
would automatically be admitted to the senior institution. Co-registration would offer simultaneous enrollment between the community college and university and provide a more seamless transition.

Bontrager, Clemetson, and Watts (2005) reviewed the concept of dual enrollment or ‘swirling’—a comprehensive partnership between a community college and university “designed to enable students to tailor educational programs that meet their personal needs and aspirations” (p. 3). This program included joint admission with a single application, concurrent enrollment at both the community college and university, electronically shared student data, and concurrent course credit for full-time status financial aid eligibility. The dual program goal is to enhance educational options and increase the completion of 4-year degrees. Results indicated that this partnership and program had achieved its goal. This seamless approach to community college student integration demonstrates a university’s commitment to this student population and is an example of a process that could mitigate transfer shock. Although this concept was not reviewed by the other literature in this study, all university practices contributing to an effective and efficient transition should be encouraged and explored.

Articulation agreements can cause frustration and uncertainty for all parties involved—staff, students, and external postsecondary institutions. Having a standard categorization system and university transfer guide website would be a benefit. Multiple entities, including faculty, the registrar’s office, and IT specialists would need to collaborate to address this challenging process. A data base at each institution could include comprehensive course information to allow a more timely assessment of course equivalency by university staff. Although there are many challenges to this system,
including cost and time to keep data current, the variability across course content and instructors, and the challenges associated with faculty proprietary course information, the benefits of such a system would be significant (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). Universities need to have established core standards across all divisions of the institution. This would allow students to understand the university expectations and provide an academic framework from which they can work (Davies & Casey, 1999).

Flaga (2002, 2006) found that it is critical that the admissions process is timely and allows the community college students adequate time to visit the university prior to admissions deadlines. Unfortunately, some universities base transfer admissions on unmet freshmen yield targets, a disadvantage for transfer students. Community college students on the transfer path should visit the university to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the culture and environment to mitigate surprises and adjustment issues.

**Technology and Communication**

Delivery of services through technology is an important component of university communication. Campuses should use current technology to provide easily accessible, accurate information about credits, registration, advising, financial aid, establishing residency. A computerized query and referral should be added to the campus internet home page. This will allow students self-directed access to campus life. (Davies & Casey, 1999, p. 71)

A link on both institutional websites would facilitate student access to preliminary information and a view of student life to provide assistance with their transition. Considering the range of articulation agreements, it is understood that this would be a
difficult and complicated task (McGowan & Gawley, 2006). The creation of a one-stop-shop website for transfer students and the utilization of on-line communities, chat systems, and list serves would also greatly enhance the students’ ability to navigate and connect to the campus (Hockey, 2009b).

**Campus Involvement**

Becoming involved on campus was seen as a way for students to feel part of the campus and establish a connection to the university. Involvement in student organizations, academic clubs, sporting events, or community activities, all contributed to learning, building relationships, connecting to the campus, and developing a familiarity with the university (Astin, 1984, 1993; Flaga, 2002, 2006; Townsend, 2008).

**Understanding Transfer Student Needs**

Universities must understand the specific needs and concerns of transfer students and address these needs through programs and services specifically designed for these students. The university also should recognize the differences in a transfer student from a 2-year versus another 4-year institution. The varied mission and culture of these two institutions contribute to the differing needs of these two types of transfer students (Townsend, 2008).

University professors can create a more intimate feel in a large class by varying their pedagogical approach. By occasionally pairing students or assigning small groups during class, the instructor could facilitate both academic and social integration for the transfer students, although these efforts may be limited in success due to resistance by the native students due to existing social constructs. The transfers would appreciate the opportunity to make new connections with their peers (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).
Rendon’s (1994) model of validation reviewed the importance of university faculty and staff reaching out to students and “designing activities that promote active learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty, and staff” (p. 44). Validation, a perquisite to student development, involves enabling student support, facilitating student self-worth and value, and fostering this sense of support both in and outside of the classroom. Orientation, and other transition programs, where there is an intentional outreach to support students in transition, is an example of where validation can be effectively utilized.

Because this is a new and different environment for these new students, staff should be welcoming and proactive in their approach to service and assistance. Campus buildings should be clearly marked and display pertinent information regarding the departments and services available within the facility (Davies & Casey, 1999).

Eggleston and Laanan (2001) concluded their research with a summary. Transfer students vary in academic preparation, age, race, and ethnicity—a highly diverse group. Senior institutions are just beginning to understand their specific needs and developing programs to meet these needs. “Transfer students report a need for more course articulation, counseling and advising, faculty sensitivity, academic support services, transfer student-centered orientation programs, student activities, and knowledge of campus resources” (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001, p. 95). These environmental structures are needed to enhance the transfer experience, their persistence, and satisfaction.

**Summary**

This literature review identified a number of themes related to the transition process of a community college student to a research university. There were significant
differences in the mission and culture of community colleges and research universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Students faced a variety of challenges with the transfer process (Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1998; Handel, 2007; McGowan & Gawley, 2006; Rhine et al., 2000; Townsend & Wilson, 2006), including the transferability of courses that included articulation agreements, university communication, the effectiveness of counseling and advising services, and the issues associated with academic and social adjustment to the new institution. Student involvement on campus and the level of faculty interaction also played a significant role in student integration and success (Astin, 1984, 1985; Kuh & Hu, 2001). University programs and support services, such as orientation (structural environments), especially those designed for community college transfer students, greatly influenced the student transition process (Cuseo, 2000; Flaga, 2006; Hockey, 2009a; Townsend, 2008). In addition, environmental theory (Astin, 1991; Lewin, 1936; Strange & Banning, 2001) and a transition model (Goodman et al., 2006) provided a framework to understand the importance of milieu management in the transition process.

Much of the past research focused on the academic transition through a quantitative framework (Laanan, 1995). Some studies explored this transfer phenomenon from a psychosocial perspective through a qualitative lens (Flaga, 2002). Recent research has considered a more holistic approach to better understand this type of transition (Laanan, 2007). This study was designed to view transition holistically by gaining an understanding of both the academic and social transition and how these two components of the student experience are interrelated.
Also of significance was the lack of literature on the university staff perspective concerning community college student transition. This was an important vantage point that needs further exploration. It was also interesting to note that, until the study by Townsend and Wilson (2006), there was little to no mention of the unique role of a research institution in comparison to other 4-year universities and colleges. Their research identified the need for research institutions to clearly articulate these differences to perspective community college transfer students in order to enhance their understanding of the important role of research at this type of university (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Students needed to understand the primacy of research for faculty at research university versus other 4-year institutions, unlike the priority of teaching at the community college, in order to consider their decision for institutional fit.

Implications for the university include the need for a clearly articulated mission, academic expectations, and the need for effective transition systems (structural environments) in place, including clear course requirements regarding transferability, effective communication about the transfer process, and the needed programs and services to support both the academic and social transition of community college students.

Through community college student individual interviews, interviews with staff who work with transfer students, and a review of university documents, this study was designed to explain the transition process of a community college student to a research university through a case study. By understanding this phenomenon through the combined perspective of students, staff, university documents, and the literature, this research will greatly assist students in their transition at WU.
Chapter 3 presents the approach to this research process and further describes the framework for this study.
CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this constructivist case study was to gain a better understanding of how a research university could assist with the transition of a community college student. This study examined the infrastructure of a research university in the western United States and identified the environmental structures utilized to facilitate an effective and successful transition of community college students to a research university. In addition, this study sought to identify structures not fully utilized or not currently designed that could influence successful transition. The constructivist approach “places a priority on the phenomena of the study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). According to Charmaz (2006), constructivism fosters researchers’ flexibility about their own interpretations, as well as those of their research participants.

A case study approach was selected for this study in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of community college transition to Western University (WU). According to Yin (1984), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). This case study model contributed to a comprehensive review of the successful community college transfer student transition process from an environmental perspective at WU by gaining an understanding of what structures and processes contributed to a high quality and sustainable first year transition process at this research-oriented educational institution. Each component of the transfer student
transition process, including the university articulation agreement, university transfer student communications, counseling and advising services, and transition programs and support services such as orientation, were examined to determine what aspects of the university’s approach to transition were effective and where improvements could be implemented. Not only was each condition of the transition process reviewed, but more importantly, the relationship of these components of transition were analyzed to gain a better understanding of transition from a holistic perspective and inform the development of a case study that contributed to the understanding of the environmental influences on the transition process from a community college to a research university. A critical examination of the transition process at this particular institution from a student, staff, and artifact approach, provided the researcher with a unique lens from which to analyze this transition process in order to facilitate enhanced milieu management.

**Constructivism**

The constructivist method was selected as the paradigm for this study, because it “places a priority on the phenomena of the study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). This model encouraged the emergence of data through interviews and document analysis that contributed to the construction of a case study. “The researcher’s intent was to make sense of [or interpret] the meanings others have about the world” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). A constant comparative method of analysis was utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. With this methodology, the researcher constantly compares the data. These comparisons led to tentative categories that were then compared to each other (Merriam, 1998). Comparisons were constantly
made until the themes and categories were fully developed. Through the triangulation of interviews with individual transfer students, staff who worked with transfer students, and university documents related to the transition process, the researcher developed a case study as a result of this data interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). “A constructivist approach means being alert to conditions under which such differences and distinctions arise and are maintained” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131).

Data triangulation was utilized for this study:

1. Transfer student interviews provided insight into their experiences with university environmental structures.

2. University staff from each of the key areas of transition provided their perspective of the student transitional experience.

3. An analysis of the university documents related to the transition process, including the university-community college articulation agreement, and university communications such as transfer student related websites and publications, provided the third vantage point.

A review of the literature on community college transfer student transition presented a fourth perspective of this transition phenomenon. Data gleaned from this triangulated approach allowed the researcher to interpret the perceptions of the interviewees and the influence of the university documents in order to inform improvements to the transfer student transition process.
Research Questions

In order to better understand how research university staff can assist in the environmental transition process of a community college student, this research specifically explored:

1. What university environmental structures do community college students describe as significant to their successful transition to a research university?

2. What university environmental structures do university staff describe as significant to a successful community college student transition experience?

Most of the literature concerning community college transfer focused on the academic challenges involved with the student transition process, including transfer shock, the decline in the transfer students’ grade point average during the students’ first term at the university. Investigation of transition from a holistic or environmental lens was limited, especially from a qualitative methodological approach. Literature regarding the student transition process from the staff perspective was also particularly circumscribed. Although research involving community college transfer student transition was somewhat limited, especially from a university staff vantage point, the literature review for this study provided some insight into the community college to university transition based on the perspective of both the transfer students and the staff involved with this process. Research from this study provided a qualitative analysis of the challenges and successes faced by both students and staff at WU and provided perspective for other research universities. Data collected from student interviews, staff interviews, and document review were used to assess the current processes and environmental structures in place and provided WU with the opportunity to examine
these systems in order to consider alternative strategies to enhance the transition process and gain a better understanding of environmental influences.

In addition, a combination of theoretical concepts was investigated within the literature review. Transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) and environmental theory (Astin, 1991, 1993; Lewin, 1936, 1948/1997), with further definitions of environments by Strange and Banning (2001), were explored to identify environmental structures that influenced the transfer student transition process.

**Study Site and Participants**

Western University, a large research institution in the west, was selected as the site of this study due to its large number of traditionally-aged community college transfer students and the fact that the researcher, who has a strong interest in transfer student success, is employed at this institution in a position that can have an impact on the transition of future community college transfer students. Western University has some unique characteristics, including an undergraduate college system, and an undergraduate demographic consisting of no majority ethnic group.

The college system provides a smaller living-learning environment within this large research institution. Students from every major are enrolled in each college and their major requirements are the same regardless of their college of enrollment. General education requirements are based on the philosophy of each college and therefore vary. For example, one college has an international focus with general education requirements that include a foreign language and a course series consisting of an historical view of how civilization has evolved. Another college has a focus on ethics in society and a required course sequence concerning this topic.
Each transfer student is assigned to one of the colleges upon admission based on a ranking preference and the university’s effort to distribute these students equally among the colleges. Students rank the colleges in order of preference and are encouraged to review the academic requirements and unique characteristics of each college to determine the best fit. Students tend to be assigned to one of their top two choices. Although these students are admitted through a central admissions process, they participate in a new student orientation program within their respective college. Western University also provides a variety of transfer student support services both centrally and through each of the colleges.

Student demographics at WU were unique compared to other top tier national research universities. The ethnic composition of the university for the 2010 fall term was 44% Asian, 26% Caucasian, 10% Mexican-American, 10% Other, 4% Filipino, 3% Latino, 2% African-American, and less than 1% Native American. English is not the native language of over one-third of the student body (Armstrong, Carty, Martin, & Thornton, 2010a). This student profile appears to be unique to research institutions within limited areas of the country. Interestingly, the transfer student demographics were not completely consistent with the general campus data. For the 2010 fall quarter, Asian transfer students represented 36% of the entering cohort, while Caucasians represented 33%. Other ethnic categories were similar to the overall institutional demographics (Armstrong et al., 2010a).

The participants in this study included 10 students from community colleges who successfully transferred to WU during fall quarter 2010 and 10 staff from the university who worked with and were responsible for the transfer student transition process. This
number of students provided the researcher with the necessary data to address the two research questions of this study. All selected students: (a) attended a community college prior to transfer, (b) were 18-24 years of age, (c) were enrolled as full-time students, and (d) completed two quarters of their first year at WU. These students included five men and five women representing five of the colleges within the following academic majors: biology, biology/premed, chemistry, Latin American Studies, international studies, psychology, management sciences, economics, and literature. There was also a mix of students living in on-campus residential facilities, those who resided off campus, and an effort to have a cross section of students from all of the colleges. This criterion was developed to adequately reflect the cohort of transfer students admitted to WU. These students were recruited through academic advisors and student affairs staff of the colleges, and the residential life staff of the on-campus housing facilities for transfer students. The individual interviews offered these students the opportunity to provide feedback about the key aspects and stages of their transitional experience to the university from admission to orientation and throughout their first academic year.

Staff from the colleges, including student affairs professionals and some academic advisors, were asked to refer fall 2010 transfer student admits with whom they had interacted during the 2010-11 academic year and who met the interview criteria as previously outlined. This allowed the researcher to interview students who utilized environmental structures designed to support transfer student transition. These students were invited by the researcher to participate in a final screening interview from which the individual participants were selected. This final interview enabled the researcher to confirm participation eligibility based on the selection criteria and allow for the most
representative group to be selected, based on age, full-time status, completion of at least
two quarters at WU, and a mix of on- and off-campus residents.

Selected staff were interviewed who worked with and represented the various
aspects of the transfer experience, including a transfer student services specialist and
campus articulation specialist from the Department of Admissions, three experienced
academic advisors from three different academic departments, including the manager of
an academic department’s academic advising unit, a senior academic advisor from one of
the colleges, three college student affairs staff, including a senior administrator, and two
staff who work directly with transfer students and orientation, and a residential life staff
member from the transfer housing complex. The Department of Admissions has
responsibility for the transactional aspects of the transition process, including the
management of the university’s articulation agreement, university communication
with the students, and the application process. Staff interviewed from this department
included a transfer student services specialist and the department’s articulation specialist,
who was most familiar with the university’s articulation agreement. These two
individuals represented staff from the central administration most closely related to the
community college transfer transition process. Gaining a specific understanding of the
articulation agreement provided insight into university academic requirements and their
implications for transfer transition. Reviewing the department websites and other transfer
student related university communications revealed the clarity of the university’s
intentional and unintentional messages.

Since community college transfer students entered as upper division students, they
were immediately connected with the academic department of their major for primary
advising. Three experienced advisors from multiple academic departments were utilized to provide a comprehensive perspective of the transition process from their vantage point. The undergraduate colleges’ academic advising department provided a more holistic approach to advising support, including interpretation of university academic policies, processing withdrawals, and filing for graduation. An experienced college advisor was identified and interviewed to gain the college perspective on implications of the academic advising process. Interviews with these academic advisors provided insight into the specific dynamic of this frontline interaction between university advisors and the students who were in transition.

Transfer student support services, such as orientation, student organizations, and programs for transfer students, reside in the colleges. Since they were responsible for the orientation process and were the home for transfer specific student organizations, a college senior administrator, whose department has specific responsibility for the transfer transition process from a programmatic vantage point, was interviewed to acquire their perspective on student transitional structures and support processes in place and how these structural environments impact transition. Two college staff who worked directly with transfer students, including orientation, were also interviewed to further enhance understanding of transition from a co-curricular perspective. A residential life staff member from the new on-campus transfer student housing was included to gain insight into the on-campus living experience and its influence on transfer student transition. These staff represented more than 150 years of working with community college transfer students at WU. No data were collected until this study was approved by the appropriate university IRB. All of these staff interviews allowed the researcher to gain a better
understanding of the impact of the various university structural environments currently in place.

Documents were selected based on their association with and contribution to the transfer student transition process. Structural environments, such as the university articulation agreement, campus publications targeting transfer students, and university websites focused on transfer students were reviewed for their influence on the transfer student transition process. These artifacts were obtained from the Department of Admissions and were identified as the primary sources of communication provided to potential transfer students by their office. Selected documents represented the most comprehensive marketing publications utilized to recruit and inform community college transfer students. The transfer student website was also examined due to its central role in providing information about the institution, including the key transfer-related electronic documents housed on the website.

**Maintaining Confidentiality**

Confidentiality was critical to the researcher and was an important aspect of the interview process according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the entity responsible for the oversight of human subjects research. All participants in this study were assured verbally and in writing that confidentiality would be maintained. Each participant was provided with a consent form clearly outlining the procedures to be used in this study (Appendices A and B). These forms were collected and kept in a secure location in the researcher’s office. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity throughout the interview process. Only the pseudonym was associated with participant responses to the interview questions. A document linking the pseudonym to
the real name was created and kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. The pseudonym was associated with the recording as an additional layer of confidentiality. The recording, transcription, and pseudonym linking document will be destroyed once the study has been completed and approved by the dissertation committee.

Instrument Development

Based on the themes that emerged from the literature review, questions were designed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the study’s research objectives (Appendices C and D). The instruments included a variety of questions for both students, who experienced transition during their first three to four quarters of enrollment, and the university staff who most directly interacted with this population of students. Primary questions for the students were consistent across all individual interviews. However, secondary or follow-up questions differed due to the potential unique answers provided by students within each particular interview.

Primary questions for staff participants were also consistent with some secondary questions based on the unique vantage point from which they each interfaced with transfer students or from the various components of the transition process. For example, staff working with academic advising had a different perspective on the transition process than a staff member planning and managing an orientation program. All of these questions sought to develop a deeper understanding of the student transition process from the specific experiences encountered by the students and staff.

Questions were asked utilizing the techniques outlined by Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namely (2005) which included “asking one question at a time,
verifying unclear responses, asking open-ended questions, avoiding leading questions, and using follow-ups and probes” (p. 43). This approach allowed for the free flow of thought regarding particular experiences with the various components of the transition process and the impact of environmental structures from both a student and staff perspective.

Data Collection Methods

Ten individual interviews were conducted with community college transfer students during or following the third quarter of their first academic year at WU. Students interviewed consisted of a mix of students from the colleges and efforts were made to include students reflective of the university transfer student demographic. Ten individual staff interviews were conducted with staff members most relevant to the transfer student transition process. “The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant’s perspective on the research topic” (Mack et al., 2005, p. 29). All interviews were conducted in a private room on the WU campus. During each interview, a digital recorder was used and supplemented with written notes to record body language to enhance the transcription.

University staff from the Department of Admissions involved with transfer students identified the key documents. These six artifacts included the university’s articulation agreement, recruitment publications, and the primary transfer student related website. Printed and electronic documents included: (a) Answers for Transfers, (b) Discover Western University, (c) Transfer Advantage, (d) Transfer Student Guide, (e) Inter-segmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC), and (f) the
university transfer website. Each was reviewed and analyzed for its influence on the
community college student transition process.

The themes that emerged from the literature review informed the approach
to analysis of these university documents. Themes from the literature included:
(a) differences in mission and culture, (b) articulation agreements, (c) university
communication, (d) counseling and advising, (e) academic and social integration,
(f) campus involvement, (g) engagement with faculty, and (h) transition programs and
support services. Each university document was examined to determine how these
themes were identified and/or presented. For example, did university documents describe
the mission of WU and clarify how its research mission was different from the mission of
other 2- and 4-year colleges and universities? Was an effective articulation agreement in
place and was it clearly described? Did the university website provide needed
information that was easily accessible for potential and new transfer students? Were
academic and social programs and services clearly and accurately described? These
questions were considered in addition to a subsequent document examination based on
the themes that emerged from this study’s data collection.

The six themes that emerged from this study provided a secondary approach
from which to further analyze these university documents. These broader and more
encompassing themes were identified as: (a) academic support, (b) faculty, (c) social
support, (d) orientation, (e) preenrollment programs, and (f) university communication.
With the emergence of these WU themes, the documents were further analyzed to gain a
perspective of how these six structural environments were identified and described.
Data Collection

Initially, approval from the dissertation committee was obtained (Appendix E), followed by approval from the IRB (Appendix F). Once these approvals were granted, the Department of Admissions was contacted to obtain and review transfer student-related documents. Then, participants were contacted to arrange the individual interviews with students and staff who work with transfer students (Appendices G and H). All students, who were referred to this study by professional staff who regularly interact with transfer students, were contacted and screened by the established study criteria (Appendix I). Individual interviews were conducted with staff who were most involved with the transfer student transition. These participants were selected based on their position’s significance to the transfer process.

College student affairs staff and academic advisors from the colleges and transfer housing were asked to submit names of potential student participants based on the screening criteria (Appendix I) to the researcher. These staff were contacted via email or phone to start considering potential student participants who they would be meeting with during the 2011 academic year, who also could be potential participants in the study. Names were referred to the researcher by these staff. The researcher contacted these students via telephone or email to determine if they met the screening criteria, and if they had interest in participating. During this screening, the researcher explained the purpose of the interview, the importance of honest feedback, and the participation compensation gift card. Students were also advised of the confidentiality of their participation and offered the opportunity to withdraw from further consideration for any reason. Those who were selected were notified by telephone or email late spring and scheduled for an
interview. Students not selected either did not meet the screening criteria or were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. Individual interview were scheduled and held in a private room on campus. Each student interview took between 45 and 90 minutes. At the conclusion of each interview, each student was provided with a twenty dollar gift card to the campus bookstore and thanked for their participation. They were also advised that they could be contacted again to provide additional clarification or to answer a few follow-up questions.

Staff participants were selected based on their degree of involvement with the community college transfer students. Those selected were identified as being the most closely associated with transfer student transition. Staff were contacted directly by the researcher after obtaining approval from the vice chancellor of student affairs and the assistant vice chancellor of admissions. Interviews with staff were conducted in the office of the researcher or staff member involved and took between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service, and analyzed by the researcher. Following an initial round of interviews with students and staff, the researcher decided to confirm data saturation by adding to the interview pool. Additional students and staff were identified through the previously outlined process and interviewed. Several student participants were also recruited by the researcher through the resident advisors from the transfer student housing complex. These additional interviews added to the already rich pool of data and confirmed that data saturation had been met.

The research instruments (Appendices C and D) included open-ended questions designed to obtain the perspectives and experiences of the interview participants.
Follow-up questions were utilized to seek additional clarification or illicit more detailed information. Western University documents, including the institution’s articulation agreement with community colleges, transfer student publications, transfer student websites, and any other pertinent university transfer student environmental support structures, were examined and analyzed for their respective impact on the community college transfer student transition process. For example, marketing and recruitment publications were examined to review how the university was presented. Were transfer requirements clearly outlined? Was the university environment appropriately described? Websites and other communications were reviewed for relevant content and ease of navigation. Was the information helpful and easy to locate? Were transfer related publications comprehensive, informative, and available on the website? Did these environmental structures help or inhibit transition, persistence, and satisfaction?

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study involving a sample group of transfer students was conducted to illicit reaction to the interview questions and the protocols being utilized for the study. These interviews allowed the researcher to further clarify the interview questions and the research framework. This pilot was conducted with four students who had been involved with leadership positions, activities, and interactions with staff within the domain of the researcher’s college. These students were contacted and asked if they were interested in serving on a pilot study to help frame a study on the transition process of community college transfer students. This pilot focus group provided the researcher with the opportunity to revise questions for the main study.
Main Study

Initially, five individual interviews with students and five interviews with staff were scheduled via telephone or email. Following this initial round of interviews, the researcher scheduled additional interviews with both students and staff to ensure data saturation. A total of 10 additional interviews were conducted consisting of five more students and five more staff. These subsequent interviews enhanced the data and assured that data saturation had been met. Each round of interviews was conducted over a multiple week timeframe to allow the researcher adequate time to transcribe and analyze data between interviews. “The very first interview or field notes should be entirely transcribed and analyzed before going to the next interview or field observation. This early coding gives guidance to the next observations and interviews” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 30). A quiet room at a convenient location on campus for all participants was utilized to conduct the interviews. Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim by a transcription service. Notes were taken to supplement the recording by documenting nonverbal communication.

University documents, including the articulation agreement, publications, and transfer student-related websites, were examined throughout the 2011 spring, summer, and fall to allow time for thorough review.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative analysis “is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 184). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the coding process involves making comparisons and asking questions. Utilizing the principles of qualitative
methods, data were analyzed by reviewing the transcriptions of the student and staff individual interviews, writing analytic memos, and allowing the transfer transition process themes to emerge through the coding process. It was important to gain a thorough and objective understanding of the perspectives and experiences of both students and staff to fully understand the student transition process from both perspectives.

A combination of open coding and axial coding was utilized to gain insight into this transfer transition phenomenon. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), “Open coding is the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (p. 62), and axial coding involves “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (p. 96). However, it was also important to understand that data analysis is not “a mechanical or technical process; it is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 140). The combination of these types of analysis allowed the themes to emerge from the data.

Each transcription was reviewed to gain an understanding of each student and each staff member’s experience with transition through the identification of significant words and phrases. These themes and subthemes were reviewed a second time with coding attached directly to the transcription notes. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), “Data analysis . . . entails certain distinct activities. The first and most important one is ongoing discovery—identifying themes and developing concepts and propositions” (p. 141).
All codes were removed from the transcription pages and assembled by hand on a wall into common themed groups. Constant comparison was utilized to continuously arrange and rearrange coding until the subthemes were finalized. These subthemes were then assembled to create the overarching themes of the study. This assembly of like codes assisted the researcher in the development of common transfer transition themes from the student and staff interview transcripts. In the development of themes, the researcher reviewed the codes that had the most significant impact on the student transition process and considered both the number of times the code was listed, as well as the context in which the code was assigned. In addition to the individual student and staff interviews, the researcher reviewed the university’s articulation agreement with community colleges, transfer student publications, and transfer student informational websites. The articulation agreement provided insight into the transferability of courses from the community college to WU and, thus, the impact this agreement had on student transition. A review of university communication, such as transfer student publications’ content and transfer student websites’ resources and ease of navigation, allowed the researcher to better understand the timing and the overall message to transfer students regarding the transition process. All of these communications provided a comprehensive framing of the community college transfer student transition system in place from the University’s perspective and underscored the intentional and unintentional messages to this population of students.

**Trustworthiness of Data**

This study utilized a cross section of data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transfer student transition process. Student interviews, staff members who work
with transfer students, institutional documents, and the literature review all provided insight into the transition phenomenon. This multi-data approach to analysis is referred to as triangulation. According to Mathison (1988), “Data triangulation refers simply to using several data sources, the most obvious example being the inclusion of more than one individual as a source of data” (p. 14), and “good research practice obligates the researcher to triangulate, that is, to use multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings” (p. 13). In this case, multiple data sources were being used—individual student interviews, individual staff interviews, university documents, and the literature review on community college student transition. All of these sources of data were compared to inform the analysis and enhance trustworthiness. “Triangulation is typically perceived to be a strategy for improving the validity of the research or findings” (Mathison, 1988, p. 13).

The literature review assisted in framing the important concepts and challenges of the student transition process. Key data identified included the impact of disparate missions and cultures between a community college and research university, the challenges of transition including articulation agreements and the implications for course transferability, university communications, counseling and advising, and adjustment to the new institution both academically and socially. These concepts were imbedded into the interview questions, as well as reviewed within the university documents to inform the development of a case study. While this chapter presented the research design, Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study.
CHAPTER 4—FINDINGS

Introduction

Transition between the disparate environments of a community college and a research university can be a challenging experience. Last year, WU enrolled 1,942 new transfer students, with approximately 92% from one of the state’s community colleges. Having a better understanding of this transition process can provide the university with the tools to enhance this experience, as well as student satisfaction and success. Much of the initial literature on community college student transition to a university focused on the academic transition, with subsequent research considering the psychosocial adjustment process. More recent studies have begun to explore this phenomenon from a more holistic perspective, asserting that the academic and co-curricular transition cannot be separated. Noticeably missing from the literature with few exceptions was exploring the student transition process from the vantage point of the university staff who worked most closely with this population.

This study was designed to examine the community college student transition to a research university from a holistic perspective, from the vantage points of both students and staff, and through an environmental lens. Such an approach will help to better understand the influence of university environments on transition. A case study approach with a constructivist lens was utilized for this study to allow the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its contextual reality through a variety of evidence, including interviews, documents, and observation (Yin, 1984). These data were reconstructed through a combination of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and constant comparison (Merriam, 1998). Analysis of data revealed the themes and
subthemes (environmental structures) that influenced the transition process of a community college student to a research university.

Findings from 20 individual interviews, 10 with community college transfer students and 10 with staff who work with transfer students at WU, are presented in this chapter. The students, aged 19-23, represented both on- and off-campus residents and all undergraduate colleges, including the following majors: biology, biology/premed, chemistry, psychology, Latin-American studies, international studies, management sciences, and economics. The staff consisted of four academic advisors, one from an undergraduate college and three from three of the largest academic departments on campus, including a manager of an academic advising department; a senior administrator from one of the undergraduate colleges; two college staff who work directly with orientation; one staff from the on-campus transfer housing; and two staff from Admissions, including staff that specialized with articulation, and transfer student services, respectively. A document analysis consisting of university artifacts and university website was also conducted to provide an additional framing of the university communication structures in place and their influence on transition.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), open coding involves “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). Multiple university environmental structures were identified during the coding process. Thus, the central phenomenon that emerged during this study was that structural environments influenced student transition experiences. These environments contributed to community college student transition positively, negatively, or neutrally. Six themes, with multiple subthemes, further defined the types of environments involved: academic support,
faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication (Table 1).

Each theme is described in the following sections with supporting statements from the individual interviews and university documents. Subthemes are presented under each theme to further depict each environmental structure and explain its influence on transfer student transition to the university. Academic support influenced students in their ability to adjust to the pace and rigor of a research university. Faculty framed the academic expectations and the in-class experience. Social support offered transfer students with the opportunity to connect with the institution and with peers. Orientation served as a formal introduction to the institution and its programs and services. Preenrollment programs provided an initial familiarity with the university and an overview of its resources. University communication presented a comprehensive view of the information needed for admission and transition. The first of these environments was academic support.

**Academic Support**

Students needed a variety of programs and support services (environmental structures) to assist them in their adjustment to a new university environment. How the university addressed these needs through institutional environmental structures, such as academic support, influenced the student transition process. Academic support consisted of multiple subthemes such as previous academic preparation, course transferability, academic advising, and university academic expectations. Previous academic preparation was the first influence described by students and staff.
Table 1

Structural Environments That Influence Transition—Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC SUPPORT</th>
<th>SOCIAL SUPPORT (contd)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous Academic Preparation</strong></td>
<td><strong>University Programs and Services</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Rigor at Community College</td>
<td>Current Transfer Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Skills/Time Management</td>
<td>Need to Enhance Transfer Student Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Transferability</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transfer Housing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Articulation Agreement—IGETCI/TAG</td>
<td>Enhanced Acclimation and Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist.org</td>
<td>Enhanced Campus Connection</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Advising</strong></td>
<td><strong>Peers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College Advising</td>
<td>Peer Support Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor Accessibility and Level of Service</td>
<td>Importance of Making Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Academic Advising</td>
<td><strong>ORIENTATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisor Accessibility and Virtual Advising</td>
<td><strong>Format and Structure</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Level of Service</td>
<td><strong>Orientation Leaders</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What a Student Wants/Needs</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
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<td><strong>University Academic Expectations</strong></td>
<td>More Condensed Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pace of Quarter System</td>
<td>More Comprehensive Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Environment and Rigor</td>
<td><strong>PREENROLLMENT PROGRAMS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FACULTY</strong></td>
<td><strong>Familiarity With Campus</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Approachability and Class Size</strong></td>
<td>Campus Tours</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of Student Initiative</strong></td>
<td>Transfer Admit Day</td>
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<td><strong>Level of Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Other Preenrollment Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dismissive and Research Oriented</td>
<td><strong>UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging and Caring</td>
<td><strong>Web-Based Resources</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Caliber—World Class</strong></td>
<td>User Friendly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive Information</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL SUPPORT</strong></td>
<td>Current/Accessible Information</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Involvement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Other Forms of Communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting</td>
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Previous Academic Preparation

Community college students’ previous academic preparation influenced their transition to the university. This previous preparation included the academic rigor at their previous institution and the student’s study skills and time management. Academic rigor was one of the subthemes considered.

Academic rigor at community colleges. A senior administrator with significant experience commented on the impact of students’ community college academic experience with their transition to the university. In her experience, the students’ degree of rigor at their previous institution had a significant impact on their transition to the university.

How much they were challenged and how much they really pushed themselves I think has a significant impact on how well they do when they make that transition here to [institution name deleted to protect confidentiality]. For those students who challenged themselves and took every advantage that they could in their junior college . . . they seem to be students who transition more successfully than students who were not perhaps as well-prepared going into their community college and did good work and worked hard. But the level of academic rigor, I go back to what I said before, the level of academic rigor is such that it is a real eye-opening experience for them and they, the kind of instruction oftentimes that they get in community college is unfortunately much more like advanced high school. And it isn’t asking them to do the critical analysis and critical thinking that our students have to come in here and do right from the get-go. And the faculty members expect that they know how to do that. So when they get in, when they
come and then they get into their upper level courses and they’re expected to be able to provide a certain level of critical thinking and critical analysis, and that’s not reflected in their papers or in their exams, it’s a rude awakening for our transfer students.

A college academic advisor with over 30 years of experience echoed these differences in academic expectations from the community college to the university. She emphasized the importance of students understanding the differences in academic rigor between the community college and the university and the need to increase students’ academic effort: “And then I think the last thing I would want a student to know is it’s rigorous here so they need to get on their academics.”

Students also explained how their previous academic preparation influenced their adjustment, but also commented on the university misperceptions of academic rigor at community colleges. The on-campus Latin-American studies major student stated,

Sometimes transfer students are treated as, maybe they’re not, they don’t know what they’re doing completely, even though we’ve taken, I mean we’ve taken the equivalents. I mean, the courses at my community college, they’re rigorous, and they’re challenging . . . and I learned so much from my professors at community college as I did here.

However, students also acknowledged increased expectations in the classroom and the accelerated pace of the university, which added to the rigor of this new environment. The 20-year-old chemistry major punctuated the difference between the community college and university.
It was difficult. Definitely the first quarter, the first set of midterms hit me like a train. I mentally psyched myself out in terms of studying, however, and it wasn’t enough. So I didn’t do as well as I thought I would in my first quarter. That being said, I did definitely bounce back my second quarter and so on.

An example of the increased academic rigor involved the amount of reading required at the university in comparison to their experience at the community college. Commenting on this change in expectations, the Latin-American studies major explained the extensive reading requirements, and her adjustment to this more rigorous expectation.

But there’s a lot more reading. There’s a lot more memorization and focus on what you’re studying . . . I had to read like 2,500 pages in 5 weeks. I never do that. And I was really proud of myself for doing that much. I was just like, I don’t know how I’m going to get through this. I’m staying up all night reading, but it was really enjoyable because it was history. It was hard transitioning for the amount of work that we had to do. . . . The amount of all-nighters I’ve had to do. I have never done, I never did any all-nighters in, for community college.

Adding her thoughts to the topic of academic differences was the voice of the youngest student interviewed, who confirmed the reality of increased academic rigor of the university: “My academic adjustment . . . it’s definitely required more studying. It’s been probably an eye-opener. . . . You have to be your own motivation. As far as class difficulty, I definitely think it’s more difficult here. It’s kind of intimidating I guess.”

The off-campus economics major also found a significant difference in academic expectations between his community college and WU. He said,
I think that that’s probably the biggest adjustment I had to make. Community college classes, I was able to, I don’t want to say bust through them but they seemed a lot less difficult than classes at [university name deleted for confidentiality]. Being a research university, I guess the standards are obviously higher, and the midterms are much harder than at I’d say what they offer at the other college. You kind of have to spend more time and basically know the material inside and out besides just being able to memorize things. It seems that [Western University] professors want you to be able to totally understand the concept. If you’re able to play around with it rather than just knowing definitions or knowing concepts. You have to actually apply those concepts and that’s, I think that’s one potential feature transfers might have problems with, is just that different level of difficulty where you have to know the material more than you had to or are more accustomed to at community colleges.

The final student, an off-campus 22-year-old male biology major, also discussed the difference in academic rigor from his community college and the increased effort needed to succeed:

I find myself working like day and night trying to pass the lower division biology courses . . . the upper division courses here are pretty challenging but, yeah, it’s just something that you go through to put a lot of effort into and if you’re driven then you’ll succeed.

Although the level of academic rigor was seen as a significant difference in the two types of institutions, with the university being more challenging, previous study skills and time management influenced the transition.
Study skills and time management. Staff and students both expressed the importance of study skills and time management in the transition from the community college to the university environment. The transfer student specialist staff member from the Admissions office stated: “The most important thing is the study habits, what they’re doing as a student at the community college is going to play a big part in their transition here.” The 30-plus year college academic advisor reinforced the importance of time management skills:

Transition is being prepared for the quarter. . . . I still strongly recommend every student that I see to do a time management both hour of the day, day of the week, and week of the quarter, especially for a transfer student who has to understand the pace of the university.

A senior department academic advisor also expressed the importance of study skills to learn/understand the subject matter and to maintain a good grade point average. She stated,

If it’s important to you to maintain a specific GPA, then you have to know what’s required of you to maintain that GPA, and so we talk a lot about, and to me it comes down to planning and it’s using all of the resources at [name omitted to protect confidentiality] to help with that, and really understanding, to you know how to study, are you reading to read, or are you reading to understand it long-term.

One of the students reinforced the critical importance of time management in the transition from a semester to quarter system. This 23-year-old campus resident expressed the general feeling of the cadre of students interviewed.
So, academic transition from semester to quarter even though I attempted to prepare, was super uniquely challenging. If I had to tell people ways that they could prepare I would just say get ready to be disciplined to manage your time, to manage everything. People that don’t manage fall behind and suffer.

Students’ study skills and time management influenced their academic transition to the university environment. Course transferability also contributed to a student’s academic transition.

**Course Transferability**

Students, first and foremost, wanted to ensure the transferability of their community college courses. Articulation agreements were central to a student’s matriculation to the new institution as was the Assist.org web-based resource. These agreements defined the required coursework needed to transfer. A senior university administrator commented on the importance of course transferability to students. She stated:

I think that that’s where the priority even for our transfer students lies, is that they want to make sure that their coursework that they’ve already taken is going to be accepted, and is going to be transferable, and that they’re going to be able to get in here, know what they’ve got to do, and then know how they can plan appropriately. So I think that the initial focus for many transfer students is really on the academic piece.

Coursework from the community college that transfers to the university sets the stage for the academic transition. Articulation agreements create a more seamless path from the community college to the 4-year institution. These agreements were designed to
create strong partnerships between universities and 2-year public colleges. They also provided guaranteed admission if the transfer student met the course and academic requirements.

**Articulation agreement—IGETC and TAG.** Articulation was reported to be the cornerstone of the academic transition of a community college student to a research university. The importance of articulation was further explained by a staff member who specialized in this area at WU. She emphasized that articulation assisted the student to make progress toward their degree, an essential component of a successful transition:

> It allows a student to start making progress towards a degree at the community college . . . so without articulation, a student is kind of floundering around. They know that the most important thing is that they need to take courses that are transferable.

Western University is part of the state’s research university system. Western University and the state research system coordinate efforts to aid community college students with their matriculation to the university. Inter-segmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) and TAG are two formalized programs to assist community college students. The IGETC is the Inter-segmental Transfer Core, and defines community college courses that meet WU’s lower-division general education (GE) requirements for four of the undergraduate colleges. The TAG program is the Transfer Admission Guarantee program that offers guaranteed admission to WU for students who complete a core set of courses at one of the state’s community college one full term prior to transferring. The seasoned college academic advisor (30-plus years) described the benefits of IGETC and TAG.
When the [institution name deleted for confidentiality purposes] system worked together and created what they called the IGETC or the TAG is the transfer guarantee program. That’s for local schools. And the IGETC is a [institution name deleted] wide program. It stands for Inter-segmental Transfer Core. And that was a core of requirements for both of these programs, where if the students took those courses at their community college with a certain GPA with the TAG, they had guaranteed admission and they had their GE requirements fulfilled for most of the colleges. So it depended on to which college they applied. And then with the IGETC it didn’t guarantee admission but it did guarantee this GE package, which each of the colleges at [institution name deleted] would say we take it or we don’t take it. So it gave transfers a definite, if you take this, if you get this GPA you could come in and be at this point in your progress towards completing the college and [institution name deleted] requirements. And that was so incredibly helpful because the students knew what they were supposed to do. They came in here and we could start them off running with their major requirements, and we had either two or three GE requirements that they would have to take here. And that made it so incredibly not streamlined but just definite. We didn’t have to say, well I’ll look at your courses and this may apply, may not apply kind of thing. It was just we could do advising on a much more definite and secure basis. So that was incredibly helpful.

This conduit between the community colleges and state’s university systems clearly defined the requirements for admission and provided students with an assurance that they would be admitted if they completed the identified coursework. Students also
echoed the significance of the articulation agreement defined through IGETC and the guaranteed admission through TAG. Inter-segmental General Education Transfer Curriculum and TAG provided them with a near seamless transition with their community college coursework and greatly simplified the transferability of their courses to WU. The literature major emphasized the ease of the process if IGETC was followed and stated that all of her courses transferred.

Every one of them did. They either didn’t matter for my major, or they, I got the IGETC certification, so everything that I took at the community college transferred here to cover all my GE’s, so that was great, because, none of them covered any major classes or anything like that, but everything else they covered, which was great. And it was, I didn’t have to petition anything, everything just went smoothly, which was nice.

The premed student extolled the assistance she received from her community college advisors in preparing her for a smooth transition. They worked with her to ensure she followed the IGETC requirements and participated in TAG. She said:

My counseling at my community college was fantastic. My counselors were very much like where do you want to go, you know, these are the schools that you can do TAG for, so I applied for TAG immediately. And they were really great in terms of individual education plans, making sure that that’s all filled out. They were even pushing me to get my associate’s degree before I transferred. I had two classes left. They were really big on making sure IGETC was done.
The student management science major also discussed the ease of course transferability due to the university’s articulation agreement and guaranteed admission through TAG and IGETC.

I did the TAG/IGETC program at my community college, so overall it was very simple, because it’s all kind of outlined for you, as to which classes you absolutely need to take to get the guarantee, and so overall it was good.

The psychology major also followed the IGETC requirements and the requirements for her major department outlined by Assist.org and found that all but one of her community college courses transferred to fulfill her general education requirements.

I literally just followed everything I needed. I followed what I needed to transfer and as a psychology major, and the only thing that didn’t was that I had taken AP Spanish in high school and I had taken a higher level Spanish class at my community college and apparently here they’re the same courses, so that I lost. It was a five-unit Spanish course there, so it would’ve been like eight units here, so I lost that. But other than that, everything transferred as lower division.

In addition to the actual articulation agreement outlined through IGETC and TAG, Assist.org, a web-based articulation resource, also provided students with the specific course transferability information needed based on the students’ academic major.

Assist.org. Assist.org is a university web-based system that assists community college students with their transition. The ASSIST acronym stands for Articulation System Stimulating Inter-institutional Student Transfer. According to their website, ASSIST is an online student-transfer information system that shows how course credits earned at one public [state name deleted] college or university can be
applied when transferred to another. ASSIST is the official repository of articulation for [state name deleted] public colleges and universities and provides the most accurate and up-to-date information about student transfer in [state name deleted]. (Assist.org, 1985b, para. 1)

Staff and students commented on the influence of the Assist.org website provided by the state’s universities. The seasoned college academic advisor stated: “I think most transfers have used it while they were at their community college. We talk about Assist.org and use it almost constantly with Transfer (and NFRS) students who have courses from [state name deleted] community colleges.”

The director of academic advising for one of the university academic departments discussed the significance of Assist.org and its value to community college students who planned to transfer. She noted that Assist.org defines all of the required community college courses needed to transfer into the (department name omitted for confidentiality) major at WU. However, since the Assist.org website was so comprehensive and helpful for course transferability, she was also surprised by the number of transferring students who are unaware of Assist.org. She stated,

I really don’t know how students know about Assist, I don’t know how that’s conveyed, I don’t know if it’s conveyed at the community college. I know we have information on our website, and when we talk to students, or if we talk to students before they’re our students, we tell them, “make sure you look at Assist,” we always tell them, “look at Assist, look at Assist,” but if we have a student who hasn’t talked to us until they get here, I don’t know how that’s advertised, I have no idea how a student would know about that. Maybe through word of mouth; I
don’t know if their college counselors tell them about it, I don’t know if their
transfer centers advertise that, I’m not really sure.

Students, in general, found Assist.org to be a valuable tool in their transition to the
university. The students stated that Assist.org was very helpful in their transition process.
One student stated: “Mostly everything that I had transferred I used the website Assist,
which was really helpful.” Another student commented that his community college
advisors worked with him and Assist.org to provide a smooth transition plan.

Yeah, it was pretty easy for me in terms of figuring out what classes I had already
taken that gave me credit for the classes here. . . . After I was accepted I went back
to my counselor at community college and said, “Hey, I got accepted to
[institution name deleted]. I’m going as a chemistry major. I just wanted to make
sure I’m good in terms of whatever I need to do here.” So we sat down, we went
on Assist.org. And we also have a transfer center at [institution name deleted]
College. And they’ve been my lifesaver in terms of knowing what I need to do to
transfer. Like they set me up on a plan. They knew what classes I needed to take,
when to take them, which one of those would actually transfer over. So I
wouldn’t be wasting taking a class that wouldn’t transfer over and retaking that
class here. So in that sense it was nice.

The premed student also discussed the significance and ease of Assist.org in combination
with her community college academic advisor regarding course transferability. She
emphasized extensive detail that Assist provided with course transferability. She also
noted as a premed student, she had to be organized and prepared and Assist provided her
with that needed preparation. She stated:
In terms of actual logistics of it, it was pretty easy because I had Assist.org, which was really helpful. I had a really good counselor, and generally, if you’re a premed/bio major you’re kind of on top of your stuff, so I was very aware of what was going to transfer and what wasn’t. But most of my classes, all of my classes transferred. Every single one of them got me units, and it was pretty easy I would say. In terms of transitioning the kind of class and the course load . . . Assist was really good and helpful for a community college student if you know about Assist. If you don’t know about Assist, it’s obviously useless, but Assist is really, really helpful. It lays out everything to a T, saying if you took this class before ‘97 it’s not valid for this class anymore, or usually if you take a class before ‘97 it’s just invalid, period . . . this class is directly equivalent to this class . . . you select your major and then it lays everything out for you, and you can basically check classes off that you have or haven’t taken.

Another student also talked about his ease of course transferability due to Assist.org and the assistance provided by his sister who had previously transferred to one of the other public research universities in the state.

The community college counselors showed me the whole thing, and also through some friends, and also my older sister transferred from community college [another state research university], so just through that I was able to get information when I needed them.

Assist.org was very clear about courses needed for transfer according to another student who was an on-campus resident:
I use that all the time, or before I transferred. So I knew exactly what I was getting into once I came here. I think I’ve emailed the original advising center a couple of times and that’s been really helpful. But yeah, it’s very clear.

Assist was helpful, but according to this off-campus student, it lacked some depth and specifics.

Obviously Assist.org helped out a little bit. They told you these classes are what you need to take and that, but they don’t necessarily tell you like how each class is necessarily weighted. Like the importance of, some classes are more important than other classes. Like, for example, they have like [ochemonisis.org] and they don’t even tell you, or in most cases they don’t even accept o-chem transferring over. So I feel like they should be like, okay, finish these courses first. They ought to show like priority tiered rankings, like these courses should be finished first. These courses should be finished second. And then like these, if you have extra time, do them.

One student initially talked about Assist.org in terms of its lack of usefulness if a major had not been selected. However, he continued by expressing how it assisted him with choosing his major: “Assist.org became very useful when I selected a major but until that point, actually I selected my major through Assist.org to be perfectly honest, yeah.” Thus, while Assist did not help him with course transferability, it did assist him to select his major.

Half of the students commented that they were referred to Assist.org through people outside of the community college. One of the students shared:
I found out about Assist.org through a co-worker at my apartment complex who was my manager when I first started and she was already in the community college system so it would be word of mouth through a fellow student. Another student heard about it from her mother: “Originally I heard it from my mom.” Less than half of the students interviewed heard about Assist.org through their community college. The chemistry major heard about Assist.org through his community college transfer center:

Well, that came through the transfer center. I mean I had never heard of Assist.org. I had no idea what it was. People tossed it around. I was like okay, I'm not sure what it is, but when I went to the transfer center they showed me how to use Assist.org.

According to all but one of these students, Assist.org was a very effective and convenient web resource due to the comprehensive information it provided about the community college courses they needed to take. It appeared that the one student who did not find it useful was due to him not having decided on a major. Ironically, Assist provided him with the support needed to determine his major. Although Assist.org provided support with what classes to take through a website, academic advising provided a personal touch to transition.

**Academic Advising**

Academic advising services provided staff that can answer questions about academic requirements, support students in navigating the institution’s academic environment, as well as assist students in the development of an academic plan at both the community college and research university. Advising occurs initially at the
Community college academic advising. Most of the staff and student feedback regarding community college academic advising discussed the deficiencies with this service. Advisors were not only seen as inaccessible, but once students were able to meet with them, the level of service in most cases was considered unhelpful. The problems associated with community college academic advising services focused on advisor accessibility and level of service.

Advisor accessibility and level of service. Western University staff shared their vantage point regarding community college academic advising. Transfer students were generally seen as being under-advised at their community college. However, the reasons for this deficiency were unclear. Were students not being proactive with advising services, or were the community college advisors lacking needed information or advising skills? A university academic advisor presented a perspective of community college advising based on her experience with her advisor peers at the university. Academic advising was presented as a balance of providing students with what they needed versus what they wanted. She also noted that her limited interaction with community college advisors informed her perception of their level of service.

Because I know my colleagues on campus . . . I know that they’re not, not helpful. But sometimes, and we’re all like this as human beings, “Oh, that person was helpful.” Did they give you what you wanted versus what you needed? And I feel
like that kind of happens with the community college. We don’t know how they are giving information to the students. We don’t know if they’re doing it all via the web. We don’t know if they’re sitting with the catalogue going through things with the students. We feel like we do a really good job of communicating through the registrar’s office, through admissions to the community college what our requirements are, yet every year we have students who come and say, “I didn’t know I needed a year of calculus for this major.” There’s math in [name of major deleted for confidentiality]. I mean you just shake your head and you say, “Wow, what were you doing for all that time? Were you meeting with someone?” So it’s hard to tell whether that’s a reflection of the students not being proactive, or if it’s part of the advising offices there not having all the information they need. And, again, they’re feeding to all of these universities. They have so much information to keep straight. And if we don’t have our information up to date, I can imagine other institutions don’t, as well. And they’re only working . . . there’s not really a time, I think two times since I’ve been here at [institution name deleted for confidentiality purposes] I’ve had a community college counselor contact me. Just twice. To ask me a specific question about requirements. . . . Is that because they think they have all the right information? Or is it because the question is just not being asked?

This same university advisor also mentioned the surprising possibility of a student never meeting with an advisor at the community college which seemed unreal to her. She stated, “A student could conceivably go through community college the whole time and never meet with an advisor. Never.”
Staff from another academic department shared that in the past there was greater communication between advisors at the university and the community colleges. She discussed the disconnection between what students are told at the community colleges in comparison to what they are told at the university, which could be due to a variety of reasons. She also shared that at times community college advisors call her department for information about requirements.

We in the past had meetings with community college counselors and transfer center directors, we haven’t done that in quite a while, but that’s something we did used to do, because we often hear from students transferring from community college, “well my counselor told me to do x, you’re telling me to do y, and they don’t match,” and so there sometimes is a disconnect between it seems with the information they’re getting from community college to what they’re actually supposed to be doing. And that could be for various reasons; our requirements could have changed, that didn’t get trickled down, or there’s just miscommunication. Sometimes community college counselors do call our office, and that’s great, because they’re getting the information from where they should, so we really welcome that, but that’s one thing we try and do up front, is to get the information out there but what specific courses they should be taking at the community college before they transfer.

This same academic advising staff member also stated that WU advisors used to meet with community college academic advisors and transfer center directors, but that this practice was discontinued due to a lack of response from community college advising staff.
I think at one point, and this again was quite a while ago, but I think at one point we would try to do these meetings during the summer because that’s generally our slower time of the year, and we received so little of a response it wasn’t really worth it to do it anymore, so really the way we communicate with the community colleges is what’s posted on Assist. That’s really what we do at this point, which is probably not as much as we should do, but given staffing and everything else that’s going on, that’s kind of where we are.

Another of the academic department advisors shared that on occasion she has received a phone call from an advisor at a community college for clarification about the university major requirements; although, this is not common.

It’s actually not very much. Sometimes, every now and then, I mean, I’d say at least once a quarter I get a phone call from an advisor at a community college who says they’re sitting there with the student and we just wanted to clarify this, you know, we’re on the website, we’re looking at this, and I let them know you can certainly feel free to call back, this is where they can find this information, and I try to make things really clear.

She added that there should be more communication between university and community college advisors, but for whatever reason, there is not.

I think there probably should be more communication, but I say also no because we don’t directly admit students, so there’s a lot of information outside of clarifying a question that we really can’t say because I’m not reviewing your transcript, and so there’s that piece. But I guess I’ve also had the sense that there aren’t a lot of, well, it’s one-sided, and I think that people certainly have an
impression of [name omitted to protect confidentiality] and should they call or should they not call. I kind of feel like the ones that call are the ones that are invested in the student that they’re with. But, I guess, you know, I don’t imagine that everyone always has time to always do that when they meet with students. Or they’ll refer students to the website and say, well, you can call them, and that’s as far as they go. But, that’s also an assumption on my part.

University academic advisors saw a need to increase communication between the university and community colleges in order to provide stronger transition support to the transfer students.

Most of the interviewed students discussed the challenges with the advising support at the community colleges. However, three of these students were much more direct in their general dissatisfaction with this support service at their previous institutions. These students’ statements illustrated the problems with advising at the community college. One student said: “I think that was actually the biggest pitfall of the community college system is that they didn’t advise me well enough. I didn’t get the correct advice till probably the last, or the second to last semester.” Another student stated: “And I didn’t really like the counselors at my community college. I found them kind of annoying, because some of the counselors gave me false information when I’d have to check it again to see if it was transferable.” The third student was even more critical by comparing his community college advising experience with the level of service provided by the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV), a notoriously slow, frustrating, and inefficient system in the state. He said:
So the way that all of their system works is you either schedule a 30-minute appointment or what they call a long term appointment, or you drop in for support. So their drop-in hours are limited. So limited that there are tons of people that go for drop-in . . . when you go to like sign in, you sign in and you get put on a giant list, a waiting list, like you’re at the DMV basically. It’s the efficiency of the DMV. So you go to drop in and they tell you, you know just sit down and wait. And then as soon as you get up to talk to them, you’re given 15 minutes for one question. Because there are so many people, you’re permitted to ask one question. And whether or not you get to ask just one question depends on the person standing in front of you, whether they choose to enforce it.

This student expressed his frustration with the limited accessibility of advisors and the antiquated appointment system in place to meet with one. To make matters worse, he expressed his frustration with an arbitrary rule allowing students to ask only one question unless the advisor allowed more. A fourth student noted that she did not utilize the academic advising at her community college because of the long lines and advisor appointment delays. She compared her unfavorable community college experience with the better accessibility and level of service at the university.

I don’t know if I ever, I think I may have tried to use that. In that regard, this is much better, because at the community college, the lines, you had to make an appointment way in advance. It was just really hard to get in there. So I can’t say much about that because I don’t have much experience with it. But that definitely shines a light on this here because the walk-in advising is quick, and you know when you’re going in it’s accessible and you’re going to get help.
Although most of the comments regarding the level of academic advising services at the community college were negative, there were a few positive comments. One of the earlier three students who was generally dissatisfied with her experience mentioned one advisor who was extremely helpful to her. She stated:

There was one counselor, he was really good at what he was talking about . . . and he was very well-informed about what students needed to do to transfer. I talked to some other counselors. I don’t know if they were new or something . . . they were not helpful.

Four of the students had a positive experience with their community college academic advising office. One of them shared his experience with his transfer center, including some trips they offered to universities within the state. But, he had friends at other community colleges that seemed to experience the same type of problems experienced with this service by the other students interviewed. He explained:

Well, at [institution name deleted for confidentiality purposes] we have our transfer center which any sort of research you want to do, anything you want to do even before you think about transferring. The first . . . literally my first semester I went there I wanted to transfer and see what it was about. And they said, “Hey, we’re in service here . . . for anything transfer related.” If you just want to talk to schools they have university trips where they’ll actually take a student to a university so he can see those places. So I mean it was an opportunity for me as a community college student to see where I would want to go.

This same student also mentioned his experience with the challenges of advising at other community colleges in comparison to his own experience. His positive experience
seemed to the exception based on interaction with his friends at other community colleges.

I was involved in the student government so I was around different colleges when I was there. I’ve visited [institution name deleted for confidentiality] as a city college and I have colleagues in all those colleges, and I just tell them about how it is with our counselors. I mean I have a personal relationship with my counselor. . . . The counseling department was somewhere I wanted to go to make sure I was on track. Whereas, again, at other community colleges it’s always been like, “Man, I gotta wait 2 hours before I meet with the counselor.”

The psychology major had experienced easy access to her community college academic advisors. She found them to be extremely helpful with reviewing Assist.org with her and support her through the process.

With community college it was, initially when I was going there first year I could go whenever I wanted and you got to sit down with your counselor and they would pull up your record, they’d get all the papers I needed, and we’d go on Assist.org together, kind of go through the whole process. I was very thankful of my counselors at community college. They were probably one of the reasons I was able to stay so on track of what I needed to get done, and I was able to transfer so quickly.

The premed student, who was highly self-motivated by her own account, had a good advising experience at her community college, as well. However, she also claimed to be highly self-directed.
I had a really good counselor and she was fantastic in making sure I had everything situated. I think it’s also to a degree your personal motivation. There are links on the community college website that will say for transfers, you know, this is information for you. Here are resources.

The economics major noted that his community college advisor was more hands on with course selection than academic advising at the university. “It seems like at community college they’re more hands-on. They help you a lot throughout your class-picking, your courses, you can talk to them basically about anything.”

Some of the students had a positive academic advising experience at their community college, while most staff and students found advising at the community colleges to be deficient due to challenges with advisor accessibility and advisors who provided inaccurate information. Whereas community college advising was phase one of the students’ academic advising experience, university advisors served as the conduit for the next phase of the student academic transition.

**University academic advising.** The typical role of academic advising was to assist students with course selection based on their major and career goals and to inform students of the other resources and support services available to them on campus. For these additional services, the appropriate referrals were made. One of the department academic advisors described the goals of their service.

The primary goal is to get them enrolled in their courses. The secondary goal . . . is to familiarize them with the resources and the systems and the processes on campus so that they understand what they’re supposed to be doing at any point in time. In the department, we certainly don’t have any involvement with them in
student life relations or anything like that. It’s really about their academics, and making sure that they understand what they need to do in terms of their major.

A senior advisor from another academic department found that student academic advising can be enhanced if the advisor established a connection with the student and gained an understanding of their needs and understanding of the major requirements and the transition process.

I think everything else comes down to the individual advising, the one-on-one, and really trying to get a sense of that student, of what don’t they understand about the major, what don’t they understand about their transfer agreement, and just trying to gauge, ok, when they’re talking about articulation. I know a lot of students, they know what Assist.org is, they don’t know what articulation really means. They don’t know why a course shows up as equaling a [department course name] specifically, or it’s just intro to stats, and you know, they don’t understand how to read their degree audit.

She continued by sharing that advisors also assist students with life skills and decision making about their academic direction and career goals.

I think in a big way, we’re teaching life skills. Whether we realize or want to or not, we’re teaching life skills. You’re a senior and you want to change your major to [department major omitted for confidentiality]? Ok, I mean, you can do it, but you need to think about A, B, C, D, E, and F, and this is what that looks like. So, I think I try to be as informative as I can, and I don’t want to send a student somewhere without them knowing exactly what they’re doing when they get there . . . so what I’m trying to do is help them so they can figure out that’s what they
should be doing. That’s what I’m there for. I’m there to help you complete your [department] major, but I’m also there to help figure out specifically what is it that you need and how do we as a department fulfill that.

Academic advising at the university also provided a virtual advising service to enhance accessible academic advising.

Advisor accessibility and virtual advising. The university commitment to a positive academic advising experience was consistently demonstrated by the academic advisors. These staff expressed their commitment to being accessible—in person or through the Virtual Advising System, where students had 24/7 advising access. Providing a supportive, caring environment for the students was also seen as an essential part of this service. The advisors discussed the importance of virtual advising. The 30-year-plus college advisor noted the prominence of this service especially for quick questions. It enabled students to obtain quick answers to basic questions and encouraged one-on-one advising for more complex questions and academic planning.

For transfer students I think what is probably the most effective is the online question and answer back and forth. For the students who choose to use the Virtual Advising Center, they can oftentimes get quick answers. Now, there are times when we say, oh, your question is getting a little bit more involved, or if in fact we feel like the student is not understanding it, or sometimes it’s a matter of they’re asking too many questions at the same time, and there’s no way you can give them good solid one line responses. So, we will ask them to come in to see us on walk-in advising.
One of the department academic advisors also echoed the importance of virtual advising for basic questions and the need for face-to-face interaction for more comprehensive questions:

If it's a detailed question we will tell students, “Please come in for advising. We want to meet you face to face.” If it’s a quick answer we’ll do it that way . . . we do walk-in advising every single day. And that’s open whenever they want to come in.

Academic advising was seen as a needs-based service. Appointment times were based on the level of academic support needed by the student. Advisors also provided referral services for students who needed additional information, such as career services. In these cases, a student was referred to the appropriate campus department where that service could be provided. The same advisor continued:

They can come in at any time and we don’t really have any limit on how long we meet with someone. Sometimes you meet with a student for 5 minutes. Sometimes it takes an hour depending on how many questions they have. And really they come in asking questions about the curriculum . . . if they’re asking questions about career plan, if they want to go to grad school, we usually refer them to career services because they’re more the experts there in that area. But the majority of our advising then with students once the academic year starts is done in . . . either in the office or by the Virtual Advisor.

The manager of an academic advising department discussed the comprehensive advising approach that virtual advising provided. She emphasized the benefit of having a
comprehensive virtual academic file of students and its impact on department efficiency and effectiveness with academic advising services.

We use it for almost everything, for students that come in for walk-ins, for students that come in for appointments, we keep contact record of what we talked about, so that if they see a different person the next time we have a whole history, and the colleges can also see what we talked to the student about, because we often get students playing parent, “My college told me to talk to you, and this is what they told me,” and it’s completely opposite of what we told them. We’ve started uploading files, so we keep copies of petitions, or anything that we sign in there, so it really is becoming a true student electronic file. For all of our new students, we’re not keeping paper files any longer, everything is in the VAC. The one thing as a manager that I really like about the VAC is I can run statistics and look at our workload and our ups and downs and our peaks and valleys and kind of do long-term planning based on all of that data.

This same staff member also expressed the importance of virtual advising as a supplement to in-person advising and the fact that many students who utilized the virtual system still appreciated and utilized in-person advising.

We still have a huge population who want the person-to-person, we actually see quite a few students who send a VAC, but then they come in, “because I just want to double check that that’s right.” So while they’ll send a VAC, I think it’s more real for some students if they hear the words coming out of a person rather than the computer. So we get students that do both; there’s still a group of students who go through their entire 4 years without contacting anyone because they’ve
just read the catalog, which is fine. So we just, it’s kind of all over, we see some students who use the VAC only, but I would say the majority kind of do a combination, they use the VAC for short questions, but for long-term plans, and a lot of time we tell them, “Well, it’d be easier if you sat down with somebody and did a long-term plan, and then we’ll keep a record of that in the VAC,” but I think a lot of them still want the one-on-one, they’ll believe you more if it’s coming from a person they can point to you, but I think in terms of record keeping, it’s definitely been a time-saver, and a win-win for sure.

In general, the students expressed a strong appreciation for the accessibility of the academic advisors through face-to-face appointments and the convenience of the virtual advising system. The premed student summarized the virtual advising experience for most of the students. She stated, “The virtual advising center in the transition process was very helpful in saying what was available and what I could do and couldn’t do and requirements.”

Only one student expressed frustration with virtual advising. She had been accustomed to a highly personalized approach at her community college. She explained, “The most frustrating pieces for me were the academic advising pieces just because here it’s very much electronic-based. You do a lot of it online, whereas at my community college you didn’t do any online advising.” In addition to advisor accessibility, advising staff focused on providing a high quality level of service to students.

**Level of service.** Students, in general, acknowledged the level of service and support provided by the university academic advising staff. Many of their comments were reflective of the quality of advising, the accessibility of the academic advisors,
especially through the virtual advising system, and the fact that some of the advisors would provide service above and beyond expectations. The Latin-American studies major student accentuated the advising quality and the accessibility of the advisors. She stated:

My department academic advisor for my major is great. She’s actually, she knows what she’s talking about and she guided me towards what classes I need to take, was very clear, and she’s always in communication through email, which was good. My college really endorses using, what’s called, the VAC, Virtual Advising Center. I think they’re kind of moving up more towards, instead of personal one-on-one individual groups, they’re more focused on students using online. I could ask questions 24/7. That was helpful because I have a pretty busy schedule.

The chemistry major expressed his appreciation of the supportive environment provided by academic advising. He appreciated their assistance with keeping him on track and the proactive academic advising support approach they provided him throughout his first year on campus.

My college has been open to me whenever I needed anything. And my academic department has been amazing. I can’t speak enough about it. I love the chemistry department. The counselors there are definitely making sure I’m on track depending on what I want to do. And I go every quarter to meet with them and say, “Hey, this is where I’m at. Hey, I didn’t do too well in this class. Can we figure something out?” And they’re definitely open.

Another student expressed the disparate academic advising he experienced at his community college versus WU. He noted the difference in quality and level of service
with the university outperforming the community college. He explained that the university advising tended to spend more time with him in an effort to gain an understanding of his future goals and then further assisted him in the development of a comprehensive academic plan.

I’ve gone into my academic advising for my major and they are very knowledgeable. She was helpful. I didn’t have any problems with that . . . it seems like it’s a much higher quality here than the community college because they kind of have a better direction on where the students are trying to go . . . she was very helpful. I weighed out the plan for me. We talked about it. And I got everything set up . . . it was good.

An advisor going above and beyond expectations was the experience of this next student. He was impressed with the level of commitment and care demonstrated by his academic advisor from preenrollment through his first year at WU. He was particularly surprised with how proactive the advisor was in her offering of additional resources and support services. This appeared to be above and beyond expectations.

I was particularly blessed, I think; I don’t know how it would be for other departments. I had someone at my department that was the type of person that went above and beyond any type of expectation to the point where I would get a how are you doing, do you have any questions e-mail, out of the blue. How is this course going that you mentioned you weren’t really comfortable about taking? We have an information session coming up; I know you’re interested in the BA/MA—can you make it at this date and time? Completely unsolicited. I mean
this is a 180 from [institution name deleted] where just to get their attention I have
to fight. Advisors did their best to provide quality service.

The economics major shared that his academic department advisor was helpful
and spent the time necessary to answer his questions.

I went to the [department name deleted for confidentiality] department and they
seemed pretty helpful. They seemed like they were more into what you were
doing because I was an [major name deleted] major, so I guess it relates to them
more, and they, usually when I have questions, they give a pretty good
explanation. They give a lot of time with them and they usually get all of my
questions answered, which is pretty good. I like having my questions answered.
However, he also shared that the university advisors expected students to be more
self-directed with their educational plan.

But, it seems like here the counselors are more like . . . you should rely on
yourself more I guess, because they just give you a sheet of paper, they gave me a
sheet of paper and they said that you’re a university student now and you should
be able to pick your own classes.

Although most of the students had a positive experience with university academic
advising, some of them had a mixed experience. There seemed to be a different level of
service between the academic departments and among the colleges.

I went to my [department] advisor and I wanted to map it out, and I was like, “Ok,
I’m not sure what to do here. This is what I need, and I don’t know what falls
under the requirements, and what will work for this,” and literally the only
response I got was, “I don’t know, talk to the [department name deleted]
department.” . . . No, I just, I mean, I didn’t have a good, I haven’t had a good experience with the academic advising, but I do get the feeling that the college advisors are more open to students coming in than the academic advisors, because I’ve emailed, I’ve gone into his walk-in, I’ve made appointments, and I still get the same stock answer. This is from, yeah, from my major, whereas from the college I always hear, “Come in whenever you want, here’s our phone number, here’s our email, here’s our walk-in hours.” They’re more, I feel like I get more information from them, even without asking for it I guess.

The other student who had a mixed experience shared her frustration with the level of service provided by the department advisor in comparison to her college advisor, but she also acknowledged her ability to find the answers to her own questions through the academic department and college websites.

In terms of my academic department here, my college was good in terms of telling me what I needed to do once I got here, which was great. I mean, the [academic department name deleted for confidentiality] department, you kind of looked at your degree audit and figured it out. I snooped around on the [department name omitted for confidentiality] website and found a direct list of all the classes I needed to take. Like an actual checklist, which I stumbled upon it accidentally while looking at stuff. The department has not been very helpful here. I’ve kind of been finding my own way. But [name omitted] was very helpful. I emailed the virtual advising center about the actual GE’s that I have to take, and they emailed me exactly where to find the link on the virtual advising site to say these are the
upper level GE’s you can take, you can’t take, pick one, go for it. They were really helpful.

However, a few students spoke negatively about their university advising experience and expressed frustration at the level of service and the dismissive and condescending attitude of their academic advising experience.

I came into [college name deleted for confidentiality], was the first academic advising I came into . . . expecting it to be like my community college counselor, so I was like ok, are we going to sit down and, I mean literally, in community college we would have a paper, and it would have your courses for fall semester, spring semester, and we’d sit there and write them out and all that, so I was prepared and waiting for her to get her paper out, like, ok are we going to go through everything, and she was just kind of like, well, you just need to go on your degree audit and it’ll tell you what you need. And I had no idea what a degree audit was. I felt a little bit dismissed and a little bit like I felt she wasn’t understanding that I was a brand new student here; I don’t know what any of this means, and I was trying to assert to her that I felt worried, that I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to enroll in because I didn’t even know what my requirements are. And when I said, you know, well what about my [academic department name omitted for confidentiality] requirements, she said, oh you need to go talk to the [department name omitted] department. So after that I went to the department . . . I kind of got the same response. Check your degree audit. Go online and look at it. So I think I was a little bit frustrated that there was definitely not that like, let
me sit down with you, let me go through . . . and I think it was particularly frustrating.

The second student who did not utilize advising until the end of his first year also felt like he was treated poorly by the advisor, so he never went back.

I actually didn’t go to them until towards the end of last year and a big part was because I didn’t know where they were at, where they were located, and so I finally went, and they just kind of prior to going you have to fill out what classes you are thinking of taking, kind of set your own 2-year plan, and then they talk to you about it. But I feel like that alone would set some students to not want to go because they don’t even know what classes they’re supposed to take, let alone to plan to talk to someone about it. But I kind of just found some plans on their website and then of like classes and what electives you can pick, so it was okay. The counselor there, the one that I talked to, was really rude and kind of made me feel stupid for asking the question that I did, and it just felt like she was talking down to me throughout the whole session, so because of that it just made me never want to go back, unless I have quick questions just to ask the front desk person.

Sometimes advisors were faced with providing a student with what they needed versus what they wanted. This was a challenge for both the advisor and the student due to the dichotomy of desired outcomes of the meeting. The advisor wanted the student to be more self-directed, while the student wanted the answers to be provided.

*What a student wants/needs.* The youngest student noted her appreciation for the advisor’s positive attitude about helping, but was frustrated with not being told exactly
what course to take. The subsequent comments by an advisor reviewed the struggle she experienced with empowering a student to explore options and make their own decisions about which courses to take.

I’ve been to [department name deleted] advising a couple times. . . . I had thought that it sounded like they would help you map it out, help you figure out what’s going on; I didn’t find it that helpful. I went in once and he asked, “What do you want to take?” And I remember I told him and he said, okay. So but I almost wanted some feedback, you know? Well, what do you advise? What courses should I take? And I went back a second time and it was kind of the same experience . . . I haven’t, so I haven’t had much help with, I eventually was able to map out my own plans. I figured it out on my own but didn’t get much help there.

The department advisor who was interviewed expressed frustration when a student wanted the answers provided instead of taking the time to discover their own answers. Advisors wanted to be helpful to students, but at the same time they sought opportunities for students to explore course options and make their own decisions based on their particular academic and career goals.

The more I’ve worked with students over the years, the more that I feel like most student are looking for you to tell them what to do . . . they’re much more content if someone just tells them what they have to do rather than them figuring out on their own or putting any creativity into the design of their program. . . . I’d have students come in and say, “Can you help me plan my major?” I said, “Well, you can take anything you want.” “Yeah, but what should I take?” “Well, what are you interested in?” “Well, I don’t know” . . . it’s that whole thing of them having
a preconceived notion about something and then not just being able to look at it and say, “Yeah, that sounds interesting. Oh, that doesn’t sound interesting. Oh, but it’s taught at 4:00 in the afternoon rather than 8:00 in the morning so, I’m gonna go take that.”

Another one of the department advisors reiterated the importance of students being prepared when they meet with an academic advisor.

We do our walk-in advising; it’s Monday through Thursday, nine to eleven, and then one to three. Our philosophy has been that we’re there, all day, every day, so you come when you can, when you can be prepared to come . . . Understand what’s required of you for your major requirements. If you don’t understand, know who to ask, and know how to start looking for info on your own. I think being a self-starter really is critical, and it makes a difference.

The director of an academic advising department echoed the view that transfer students needed to be more self-directed, take the initiative with their education, and ask questions. She said:

If you know what your long-term plan is, you gotta figure out how to get there and what steps make sense, what steps you can do, and ask a lot of questions, and I think a lot of students are, for whatever reason, still kind of afraid to ask questions. I don’t know how to get over that hurdle, maybe because they’re used to just getting the information. I don’t know. I think that’s one thing we always try to reiterate at our orientation too; this is a huge university, there’s not gonna be a person you can go to, students have to be proactive and again, ask a lot of questions to figure out who do I talk to, where do I get information? If I want
information about my major, I need to go to one person, about my college, I go somewhere else, career services is somebody else, and so there is, there are tons of resources on campus; students just need to figure out where to go.

Most of the interviewed students were generally satisfied with their academic advising experience at the university. They especially appreciated advisor accessibility in person or via the web and spoke positively about the quality of advising received. Some students had a mixed experience due to the varied roles of the academic advisors in the colleges in comparison to the academic departments. College advisors focused on general education requirements that primarily involved underclassmen. Because transfer students are upperclassmen and focusing on their major, most of their academic support should be with the academic department. Some students may be unclear with this distinction. One interesting note was the challenge of providing a student with what they needed versus what they wanted. Staff noted the importance of helping the student to become more self-directed with their educational journey. Academic advising influenced students in their exploration and development of an academic path. While community college advising services were generally considered inadequate, university advising provided students with the support they needed to navigate the academic environment of the university. In addition to academic advising, understanding university academic expectations further assisted students in their transition.

**University Academic Expectations**

Academic Expectations considered the pace of the quarter system, academic rigor, and class size. Both staff and students commented on the differences between the academic environment of a community college and WU. Staff and students provided a
variety of insights into the challenges of this academic transition, including the pace of the university’s quarter system.

**Pace of quarter system.** This new academic and fast paced environment was particularly challenging for students in transition and oftentimes required one or more quarters to make the adjustment. This accelerated pace contributed to the academic rigor. The college academic advisor observed that new transfer students struggled with their adjustment to the new environment of the university due to the fast pace of the quarter. She noted that students had expected a difference, but did not realize the magnitude of that change.

I see them as struggling a lot with the quarter versus the semester system, absolutely and then just the rigor of [institution name deleted] which I don’t necessarily see in the other 4 years. Now, we do get a lot of 4 years from other [state universities]. So, they seem to know the system and understand the rigor. But there’s every once in a while a student will come in from, transfer in and just say I’m just blown away. I was told it was going to be hard but I never really realized it.

A department academic advisor also emphasized the challenges of the quarter system and the importance of students understanding course expectations. Students needed to adequately plan for the pace of the quarter system and pace themselves for the assignments and exams.

Sometimes I want to say their preparedness, like understanding the amount of work that is going to be required in an upper division psych course. I think that some students are not used to the load, or what they need to put in to get the grade
that they want. We try to emphasize 10 weeks isn’t a very long time, especially if
you’re coming from a semester system, so it’s even more critical to understand
what’s on your course syllabus, and probably most students don’t do this, but I tell
them, you need to plot out over 10 weeks, how much do you have to study?
When are those exams? Set reminders for yourself, because 10 weeks, I said, I
can’t even, 10 weeks goes by and I’m not prepared for it, so as soon as classes
start you have midterms. As soon as midterms are over, you’ve got finals. You
may have papers in between there, and that’s one class. So you have to
understand, what do you need to work smart?

Staff from Admissions had the same observation about the challenges of the
quarter system for a student coming from a semester-based community college. The
transfer student services specialist commented on the semester to quarter transition
experience and the importance of students knowing about campus resources to support
them through this adjustment process.

We’re on the quarter system, so we move a lot faster on this campus, and so
students need to be advised in advance that when you get here, there’s no time to
procrastinate. And this is often a big challenge for students when they get here.
They say that first quarter was really a tricky quarter, trying to just get used to the
system. But once they make the change from the students I have contact with,
they really appreciate the quarter system and they realize, boy, I wish I would’ve
been on the quarter system long ago. So, I think the key to the transition is not
holding the student’s hand, but making sure that the student knows where to go if
they have questions.
Again, the senior staff member from Admissions noted the significant challenge of the quarter system and the academic rigor for these new community college students transitioning to the environment of a research university, especially during the first quarter.

Because even a decent GPA, once you come here it’s going to be totally different. It’s going kick their butt. And it happens all the time because once they get here the transition is really hard in the first quarter. It’s really, really hard.

Staff from transfer housing expressed the importance of students staying on track with schoolwork, because a quarter system was not as forgiving as a semester system if a student falls behind. She further noted that students did not realize how fast the quarter was until experiencing it for the first time.

The other thing is adjusting to the quarter system. That first quarter, for a lot of them, is really rough. They come here and they’re meeting people, they’re having a good time, they’re making the connections, they’re going to class, but that quarter system is tight, and if they have anything, any kind of hiccup, if they are lazy those first couple of weeks and then they’re playing catch-up, or they get sick in the middle of the quarter and maybe they miss a week of school; they’re behind and it’s tough to try to make up that time. Most of them, they’re coming from semester systems where you have time to make that up if you have to, but it’s really tough with the quarter. It’s one of the questions that we ask during our RA interviews, is what’s the biggest issue for transfer students, and about half our applicants are transfers and almost for all of them they talk about the quarter system and adjusting to the quarter system, that people told them, they heard other
people say that it was fast, but until they did it, they really didn’t realize how fast it was.

A college staff member who worked directly with transfer orientation echoed the challenge of the semester to quarter transition. She emphasized the difference in the university academic pace in comparison to a community college.

But, the academics is too intense in 10 weeks is a shock. It’s a shocker. And so, students that are coming from the community college typically have 16 weeks, and so it’s a little slower paced, it’s more intimate, you have that time to relax, to get to know students, then you know what, it’s time to buckle down and study . . . very different here. At [name of university deleted for confidentiality] you’re trying to do both at the same time. Get to know your students, get to your academics, it’s all a race trying to balance them out and so, sometimes one’s going to have to give.

Students also found the pace of the research university to be challenging. The off-campus female expressed the challenge of the semester to quarter transition and the fact that midterms start as soon as the third week.

Ok, I’m a good student, I am. I know how to study and all that. However, the transition from semester system to quarter system is mind-blowing. It’s so different. However many times people tell you, that you just, you need to be prepared for it, you will never be. Your first quarter will probably kill you, because it’s just so hard. It’s just, especially, I mean, first of all, it’s what, 16 weeks to 10 weeks, which is, you’ve mid-terms the third week, and back in community college you’re still going over the syllabus in the third week.
A common theme among all interviewed students was not having a full understanding of the semester to quarter pace until experiencing it. This perspective was encapsulated by one of them. He stated: “The biggest thing I think that a lot of transfer students struggle with is the transition from a semester quarter system. Knowing exactly what to do, knowing how it works . . . you’re told it’s fast but you don’t realize how fast it is until you get here.” He further commented about the pace and its impact on keeping up with assignments. He stated:

During my free time, during actual breaks, I’m just sitting there reviewing it, sort of trying to read ahead. So I’m not playing catch-up. Which I think a lot of students regardless of how much you read . . . when the class starts, I think it’s something I have to do at least 1 or 2 weeks beforehand, so by the time I get around to week 4, I’m still keeping up with the class, because it’s definitely a faster pace.

The economics major confirmed this unanimous perspective of the quarter system and the challenge of its pace.

The first quarter I was here, I thought it went pretty fast. I thought it went really fast actually. It was like 3 weeks, 4 weeks, a month later you already have your first midterm. It’s like, what’s going on here? Everyone’s like scrambling to study and the cramming and all that. And then you see your first midterm and you’re like, whoa, this is totally different from community college.

In addition to the pace of the quarter system, the overall academic environment and rigor of the research university influenced student transition.
**Academic environment and rigor.** Students all experienced the challenges of the quarter system, but also discussed the impact of course expectations. The academic rigor of a research university caused one of the students to transform his approach to academics and work much harder than he did at his community college. He commented on the need to be highly motivated to succeed at WU.

The academics required extensive, rigorous preparation and recalculation and remarkable effort. I don’t use adjectives lightly in my personal life and I mean every one of those. In order to be able to transfer to [institution name deleted] in the major that you wanted, you just had to be a very motivated student.

He commented further, comparing the much higher university academic expectation to his community college:

But there is a babying process at the community college. Where they really are counting homework and sort of participation is a little bit more important. And things like that, that here are completely irrelevant. Midterm one, midterm two, here’s your final, that’s it.

Another student also commented on the vast difference in academic expectations between her community college and the university, including the volume of course material and having her course grade based on a midterm and final in comparison to the multitude of smaller assignments at her community college, along with the faster pace. She also talked about the more competitive university environment. However, she eventually adjusted following her “rocky” beginning.

And, in relation to how difficult it is, it’s, my classes at community college were just so simple compared to the classes here. The standards are just so much
higher, which, I mean, it means you learn so much more, but it, it’s just, a huge
difference. I’m, I mean, I’m pretty well adjusted to it now, but I’m still sort of
adjusting to the whole 10-week system. . . . I know my first quarter was kinda
rocky, because I took 16 units, which is a terrible idea, and they tell you, I know
they tell you to take 12 units and no more than that, but I didn’t realize they were
serious, and so I took 16, and I mean, I got all Bs, I think, and I was just like,
“What is this?” It’s so hard, and I mean, back in community college you don’t
have discussions, and you don’t have. Back in community college, the grade set
up is completely different too, it’s very even: homework, and then participation,
and then tests, and then finals, and mid-terms are all evenly dispersed percentage-
wise, but here it’s 50% final, and 50% mid-term. So that is just very, it’s a huge
difference, academic-wise, but last quarter I feel like finally, I hit my complete
stride and I did really well, so, I feel like the people that I know that also
transferred, it took them about the same amount of time to get completely used
to the quarter system, and the intensity of [institution name deleted for
confidentiality], because it’s very hard, I mean, it’s very competitive, which is
why I go here, I mean, it’s why I wanted it, but it’s a huge, it’s huge.

Another student also noted the challenge many community college students faced with
having only a midterm and a final that determined their course grade, whereas at their
community college, multiple assignments including homework all counted toward their
grade. She said:
In some courses having a mid-term and a final. You would never have that . . . in a community college course. You had at least a few exams and a final. I feel like there’s a lot more homework, whereas here it’s more just do it yourself.

The difference in grading was also seen as a challenge. Grading on a curve reinforced a highly competitive and, thus, more stressful environment. This aspect of academic expectations was addressed by another student.

Yeah, I would say the type of testing is definitely different here. It’s all a curve system. It’s just based on how you do in relation to other students versus community college is more like a, it’s just however relation you do on the test . . . a lot of students succeed, then a lot of students will get A’s. But here it’s just like, it’s just certain percentage of students that will get A’s pretty much no matter what . . . And I actually kind of prefer the curve system, but I find it also very challenging because there’s a lot of pressure because you’re competing, you’re directly competing with other students versus the other one, versus at community college you’re competing against like more of the material and so it’s, it’s definitely a high stress system.

He continued by expressing the fact that this type of academic environment discouraged students from collaboration and working together. Grading by a curve produced a Darwinian, survival of the fittest mentality, which on one hand encouraged students to work harder, but also created a highly competitive and stressful academic environment.

The system . . . deters you from working with other students. . . . It’s whoever puts like the most work into it is . . . going to come out on top, and so it kind of, it’s kind of more, it’s all your, it’s self-motivating. You have to like get the edge on
everybody else. . . . You might study with like people that you already know but I don’t think you’re going to go up to like random people and be like, oh, let’s all have a study group.

Although the academic transition was not too difficult for the premed student, she initially found the grading on a curve to be shocking compared to the straight scale at her community college.

It wasn’t very difficult for me. I actually in some cases thought my community college had a higher standard in terms of academics, because at community college an A is an A, a 90% is an A and you either get it or you don’t. There’s no curve. My first experience with a curve was the summer at [university name deleted] before I transferred in. I took an o-chem class and I was shocked when the class average was 60% or was like 58% or something like that. I was absolutely mortified because I was just not used to it. I was used to being like okay an 89.5, that’s a B, that sucks, you know? So it wasn’t too hard for me but I think that’s where I got caught winter quarter when I transferred. I’m a very highly motivated student. Premed, so straight-A’s is what has to be. So, my first quarter I was really overcompensating, like, okay, quarter system, really need to make the adjustment, focus really hard, work, work, and I was just in total shock over the extent of the curves. A 70% was an A. It was very strange to me. But then I kind of got used to the curves and was like oh, chill, there’s curves in my classes, and so I slacked off a bit winter quarter, and I got really bit in the butt, and I had to fight really hard on some of my finals to manage to pull out an A in my class. But I feel like spring came and I found a happy medium.
Students also noted the impact of university class size being so much larger that the community college and the impact that has their ability to participate and on their level of interaction with faculty.

Also, the class size. I went from being maybe the largest class I ever had in community college was maybe 60 students to coming to class where I’m one out of 400 students. I think besides discussions, my smallest class is, I don’t even know, a couple hundred, and so you don’t get the teacher interaction at all, where in community college I became close with all my teachers, you interact with them, you raise your hand, they call on you, it’s very interactive. Whereas here, understandably, with a class of 400 you can’t be as interactive, and you don’t get a chance to really meet your professors unless you kind of go to their office hours and stuff. That was probably the biggest difference in classrooms.

The premed major also discussed how the larger university class size was an impediment to faculty interaction.

I feel like there is the disconnect between having a small class and a class of 300 people. Some people can handle the transition, some people can’t. I personally don’t mind being a face in the crowd. I think the one thing I didn’t like was the availability of the teacher to the student. I mean, my g-chem and o-chem classes at community college, they weren’t small, probably 150 people, but that’s small by comparison to 300 people, but my professor was much more available at community college, and he definitely knew everybody by name, in a class of 150 people. Part of me is like, yeah, I know you have 300 students, and you don’t know all your students, but I mean, a jump from 150 to 300, you know, and my
professors at community college had to be in their own labs. They didn’t necessarily have to be running their own labs, but they had to be there, and so they kind of got to know their students like that, and I feel that was helpful in terms of academics.

The psychology major’s comment was an appropriate summary for nearly all of the students in that she had never worked so hard in school before.

Academics—it was hard. I feel I’ve done very successful here actually, but it hasn’t been easy. I’ve never worked so hard. I mean, I came in with a 4.0, I was a straight-A student at community college, and not that, I worked very hard at community college but definitely coming here it was a whole new level. You come from a community college being like maybe a top-ish student to coming here and being definitely an average student, and 10 weeks is extremely fast, and the classes are hard, and they’re very different. They’re structured different than community college courses.

She continued by sharing that the students’ academic priority here at the university encouraged her to work hard and focus on school.

Being around people who were at a community college, not everyone was quite so academically oriented as I was. Definitely here people are, it’s about school. Everyone’s pretty serious about school, so definitely it helped me get down to business with the school, and everyone kind of makes that a priority.

Students struggled with their academic transition due to the elevated academic expectations of the university. One of the students provided an appropriate summary statement regarding these rigorous expectations at WU and the need to learn the system
and adjust to the new environment: “The academic transition was learning the system, learning the geography, and adjusting to the expectation of the rigor, the rigorous expectation. So those things were challenging.”

Adjusting academically was central to the community college student transition process. Contributing to student transition to the university was their previous academic preparation, the transferability of their community college courses, the availability and quality of academic advising at both the community college and university, and the adjustment process to the increased academic expectations of the university. Although, academic support was critical for student success, as expressed by both students and staff at WU, faculty were central to the transfer student academic experience and the creation of the campus academic milieu.

**Faculty**

Faculty played a central role in the creation and framing of the academic environment at a research university. Interaction with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom had a significant influence on student transition. Community college faculty were seen as nurturing and accessible, while many university faculty were perceived as being distant and focused more on research than teaching. Faculty influenced transition through their perceived approachability, level of engagement with students, and their world class reputation. According to students, faculty approachability and class size were interrelated.

**Approachability and Class Size**

According to the off-campus 22-year old student, university professors were unapproachable due to the sheer size of the class, whereas at his community college,
classes were small and the relationship with the professor was more personal. This student experienced shock at the size of university classes.

Yeah, instructor approachability I found very difficult because that was a shock thing. When I came in here, oh 300-person classes. Now, how am I even going to talk to the professor? I still am struggling at that, like versus at my community college I was able to have fairly personal relationships with instructors, because most of the classes are around like 50 people. But yeah, it’s been difficult because I feel almost intimidated to go up to a professor because I just get the impression that, oh yeah, like he’s, in his mind he’s like, oh, I got 300 students. I don’t have time to help everybody. I’m just, and they’re more like focused on their research, as well as they have more things on the side going on. And so that’s been a difficult transition for me I’d say.

The economic major also found that the large class size adversely affected interaction with the professor. He stated: “Oh, and the class sizes. They’re big. They’re definitely big. Obviously they’re bigger than community college classes, and I wouldn’t say it’s a bad thing but obviously there’s less interaction with the professor.” Another student expressed the same sentiment about the much larger university class size and its negative influence on student-faculty interaction.

I went from being maybe the largest class I ever had in community college was maybe 60 students to coming to class where I’m one out of 400 students. I think besides discussions, my smallest class is, I don’t even know, a couple hundred, and so you don’t get the teacher interaction at all, where in community college I became close with all my teachers, you interact with them, you raise your hand,
they call on you, it’s very interactive. Whereas here, understandably, with a class of 400 you can’t be as interactive, and you don’t get a chance to really meet your professors unless you kind of go to their office hours and stuff. That was probably the biggest difference in classrooms.

Another student noted the lack of a relationship with the university faculty affected his ability to connect to the course material. He expressed his disappointment with the general lack of engagement with his professor and among his classmates. He attributed this frustrating academic environment to the large class size. This 23-year-old resident student explained:

Without a relationship with a professor, I felt like I didn’t connect with the material as much, which was a completely different [inaudible] experience. Whereas in community college, even if it was not part of my major or of particular interest, these were people that were talking to me. Whereas here with the giant class size, they, I feel like the professors feel as though they’re just putting information on a board. And they’re just there to spew their knowledge and hope that the people in the room can write it down fast enough. And that’s like there’s no, especially in the big classrooms, there’s no opportunity for interaction, engagement, I mean you can ask questions but most people feel as though they’re asking stupid questions and don’t engage.

The literature major, who had smaller university classes due to this major, expressed the influence this size had on creating a more intimate classroom environment between students and instructors.
Because I know a lot of my friends here are in the Bio-chemistry, human biology area, and I know a lot of their courses are huge lecture halls with hundreds of people in it, but my, I have, since I’m a lit major, all of my classes are 15-20 people each, so it’s a lot easier to get to know your professors, which is great. So in that sense, they’re very similar to my community college, because it was the class size.

Another student discussed the small class size at her community college classes in comparison to the university and how that more intimate environment encouraged students to utilize faculty office hours.

In community college, you have smaller classrooms. I would be in my professors’ office hours once a week if it came down to it, if I was struggling, or whatever it was, and you had a lot more interaction with them. I mean, they knew your name. When you’re in a class for 16 weeks with them, and it’s not a huge class, they know who you are. Some professors I took multiple times. So yeah, there’s definitely not quite as much faculty direction here, but it’s slightly more, I mean, it’s understandable given the difference in the institutions.

This student continued by stating that she has not had much interaction with university faculty with the exception of a history professor. The initial class she took with him had been offered in the summer; it was small and encouraged interaction. She also had subsequent classes with him.

I’ve gotten to know a couple professors, particularly just because I’ve taken their class a few times and one professor, history professor, I took a summer class with
him, and so it was a small group setting. It was a class with maybe 30 people.

But other than that it’s been a challenge.

Although class size seemed to influence faculty approachability, many students lacked the initiative to engage with their professors.

**Lack of Student Initiative**

While commenting on faculty inaccessibility, most of the students also shared that they made little to no effort to approach professors or attend their office hours. This dichotomy of student belief that professors were inaccessible, but at the same time did not avail themselves to faculty office hours, was addressed by several students. The 21-year old Latin-American studies major stated:

I actually have a hard time interacting with professors here. I don’t know if it’s because I am kind of timid and bashful in going to talk to professors. It would be really helpful if I would go I should go to the office hours, but then again it’s just like what do they talk about? I feel so timid. I feel so intimidated. They have a Ph.D. They’ve been teaching the researchers at the university. What would I talk about? But I’ve confronted some of my professors [inaudible] about questions like theoretical questions . . . so he’d say come to my office hours and talk about it. But I never went. I should’ve went. I regret that so much.

The youngest student had a similar experience. She did not connect to her instructors, but she also did not attend office hours. “I didn’t really make any connections with any of my teachers, but I didn’t go to office hours either.”
The economics major commented that some of his professors shared that they
were accessible and wanted to assist students, but that students did not utilize office
hours. He stated:

A lot of times I’ve gotten a lot of professors, they say nobody comes by their
office hours and they’re not using us basically. Everyone complains that it’s such
a big university, but they’re there. It’s not like you can’t access your professors.
You just don’t. You choose not to. So, if you do, though, it can benefit you.

Another student discussed her lack of initiative with faculty office hours. Even
though she was aware of the programs available to connect students with professors, there
was an initial fear. She also notes that her level of intimidation depends on the faculty
member.

I can definitely own that there has been opportunities that I didn’t take, or that it’s
kind of my lack of assertiveness where I could’ve totally been like, I could’ve
gone to a social or I could’ve gone to another professor’s office hours, and who
cares if they think your question’s dumb or whatever. As the student I guess I
have the right to go in there and talk to them. So, I think definitely that’s been
kind of a lack on my part. But yeah, I don’t really know, because there are
options, the coffee with a professor. I think it’s just taking that step, that like,
asking a professor will you have coffee with me, is the harder part. In theory it
sounds awesome. You’re like oh great, free coffee and I get to talk to the
professor! But, taking that step of talking to them, a little scary. For me it just
kind of depends on the professor.
The one student who was in smaller classes took advantage of office hours and had a positive experience with her professor. Her perception of faculty in general has been influenced by this interaction.

I took a class last quarter, hardest class I’ve ever taken, it was so difficult. . . . I was so lost, I didn’t know what I was doing, and I went to office hours, and my professor was just amazing. If you go to office hours, she will go out of her way to help you. She will explain, and re-explain, and show you, and I just, I got a great grade in class because of her, because of her willingness to help you, and I feel like, in my experience, that’s how the professors here are. They’re just, if you go to office hours, if you take advantage of that, you’re good. I have yet to meet a professor that doesn’t really care, who’s just here to lecture.

Another student discussed her perception of some faculty members being genuine when encouraging students to attend office hours and easier to relate to, but that some seem to be insincere when encouraging students to come to office hours.

I’ve gotten to know a few professors, or at least got comfortable enough with about two or three professors to go into their office hours partly because they had that personality where you just felt like okay, I can go to them and they’ll be fine. They’re also the professors who are like please come to my office hours, you know, like, you will do better. One of my professors [faculty name deleted for confidentiality], she was just like, we’ll go over, even if you got a B on your exam and you want to get an A, we’ll go over your exam, and I was like, wow. Because sometimes you hear teachers say come to my office hours, but you don’t
really get the vibe from them that they really want you to come to their office hours, but it’s just like they’re saying it.

The premed student expressed that she prefers to talk with her professor following class in lieu of office hours, because they are more accessible. She shared that sometimes professors are not there for office hours: “I prefer to talk to the professor after class because they’re really accessible, if I can. I’ve got the experience where I went to office hours and the professor wasn’t there and that kind of sucked.”

A department academic advisor shared the importance of students utilizing office hours, not only to address course material, but to establish a relationship with the instructor for potential research opportunities and for future reference letters. She also pointed out that TA office hours were often eliminated due to the lack of student participation.

I think it means that they should have comfort in talking to a TA or a faculty member, like how to get their foot in the door, whether it’s working for a lab for their research requirement or they’re just looking to build a relationship for a letter of recommendation and preparing themselves to learn in a research environment. . . . We get feedback from TA’s. Some of the TA’s don’t need to have office hours because students don’t go. There’s a reason you should go, and so I try to draw that picture during the orientations because I feel like that impacts everything for the entire year. It impacts the TA’s experience with students coming in and how helpful they can be or not, and the same with faculty and office hours.
Students in general did not utilize faculty office hours. This lack of student initiative was due to shyness, intimidation, large classes, or indifference. Faculty were surprised at the lack of student utilization of office hours, since this opportunity was provided to assist students academically. In some instances, TA office hours were discontinued due to this lack of student participation. Those students who took advantage of office hours were appreciative of the support. Although most students did not utilize faculty office hours for a variety of reasons, there were also implications with the professors’ level of engagement in the classroom and their focus on research versus teaching.

**Level of Engagement**

Classroom environments were established by faculty. Although many professors were perceived to be ambivalent toward undergraduates and focused more on research than teaching, some were seen as engaging and caring toward their students. This environment influenced students’ perception of faculty attitudes toward them. While some faculty were seen as dismissive and research oriented, others were viewed as engaging and caring.

**Dismissive and research oriented.** The oldest transfer student presented feelings expressed by many of the other students regarding faculty being distant and research oriented. He compared their lack of concern with undergraduates and focus on research to the passion for teaching by faculty at the community college.

I felt like there was a bit more passion for making sure that everyone was grasping the material at community college. . . . I feel like the professors are considerably more dismissive here than they are, like these are, a lot of them have PhD’s or are
working on massive research projects and so that their undergraduate students are sort of like the least of their concerns.

Faculty research demands were also seen as influencing faculty interaction with students. However, according to a university academic advisor, research was an institutional priority and, therefore, students needed to take the initiative to connect with professors due to their priority with research.

Here you really have to go out of your way to find faculty who want to interact with the undergrads because they’re so bogged down in research, they’re very involved with their grad students. They’re involved with trying to get grants so that they can continue their research. So, students really do have to take the initiative to get to know the faculty instructors, even lecturers, so that they can make some of those relationships.

Another college staff member commented on limited faculty availability at a research university in comparison to a community college where there were no research responsibilities. Thus, faculty office hours become more important for students to utilize.

Also, we’re a research institution, and so knowing that, knowing that professors may be busy, a little bit busy, so office hours are really the only time you need to catch a professor, so there’s that surprise element of the shock of how fast the pace is and then also that maybe faculty members aren’t as available as at the community college.

One of the students also shared her perspective on the dismissive attitude of some faculty due to their research priority at WU and how that can create a perception that they do not care about students.
I feel like some professors are not very interested in their students. This is a research university, and a lot of them are here to do research, and then they relay to you as such that they’re here to do research. They’re not really here to teach. They just have to kind of do it as well, and that kind of sucks as a student, because generally you’re studying something you’re interested in and they don’t really want to communicate with you at all about it.

While many faculty had limited interaction with students in the classroom, some were highly engaged and had a genuine concern for students.

**Engaging and caring.** Many faculty were perceived as not caring about the students and focused on research, while some were particularly engaging and seemed to be sensitive to students’ needs. These faculty were seen as the exemplars due to their high level of classroom engagement. Such faculty were greatly appreciated by the new transfer students. One student noted that while most faculty seemed to be distant, he had a professor who reached out to him.

I think the perception of faculty is the fact that they’re pretty distant. They’re more focused on their research than they are lecturing. However, my experience with a few faculty members that I was able to sort of interact with so far has been pretty good. They . . . I’ve had professor [professor name deleted] . . . who would meet you during office hours, and now whenever I see him walking around he waves to me and says, “Hey, how are you doing?”

Students had varied experiences with faculty. Most professors were viewed as being distant, while a few exemplary instructors were seen as demonstrating care toward students. The following student experienced this mix and was both surprised and
disappointed with the faculty who seemed distant and uncaring. However, he also experienced one standout professor who seemed to make that extra effort to connect with the students.

It’s been very mixed to be honest. It’s been very, very mixed. I’ve had professors that just had absolutely no interaction with the student and I just, it surprised me to be honest. Like I’m surprised that, I can understand they’d probably be here for the research and that’s probably the sole purpose they would be doing that. But, yeah, it’s just like you come into a classroom expecting a teacher, professor to really care about the student, try to help them out, but some of them, that’s not the case. And then you have others, like this course I took [course name deleted] with [professor name deleted], and he really cared about the students . . . it’s a more welcoming environment.

Another student also noted that many faculty were disengaged and even dismissive of undergraduate students. But, he also experienced a professor who was so engaged with his class that he created an entire lecture on a topic that was not a part of his course, but was of interest to the students. He explained:

Professor [professor name deleted] who is the [title deleted] specialist through [department name deleted] is one of the most impressive and awe inspiring professors I’ve ever had. And I know that one day we had asked if he would cover a different topic. And he created an entire lecture on something that . . . had nothing to do with his material. But he knew that we were interested in it . . . he rearranged the syllabus, rearranged the class. Put a test off so that we could discuss an entire hour and 20-minute course to this particular topic then that we
were interested in. Which I was stunned by. And no other professor has done anything like that. But he was, that impressed me quite a bit. So disengaged I would say most of them are. And dismissive of undergraduates in particular.

The premed student also talked about her mixed experience with faculty, with some being outstanding teachers and very helpful and others being condescending and ineffective.

I’ve had some really, really great professors. My molecular biology professor . . . was fantastic. He’s one of the best professors I’ve had here. He helped me get into a lab. . . . He knew what he was talking about, was interested in his students, willing to talk to you about whatever you had questions about. He was great, absolutely great. . . . My structural bio chem professor was similar. He was willing to talk to you if you had questions just about the topic and he was fantastic, as was my genetics professor. She was really, really good and very interesting. When they’re talking about it and they like what they’re teaching, it just has a big effect. I had a really, really bad calculus professor who was very difficult and very condescending in the class and that was very frustrating. . . . But he was very difficult to talk to, very difficult to communicate with. If you asked him a question that he thought was stupid, he’d let you know basically, which didn’t help because I didn’t think he was a good . . . That was a horrible experience.

The economics major also found a mix of professors, but noted that, in general, they were helpful. He said, “Obviously some are a bit, um, I guess, more helpful than others. But,
in general, if you want help they’re there for you, and if you just ask for it, you can be assisted pretty well. There’s also TA’s, too.”

The final student encapsulated the student experience with faculty and emphasized the impact of the research priority versus an emphasis on teaching. He also noted the importance of faculty office hours to become better acquainted with faculty.

I feel like the good ones are really good, the bad ones are really bad. I feel like there are some that are here to teach and there’s some that are here to research, and so it just really depends on your luck on when you need to take that. . . . So, it really depends, but luckily I was able to meet a couple really good faculty that I was able to get to know a little bit more stopping by their office hours and stuff.

Although there were varying degrees of engagement between students and faculty, there was a sense of awe among some students with the caliber of the faculty.

**Caliber—World Class**

At WU, students have the opportunity to be part of an educational environment with award winning faculty who are leaders in their field. One student expressed his sense of awe with the faculty due to their research and academic contributions to the world:

You have these amazing professors that are doing big things, making names in the world doing big things, and you have a chance to learn from them. You have a chance to have a lecture from them or even work in whatever research they’re doing with them.

According to the literature major, she did not attend faculty office hours due to being intimidated by the caliber and accomplishments of her faculty.
I think I was mostly just intimidated by them. Cause, moving from community college to here, it’s way different. . . . I feel like the professors here have so much under their belt already, that they’re, they’re huge, you’re just like, “are they gonna care about my little problems, when they have all these books published already?”

This prestige of faculty as an intimidation factor was echoed by the next student, who also indicated that TAs were less scary, so she tended to meet with them instead of her professor.

It’s very scary to go into a professor’s office hours here because we have these very prestigious professors here that are doing all these amazing things, and you’re kind of like, you feel a little stupid going in there like I don’t really understand this chemical reaction. I’ve had a hard time with that. There’s been a few times where I had to just suck it up and go in there. The TA’s are helpful, definitely. It’s kind of a nice segway of it’s a little to scary to see the professor so you go see a TA, and they don’t seem quite as scary.

University faculty were central to the academic experience of students and had a significant influence on the transfer student transition. Contributing to the student transition was the much larger university class size, the perceived approachability of professors, the lack of student initiated interaction with faculty, the varied level of faculty engagement with students, the research versus teaching priority, and the prestige and caliber of faculty.

Although the academic realm is cardinal at a research university, the complement of psychosocial support can assist students with a more holistic educational experience.
Students needed to connect with others and feel at home in the university environment.

The next section provides an overview of social support at WU.

**Social Support**

Students needed university social support to assist them with their transition to this new environment. How the university addressed these needs through various support programs and services influenced the community college transfer student transition process. Social support environments consisted of connecting to the campus through involvement opportunities, such as student organizations, campus programs and support services, on-campus transfer housing, and the importance of peer interaction.

Involvement on campus was seen as an important component of student transition.

**Involvement**

All of the students discussed the importance of campus involvement and its impact on their transition and overall satisfaction with the university. One of the students, who lived off campus, expressed his initial challenges with assimilation to the university. He noted that many student organizations already had established groups which could make nonmembers feel like an outsider, but found that persistence led to connections, ultimate involvement, and friendships. Students discussed the wide range of student involvement opportunities, including a wide range of student organizations catering to all student interests. One student noted that he decided to enroll in WU specifically for the co-curricular opportunities available. Another student mentioned how involvement in leadership opportunities led to friendships and connections to other students. Most of the students also talked about the importance of a balance between their academic and co-curricular experience for a holistic education. Involvement
allowed students to connect with the institution and have a more fulfilling experience. University staff believed that involvement on campus was very beneficial to students and their overall learning. In addition, living on campus further contributed to a higher level of involvement. Student organizations, campus jobs, interaction with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom, all contributed to enhanced student satisfaction and success. Connecting to the campus contributed to transition.

**Connecting.** Having a connection to the university was about a feeling, an affinity with the institution. This could be accomplished through involvement with campus programs, activities, and people. By engaging with others on campus, a stronger campus connection is developed. According to the senior administrator, becoming involved both inside and outside of the classroom was beneficial for transfer students and helped them connect to the university.

This is just going to sound so textbook . . . it’s a matter of finding out how they can get involved, making sure that they go to TA office hours, and go to seek out the faculty, that they find a way in which to feel connected to the institution and that it’s not just an academic experience, that, whether that’s through a job on campus or it’s joining an organization, creating their own organization, getting involved in . . . the programming group at [residence hall name deleted].

An academic advisor echoed the importance of students having an early connection to WU to be successful. The earlier this happens, the better. Student involvement assisted students in establishing this connection: “The more that they can feel like they have a place here, and the more they feel like they have a connection here, and the earlier that happens, the more successful they’ll be in their time here.”
According to a staff member who worked directly with campus transfer student support services through the Admissions office, student campus engagement outside of the classroom was a critical component of a student’s ability to connect to the institution and connect with fellow students, especially for transfer students who lived off campus. He also mentioned involving these students within the Admissions office facilitated a higher level of engagement with the university.

We know that some transfer students, maybe they live off-campus, they come for classes and then they go, and we don’t see a lot of them. But we want to engage students to make sure that if they want to make this experience more than just going to class, which is important, and some students that’s all they want to get out of college and that’s fine. But for those students who are looking for a little bit more engagement, we want to be able to provide those resources to students and make sure they get connected with other departments on campus. For example, our college ambassadors, we through the admissions office, we have a campus tours program. So we work very closely with the campus tour program to try and recruit current transfer students to become college ambassadors. College ambassadors basically facilitate all of our campus tours, and so having transfer students on the staff really helps to communicate to prospective transfer students when they come on a tour what they can expect in some regard, what it means to be a transfer student on the campus. And then transfer students can get more engaged, more connected, connect with other students, which is really important. We want students to be able to connect with other students, as well. Living on campus contributed to the ease of involvement.
One of the college staff members who worked with orientation shared that student involvement influenced student satisfaction with their university experience.

The ones who seem happy are the ones who engage in something. It doesn’t have to be something social. It could be mentored by a faculty member, working on campus, having someone looking out for them no matter where they work, somewhere on campus because that department will always adopt those students who work in their office.

Students also saw the importance involvement in creating a better experience for transfer students. The off-campus literature major discussed the importance of the involvement opportunities at her college in connecting her to the university and creating a positive experience for her.

When I came here, I, I don’t know, cause I’m in [name of college deleted for confidentiality] college, and I feel like they’re very welcoming to their new students, very much so, we’re a community at [college name deleted for confidentiality], and I literally belong here. I’m one of the founding members of our organization, and through that I’ve done so much more than I ever did back home, which is great, and I’ve met so many people, and I’ve, I’m a mentor in a college mentoring program. The president of our organization and I and one of our other members, we emceed Transfer Admit Day and stuff like that. . . . Here I’m on my own, it’s in a new world basically, and I have to create it myself, and I feel like it’s been great, because the people I’ve met make it so easy, and my college I think makes it so easy, and it’s just, completely different . . . and I’ve got this whole world ahead of me here, which is crazy but cool. It’s been great.
This same student further emphasized the importance of getting involved and the impact it had on her success, satisfaction, and ability to connect to the university.

Just, honestly the most important thing for me was getting involved. That was the biggest thing. I know people say get involved, but I mean, just doing it, and just putting myself out there, just doing it has been the biggest thing for me. Cause you will meet more people, and you will never feel more included in the college, and the university, and the social life, and the outside world, than you do if you get involved. It just, for me it was the biggest thing.

The economics major also talked about how involvement has influenced his connection and transition in a positive way. He stated: “It’s definitely made me feel a lot less of a stranger to [Western University]. I definitely feel comfortable, happier even, after getting to know more students, socialize with them. It just feels like you belong more now.” The on-campus premed student talked about her involvement at her community college and her continued and immediate involvement at WU. This connection created her circle of friends and established her sense of community.

I was decently involved at my community college, and I joined the men’s crew at my community college, so when I came here that’s what I was doing, which is a very, very big time commitment. So, in terms of social activities it was kind of centered around my team. So, in that case it was good, I had a built-in kind of community, but at the same time it’s really difficult to get involved unless you’re very proactive as a transfer student.
She added that transfer students needed to take the initiative to become involved due to the student organization emphasis on recruiting freshmen. Involvement opportunities were available, but transfer students needed to be proactive and persistent to connect.

I think it’s partly awareness. You don’t know about the opportunities that are there until you look. Like, really, really look. Also, you’re not the demographic targeted in a lot of organizations. For example, they want freshman who are going to come in and be involved from the ground up, kind of like grassroots sort of thing. So, you’re not really the demographic targeted. If you’re really interested in whatever the club or organization is doing, obviously you’re still going to go, and it’s easy for you to just keep going and eventually connect with people, but you’re not targeted as juniors.

Both staff and students identified involvement as a way of connecting transfer students to the campus. According to staff, becoming involved on campus was a crucial aspect of connecting to the institution and the degree of that involvement was directly related to the degree of their connection to the university. Students saw the importance of involvement, but at times struggled to identify involvement opportunities and noticed the emphasis on involvement opportunities for freshmen versus transfer students. It was the role of staff to make students aware of these involvement opportunities and resources. If involvement was perceived to be easy, students were more likely to engage.

Ease of involvement. Students who lived on campus acknowledged the ease of involvement due to proximity. The youngest student expressed her strong appreciation for all of the activities and programs sponsored by the college and its impact on her ease of transition: “I love, love, love that there’s so many things that the college plans. We
had a lot . . . the school in general had so many activities . . . so much easier because you could say, oh let’s go to this, oh let’s go to that, and it gave you something to do.” According to the 21-year old residential student, her ease of involvement was due to living on campus and the emails she received from the university highlighting campus activities. She was able to easily find programs and events to her liking from a wide range of involvement opportunities. A certificate program for leadership development was an initial program in which she became involved that became a stepping stone to other activities and programs.

Passport to Leadership was a really good opportunity . . . I did two sessions and then I found out, they have these weekly flyers at [name omitted to protect confidentiality] that you receive through the [deleted department name] webmail. So, I found out about things that are happening maybe at The Loft, music, shows and things like that, and since I was of age to drink, I could go there, have a beer, and just like do some reading and just relax, and meet people my age was good.

What else? I try to take advantage of some things with [college name deleted] college. . . . I tried to do alternative spring break . . . but I can only get involved in so many things.

An on-campus student shared that his off-campus friends were less likely to become involved with campus activities due to a lack of convenience. His involvement was encouraged by living on campus.

A lot of my friends who live off campus, they don’t know, and I personally wouldn’t be motivated if I had to drive to campus just to go to this workshop for 2 hours where I don’t get credit for it. It’s just to help me. So being on campus
definitely motivates me a lot more, too, when it comes to doing things and participating in things.

A transfer housing staff member noted that the on-campus transfer housing provided community college transfer students with an ease to become involved on campus due to proximity and specific student organization involvement opportunities available within the transfer housing complex.

I think some students come in, some transfers come in, and they know that they want to be involved, and they seem to be able to do that if they want to, but the [on-campus housing name deleted for confidentiality] offers them another chance to do that. So, you know, I know we have students who come in and they go to the student org fair that’s during welcome week, and they find their group or they find their niche or whatever it is, but I think that the [housing name deleted] just augments that because of the [programming board]. . . . There are a lot of positions on [the programming board] . . . it gives folks the opportunity to get involved right off the bat, and then even the folks that don’t get elected to positions, we try to keep them involved and engaged in the group and what they’re doing and try to use them as volunteers or whatever for events. I think that the [housing name deleted] has really helped that.

Students also noted the importance of involvement with establishing new friendships.

**Establishing friendships.** Establishing friendships was seen as an important aspect of involvement on campus. It was also seen as challenging due to preestablished student aggregates. An off-campus student experienced the challenges associated with breaking in to an already established group. He expressed the need for persistence to
eventually become an accepted part of the student organization. This student also commented on the vast array of student organizations that were available.

Social adjustment, obviously at first going into any new place. I moved 5 hours away. I came here not knowing a single person, so start fresh. I didn’t find it difficult. Well actually, at first, I found it difficult to kind of assimilate and get out there and meet people and really feel comfortable in like these organizations and these establishments. Because a lot of them, they already have people that have been there for a few years. They have their groups, their friend groups, and you kind of come in as an outsider, but I feel like after, if you really, really try and you really, really want to fit in, and you really want to get on top of it, then you will be eventually. You just put a couple months of hard work in there, and then you’re just like anyone else. You’re on equal playing field. You’re obviously starting off at a disadvantage, but you can get in there and you can equalize it so I found that good . . . all the social organizations here on campus are very, you know, they have them for all different types. . . . They have everything. So I think it’s, it caters to all different types of students. That’s one of my favorite things about [institution name deleted], that I feel that like a lot of schools don’t have as much of that.

The 23-year old student realized that becoming involved in campus leadership opportunities led to friendships, resume enhancements for his future graduate school application, and an institutional connection. This realization led to his desire for immediate involvement with several leadership positions.
So, I quickly in the first couple of weeks applied for a college council leadership opportunity and realized that I knew that from my high school experience that those leadership opportunities led to friendships and bonds and things like that. So taking a sort of pragmatic approach that I simultaneously needed leadership opportunities to make my graduate student application look as good as possible, but also realizing I could make some really good friends along the way. So, I applied for transfer senator on [college name deleted] College Student Council and an elected position at VIP, which is the student board of [residence hall name deleted], and I was programming co-chair for that last year.

Involvement with co-curricular activities in conjunction with the academic experience was seen as an important combination for a holistic education. 

**Holistic education.** Students also recognized the importance of a holistic experience at the university and its impact on their satisfaction and success. One of the students noted: “It’s important to like balance school with extra-curriculars and I have recently volunteered. You get more of like a holistic experience and you enjoy college more that way.” The youngest student who lived on campus connected the significance of living on campus with her ability to become involved, establish friendships, and have that balance of academics and experiences outside of the classroom:

I would say, well to be successful, I would definitely recommend that people live in the transfer housing. But making friends and those connections with your peers and with your teachers, and yeah, it’s just creating that balance between social activities and grades, school activities, schoolwork.
One of the off-campus students expressed the importance of a holistic education and its impact on his decision to attend WU. He explained that although this institution was known for its academics, it was also known for the quality of its co-curricular experiences, a key to his satisfaction.

If it was just academics alone, I would not find this school as spectacular. I probably, if I didn’t have the co-curricular activities I’m involved in right now, I would honestly, I would be fine with just going to a school like [institution name deleted] or something like that. Because if I’m going for academics, I know this school’s like acclaimed for academics, but you can get an education nearly anywhere, and it’ll still be respected. It might not have as much gravity to it, but this is where the school shines. It shines in its co-curricular. It shines in its student involvement . . . . It’s been key to my transition. It’s been key to me like really enjoying the school and it being fulfilling to me. And it’s been very fulfilling.

Having a balance between academics and the co-curricular was also seen as important by the 21-year-old on-campus resident. He expressed his thoughts in terms of the university feeling like home and the comfort associated with that feeling due to the out-of-classroom experiences.

I think I mean successful to me doesn’t necessarily mean getting good grades. It means being comfortable in where I’m attending and being comfortable and feeling . . . having the place. I mean this almost sounds cliché but making it feel like home. Having it be more than just an experience in the academic side. Tying
in the clubs, organizations. Tying in other stuff so you have a whole experience not just, I went to class or I went to [institution name deleted] for classes.

One of the college staff members also noted the importance of balance in a student’s university experience between academics and co-curricular experiences.

Successful transfer transition to me is somebody that . . . has found that balance.

The successful transition is that they have participated in the different programs, not all of them, but the different programs that our particular college provides to them, that they have a balance between their academics and their personal life, their social life.

Campus involvement was seen as important by everyone interviewed and was viewed as enabling students to connect to the university, assisting with the development of friendships, and contributing to a holistic education. Living on campus was also seen as providing a greater ease with encouraging students to become involved. In addition to involvement, university programs and services also provided needed social support for students.

**University Programs and Services**

Campus programs and services served as environmental structures to support transfer students in transition. Many programs and services were available to assist transfer students with their university experience, and although many staff would say that WU’s support for transfer has increased over the years, there was also consensus that there was a need to enhance transfer student support services.

**Current transfer programs.** Two of the college staff members who directly worked with transfer students shared their current transfer student programs and services.
Their programmatic results were mixed regarding levels of success for transfer student transition. These support services included mentor programs, Transfer Connect—a program designed to connect transfer students to each other and to the campus, and college-based transfer student organizations that were designed to have transfer student develop and provide programs for their fellow transfer students. The first college staff member discussed the mentor program, the Transfer Connect program, and the college transfer student organization.

The mentor program stems from students saying at [Western University] they were not connected with their professors. They were graduating and they weren’t able to find letters of recommendation, because they were intimidated by the faculty members. . . . Professors can be overwhelming. So we thought, well, why don’t we create it in an environment where you’re not so intimidating, where you’re a person and it’s not just the academic component. . . . So, it’s been very helpful for the students to connect with their faculty. The Transfer Connect has two big parts. So, we were finding that students weren’t connecting with one another, and students were also not utilizing different resources that were available to them because some students were saying, well, I didn’t even know about the career services, or, I was a little intimidated to go to an academic internship program because I didn’t think I could qualify. Or, I didn’t think I could do study abroad because I’m only here for 2 years. And so, although we share this information during orientation, orientation is exhausting as it is, and so we’re thrilled when students walk away with some friends during orientation and some resources, but we don’t expect them to remember the whole day. So, we
provide the transfer connect and success program which, again, starts off with a get-to-know-you activity of the students that are in the program, so we’ll do some sort of what’s behind your name, or we’ll do an activity, some sort of get-to-know-you, doing interviews between each other. Then we invite a campus resource that meets the needs of our transfer students. Then we conclude with dinner. So, there’s two parts to it. It’s the get-to-know-you, and then the resources on campus, and it lasts 6 weeks, for one quarter. [Name of organization deleted for confidentiality] is a student organization funded by the college council. They are a club that I meet with every week. They have weekly general body meetings, they plan different events throughout the quarter. I meet with the co-chairs, every week, but they are really a club to let’s get to know each other, let’s get to know one another, we don’t need to be first year transfer students, we can be fifth year transfer students. We are open to every college; this group of students are very social and very welcoming. And so we pair up a lot with [the other campus transfer organizations]. . . . They are very social, and they’re doing night activities off-campus and they’re having a great time. But they also do sometimes find that they need to have some balance, and I’ll bring in some academic resources to help with that balance.

The other college staff member who also works directly with transfer students shared that their college had similar programs, but that the transfer student organizations tended to be cyclical in their level of transfer student involvement and effectiveness. They wane. It depends on who’s the chair or co-chairs, and so when we have someone who’s very dedicated to it and really wants to see it grow, I think we’re
seeing a better success just from this school year because there was continuity from someone from the year before, and also the friendship that they have with [the all-campus transfer student organization]. And so, because there’s a friendship between the students, personal friendships, then they co-sponsor things to do things together so that’s been quite rewarding to see that and it’s not been by my prompting. They’ve actually done it by themselves.

As these two college staff noted, these programs provided by the colleges were designed specifically to engage transfer students and connect them to the university and to each other. Although the number of transfer students affected was limited, those who participated seemed to have a more satisfying experience and developed stronger relationships with both staff and their fellow students. While many current programs successfully engaged transfer students, the university still needed to do more to support this population.

**Need to enhance transfer student support.** The senior university administrator discussed the impact of increasing numbers of transfer students and its impact on the university’s ability to serve them. She noted that, although transfer support services have increased over the years, they have not kept up with the increases in the number of transfer students. She also emphasized the varying needs of transfer students in comparison to native students.

I would say that specific services for transfer students are much more focused now than they were several years ago, primarily because the transfer student population has increased significantly. I think we always recognized that transfer students had different needs, that some of the transition issues were similar yet distinctly
different than for our first year students who enter as native or freshman students. So, in terms of describing them, I would say that they are still not as robust as they probably should be. And I mean that perhaps for not only our college but across the board at the University, especially when we’re seeing the increases that we are and when you think about the percentage that our transfer students are now making up of our total enrollment. So, that has become more of a focus for the college and especially for student affairs. The college academic advisor also expressed her concern about the need to do more for transfer students beyond orientation:

I feel like we don’t do enough for transfers. The main thing we do is provide, participate in the transfer orientation for students. And this gives them an introduction to the campus and to [college name deleted] and introduces them to just the whole academic side of it.

One of the academic department staff members expressed the need for a campus-wide concerted effort to assess the needs of transfer students and develop a more coordinated approach to assisting these students.

On campus, there hasn’t, as far as I know, there hasn’t been a really centralized, concerted effort, or discussion, about are the transfer students struggling, do they need different kinds of help than other groups of students; what can we do about that, are we dealing with them in the best way? I think transfer students sometimes get frustrated, for whatever reason, either because it’s something they haven’t done, or something that our process is, that’s just the way the university operates, so I think that’s one thing that campus could do, is at least have
discussions amongst all the involved parties, to find out if what we’re doing doesn’t make sense, if not, maybe there should be something different. The fact that each college deals with them differently, each department deals with them differently, I think sometimes just adds to the confusion.

One of the college staff members who worked directly with transfer students also shared in the notion that the campus should assess the needs of transfer students in order to better address their needs.

I would say that it’s very important for us to keep assessing, and I’m not trying to say that because that’s our buzz thing for the past 5 years. It really is true. Better to get their feedback directly from them. What do you want? I wish that we had financial incentives to give students so that we could get significant numbers to get feedback, but any feedback is better than none.

This same staff member also noted that college and campus programs in general were for all students, including transfers. She also emphasized that a personal connection with staff could make the difference in the experience of a transfer student and that she was committed to making those connections.

But any program that’s done to reach out to students, there’s always an invitation that goes specifically to transfers saying, this includes you. So, you know, try and get them to come to convocation, try and get them to come to welcome week activities, try and get them to any social or any event that’s done at the college. Every once in a while there’s somebody who pops up at every single event, and once you make a personal connection, then I always add on the note that I’ll be
there, and then maybe they won’t feel lonely, like oh, okay, I know one person who will be there.

A staff member from Admissions explained that it was important to provide needed resources and services to transfer students, but to not hold their hands, as they were adults with college and life experience.

So I think the key to the transition is not holding the student’s hand, but making sure that the student knows where to go if they have questions. We don’t want to hold students’ hands, especially at the transfer level. Many of these students are 19-, 20-years-old, 21-years-old, and some of them are re-entry students. We’re talking about 25, 26. Some of our student veterans are in their 30s and 40s. So, we want to provide resources for students so that if they have an issue, if they have a problem, they know where to go to get that issue resolved. I think that’s probably the key to a transition.

Some university staff commented that many transfer students do not take advantage of university programs and services. However, according to one of the college staff members who worked directly with community college transfer students, some students were unaware of these programs and services. She emphasized that the university needed to communicate information about resources multiple times to ensure the message was being received.

So, a lot of the students are coming in with a lot of experience beforehand. They have had great life experiences and then they’re put into this environment where sometimes, they don’t feel like they’re able to utilize their resources because they
don’t know their resources because maybe they heard it one time and that wasn’t enough. Or, because they didn’t know where to turn to.

Students had multiple reasons for not utilizing campus programs and services designed to assist community college transfer students with transition. Some stated that they were unaware of those services while simultaneously admitting that they may have actually received this information. The immediacy of transition was their focus at the expense of actually digesting the university communications about available programs and services. Some students were self-sufficient and did not need support services while others took the initiative to connect with the services they needed. Students also found that resources were helpful when utilized.

The psychology major stated that she was not informed about the resources, while at the same time admitting she may have disregarded the university’s communication about that program or service due to her preoccupation with the challenges of transition. I felt like my first year here I wasn’t informed as much about that, and so I did miss some of the opportunities, getting to plug into different resources, whether it was CAPS, or study abroad office, that kind of stuff. I did feel like there was maybe some sort of not miscommunication, but maybe a lack of communication. It might’ve been that I was receiving emails for it, but maybe I wasn’t reading them, or I don’t know, but I didn’t feel like I was quite as plugged in as I could’ve been. That, and then I think your first year, I think a hard thing for me was, my first year I was going through that whole transition process. I didn’t use my first year here as well as I could’ve if that makes sense. . . . I definitely felt like my future past at [Western University] was slightly hindered due to the transfer
process just because I wasn’t able to get plugged in or take as many opportunities as I could, and in some of the cases I’m already too late for some of that.

The premed student was so focused on school and her athletic team that she did not have time to consider other university resources. Although aware of the programs and services available, she was self-sufficient during her first year.

I kind of lived first year in a semi-sleep condition. I would say that I was pretty self-sufficient in terms of the first year. I was aware of what career services could offer to me. I never went in there. I was definitely aware of all of the resources available to me. And if I wasn’t, I knew where to find the information. But there was nothing that I particularly needed to utilize at the time because you’re just figuring things out. I looked into going abroad, so I utilized that a little bit, but other than that, it wasn’t too much. I just went to class and did my thing. Did sports, went to class, slept, ate, repeat.

The psychology major also acknowledged the importance of being self-directed and taking the initiative to find needed resources, especially as a transfer student. She believed that developing this initiative was part of students’ transition process.

As a transfer, and I don’t know if this is unfortunately or not, but you have to take the initiative with a lot of things. You have to really go out and look for the resources or the opportunities. They’re not necessarily handed to you, or they’re not quite as available I feel like. So, I think that’s a key part of transitions.

One of the students found the university resources and staff very helpful when utilized. They’re helpful when you go in. When you actually need them and you go in, they’re really, really helpful. Most of the people are really nice and it’s like oh hi,
I don’t really know what I’m doing, I’m a transfer, you know, and they’ll help you out and say this is what you need to do. Take career services, yeah, this is what you need to do, if you want to make an appointment, this is how you do it. People are generally very helpful when you kind of explain that you don’t know. When you seek out the services and actually use them, they’re great.

The management science major connected to several programs and found them to be very helpful. He met his significant other at a campus program held during Welcome Week and utilized the academic support services of the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS).

Well, at the LGBTQ-camp, I met the guy that I’ve been dating ever since then, so, well like we’ve been dating, it’s been kind of just him and I, and we don’t really venture out. I think definitely the OASIS workshops helped. . . . And also through OASIS I was able to meet other students that I became friends with, and a lot of them happen to be in the same major and the same class. For econ we have sequences, so it ended up that we’re all in the same sequence and we end up taking the same classes together, so it was good to have, to meet friends that you can study together and help each other out.

Campus programs and services, when utilized, provided the needed support for students in transition. There was also a general agreement that programs and services for transfer students needed to be enhanced and that on-campus housing specifically for transfer students also had a significant influence on transition.
Transfer Housing

On-campus housing specifically for transfer students has been a recent addition to WU. This on-campus living experience now afforded to transfer students has, according to both staff and students, enhanced student acclimation to the institution and encouraged campus involvement. It has also improved students’ overall connection to WU. University staff were uniform in their view of its positive impact on the transfer student transition experience. Enhanced campus acclimation and involvement was one of the outcomes of on-campus housing.

Enhanced campus acclimation and involvement. Every one of the staff interviewed expressed how this new on-campus housing was creating a stronger transfer student community and a greater ease for this population to become involved and engaged on campus. It has also not only provided a better campus connection, it has also contributed to a better and more successful university experience for these students.

The transfer housing administrator described the living environment for students in transfer housing being facilitated by the transfer housing staff. They were working to provide these students with a full on-campus residential experience. Their goal was to help these students feel welcomed, provide them with a connection to the campus, and offer opportunities to become fully engaged in the university experience.

Okay, so, from the beginning we wanted this to be a real on-campus experience. We didn’t want to just put up an apartment complex and have it be as if you were living off-campus where you lease a space and that’s it. We wanted it to be more than a space, we wanted it to be a home, which is why housing decided to have resident deans and have resident advisors, or resident assistants, as we call them.
now, and to build that whole residential program into it, because we wanted transfers to be able to have that experience because what we knew was that transfers were coming here to [name of college deleted] and not really feeling connected to the university, and one of the easiest ways to make that happen is to have them live on campus and to have that experience, so we do.

She continued by explaining the important role of the resident assistants (RAs) in connecting transfer students to the campus and helping them to understand the resources available to them. The RAs also served as a resource to connect the transfer students to other involvement opportunities on campus. Resident assistants were the front line of the residential life experience and were a valuable resource to their residents.

Really the RA’s and the Res Life programs were sort of the heart of that on-campus experience and helping students understand how to navigate the university, and understanding the resources that are available to them, being able to point them so they know that they exist, because it’s a big school, and if you need your bike worked on, you might not know that there’s a bike shop on campus, unless you’re really paying attention. But the RA’s do know that kind of stuff, so to have them there to help these students feel more connected in and to help them sort of transition . . . I think we do similar things to what folks do at other res life areas for first year students and well, all students, where you have your first floor meeting or hall meeting that’s mandatory where they’re meeting with their RA and sort of going over how things work here and what the RA is, what they’re there for, and what they do in making sure they establish themselves as a resource for those students.
She further explained the role of the RAs and the resident student programming board regarding programs within the residential area. In addition to the programs provided by the RAs, a programming board consisting of the transfer student residents worked together with a staff advisor to plan and implement programs for the residents.

We also created our own sort of programming board. . . . They have done all kinds of stuff—Iron Chef competitions, Amazing Race type of things, and all that kind of stuff, but their role is really programmatic. Occasionally, I’ll go to them if we have questions about something we want to change at the [transfer residence halls], or something we want to make better, or if they have ideas it’s sometimes used in that way, but generally it’s just programming. . . . I have one of the assistant resident deans and three RA’s that sort of advise that group and help them come together, because a lot of them haven’t lived on campus before, so they are not sure what a residential programming board does, so really they help them in the fall especially, and they’re a little more hands-on with helping them understand what their role is and what they can do as that board.

Both college staff members who worked directly with transfer students discussed the significant impact the new transfer housing has had on connecting transfer students to the university and providing them with greater opportunities to become involved. The first college staff member found that this new housing had created a stronger sense of community for all transfer students and a place to call home.

That has definitely created a hotspot for the transfer students. . . . I hear a lot of students saying just that area [name of campus bar/restaurant deleted for confidentiality], that side of campus, I have heard from students, oh where are you
going today? Oh, I’m just going to hang out at [bar/restaurant name deleted], or I’m going to stop at a suitemates apartment, and then we’re going to go somewhere together. So, definitely there is a space. There is an area where students are able to connect with one another. One of the things I think, the benefits of the [transfer residential name deleted for confidentiality] that I’ve heard is, I have seen students that are not living on campus that are hanging out at the [transfer housing area] because they feel a sense of community. Their friends are living there, they know the people that are living there, and that is the exciting part of the [transfer housing area], is that it seems, I have not lived there but I feel like it’s home for many, whether you have a key or not. It feels like it’s home for many people. And so I do feel like it’s definitely been a huge plus.

The other college staff member also shared that students seemed to be having a better college experience due to their enhanced ability to participate in on-campus programs and events. Living on campus provided them with more opportunities to become involved.

Well, I think that it’s helped a lot based on what students have shared with me, that they’re really getting the college experience by living on campus. I see a lot more of them and they’re more inclined to say, oh, well I can go to that event because I’m not splitting after my last class at 7 p.m. I’m already here. Also, to have that experience, you know they didn’t have to leave over the break, and so hearing from some of them while we were here saying, “are you going to be around? I’m going to stop by,” so yeah, I think that’s been a great improvement.
One of the staff from Admissions saw the transfer housing as an opportunity for transfer students to become more involved and to better acclimate to the university.

The [transfer housing area name deleted] is a crucial aspect now that transfer housing is available on campus. We really see the value in that where students can come and they don’t necessarily have to be off campus . . . we know that if a student is on campus they will acclimate to the environment more thoroughly. And they will be more involved in other capacities as well, whether it’s through student life, through residential life, whatever the case might be. So, we find that very meaningful.

He continued by stating that on-campus living allowed these students to become more engaged and connected and thus, had a more successful transition: “And then transfer students can get more engaged, more connected, connect with other students, which is really important. We want students to be able to connect with other students as well.”

The senior administrator also commented on the impact on on-campus transfer housing and its influence on transition. She stated that living on-campus allowed a simplified living situation by eliminating issues such as travel and finding a roommate.

I think living on campus helps. I think that it helps them to have less issues when it comes to transportation. And it can help with less issues of figuring out the month-to-month rent, and the kind of revolving door roommates that sometimes happens off-campus and the issues that present themselves there. Those, I think those kinds of things, I think that those, all of that would contribute to a successful transition.
Students generally shared in the importance of transfer housing and its influence on transition. The chemistry major student remarked that being on campus was an advantage to making friends and having a more positive social experience. He also noted that living on campus provided greater ease to become involved.

I don't want to go off campus. Because a lot of the students . . . who are off-campus aren’t really in touch with the university itself. They have no tie to the university. They go to class, they go back, and that’s it. Whereas being on campus and having friends that were here with me and that had gone through the same thing as me at [housing name deleted for confidentiality purposes] and making new friends who were trying to figure out what this quarter system was about and everything else sort of made it easier for me to get involved.

Students also discussed the advantages of on-campus housing for transfer students. They believed that it was easier to become involved on campus if you lived on campus. Those who lived off campus tended to go to school and then go home and not come back to campus for co-curricular activities. Living on campus provided opportunities for connecting with other transfer students and having more of a transfer student community—others who were sharing in the same transfer transition experience.

One of the on campus students stated:

I think I would not have made it well socially if it wasn’t for the [transfer housing], to be 100% honest, especially as a transfer student. . . . I lived at home my first 2 years in a community college and, definitely, when you live at home you come to school and then you go home. You don’t stay for extra-curricular activities, you don’t come to functions on campus because it’s kind of a pain. So,
you just come and go. And so definitely having the on-campus transfer housing was the best. I made life-long friends there. You have a community and we’re all in the same boat. Because you do get the you’re a transfer, I’m a first year student, I’ve been here since freshman year, there’s definitely that, whatever, separation I guess, so it’s really nice being in a community where you don’t feel that, because everyone’s a transfer and we’ve all been in the same process, and I would not have had the same social experience if it wasn’t for the [transfer housing]. I think every university should have some sort of transfer housing. I think it’s extremely vital, because I think transfer community other than that is kind of swept under the rug. You try to have organizations and programs for them, but without having that community that we have, you really don’t establish as much of a social life, unless you seriously initiate it. But it’s hard enough when you’re coming into technically your junior year to initiate a social life when you’re just trying to survive getting your academics done, you know, trying to figure out what internships to do. I’m going to graduate soon. What am I going to do when I graduate? Yeah, so if it wasn’t for on-campus housing, it would’ve been a lot harder, but I had a really good social transition.

This same student also discussed the influence her RA had on her participation in campus events.

I lived on campus, and the [transfer housing] is very, they encourage people to go to a lot of the events and stuff, I did go to a lot of events. I went to spirit night and [name of spirit event] and all that kind of stuff, so I definitely participated in things, but that was solely because . . . our RA’s encouraged us to do it, and as a
group we were all going to go. Other than that, I probably wouldn’t have gone, like on my own, to some of the stuff.

**Enhanced campus connection.** Students were uniform in their perception of living on versus off campus and its impact on campus involvement. They believed that transfer students who lived off campus had a harder time connecting to the campus due to proximity and the additional time needed to manage an off campus living experience. The premed student found that living on campus had a positive impact and allowed students to have an easier and stronger connection to the campus. Those who lived off campus had a harder time connecting socially.

I think it has a positive impact, because if you’re living off campus, it’s already hard because you’re a commuter, and I feel like commuters are at a disadvantage at socially connecting on campus just because they don’t live here. So, it’s really helpful living at the [transfer housing]. It makes things a lot easier in terms of getting to and from classes and when that part of your life is easier, it’s easier to connect into whatever else is going on on campus because I feel like if your academics are taken care of in terms of it’s easy to get to class, it’s easy to find a place to live, like you aren’t worried about rent, it’s kind of all very rigidly organized, it allows a little bit more freedom to participate in other things.

According to another on-campus student, it was also more challenging for those who lived off campus to meet other students when your university experience consists of going to class and going home.

So I think those two, to me, seem like for transfer students is a big thing because I feel like if you came down here, and you lived off campus, you’d just go to school
and come back and you wouldn’t really meet anyone unless if you work somewhere and you have people you know off campus.

One of the off-campus students expressed the disadvantages of living off campus. She saw the sense of community that the on-campus transfer students were experiencing. She further described living off campus as missing the full college experience.

I really wanted to live in a dorm, which I know is weird, because nobody wants to live in a dorm, and everyone who lives in a dorm can’t wait to get out, but I didn’t move into the [transfer housing], which I’m really sad about. I really regret that. Because all of my friends who moved into the [transfer housing] have even more college experience than I did. I moved straight into an apartment, and I really regret that, because there’s so much of a community at the [transfer housing], even just within the [transfer housing], the [transfer housing residents] know each other, and there’s events in the [transfer housing] that I go to, but from off campus, so I’m like an outsider kind of, so I think that’s something I really missed out on. Which is, I mean, cause you definitely miss the freshman experience, being in a dorm, but it’s kind of like a second chance, to transfers, and I missed out on that too.

The off-campus economics major also saw the challenges of meeting peers when living off campus, but found that he was eventually able to make friends.

Being a transfer student and living off campus I guess is, it’s not the best way to meet people. But, I think after awhile, after you get into your classes, especially the smaller sized classes, you get to really meet people and talk to people. I’ve made some friends through those classes and even classmates. After you see them
for awhile, you get familiarized with them, and it makes you more I think
accustomed and comfortable with [Western University].

On-campus housing connected students physically to campus and also contributed to a
stronger campus connection.

According to the seasoned staff member from Admissions, on-campus transfer
housing not only assisted students to establish stronger connections with the university, it
also provided more incentive for transfer students to come to WU:

My whole point that I wanted to see was having that connection immediately so
when the student would get here they would feel a little bit, aside from the fact
that we didn’t have any housing. So then we get housing. So that, it was a great.
Students started coming.

The management science major expressed his appreciation of the on-campus
housing for transfer students and its influence on his decision to come to WU. He stated:

I really liked [Western University] because they built the new transfer dorms at
the [transfer housing name deleted for confidentiality]. So, I was really excited
for that because I feel like I kind of missed out on the whole dorm life, that kind
of thing, so I was really excited to come.

All of these student and staff comments affirmed the positive influence of on-campus
transfer housing and the challenges off-campus transfer students faced. While this type of
housing provided these students with a stronger connection to the university, it also
encouraged more peer interaction.
Peers

Peer interaction included both formal and informal interaction with peers, as well as developing friendships and peer support systems. Staff and students both commented on the importance of this influence on their level of satisfaction, success, and connection to the institution. Peer interaction included support programs, peer involvement in orientation, and peer support groups, such as residential and student organizational aggregates. In the first section of Social Support, staff discussed the impact of student involvement and peer interaction through student organizations and programs. The subsequent section on Orientation reviewed the impact of student (peer) orientation leaders. Peer support programs provided students with the opportunity to learn from peers and better connect to the university.

Peer support programs. In this section, university staff made a number of comments about the significance of peer interaction, emphasizing the need for more peer support programs. An academic advising staff member shared that sometimes students wanted to hear from other students more than they want to hear from staff. She also presented the importance of having student interns in the department and their impact on creating a stronger department connection to students.

In the Student Affairs Office . . . the interns, I think make a tremendous difference. Sometimes I feel like they’re doing the kind of the work to get things organized. But I think there is that element of, once that student is known as head of the commuter students, there’s some connection there, and students will come back.
One of WU’s senior administrators stated that student peer advisors can reach their fellow students at a different level and referred to a transfer peer program where experienced transfer students mentored and answered questions for new transfer students: “I think that having conversations with the transfer ambassadors is probably where some of this really gets to, and it’s more on a student-to-student, face-to-face kind of experience.” This staff member also discussed the impact of peer-to-peer interaction where students will oftentimes listen to peers over university professionals: “Those upper division students had the experience and the knowledge to influence other students. It could be very powerful if these experienced students could be harnessed to provide additional guidance to new transfers.” However, it was difficult to recruit transfer students to serve as peer advisors in these programs according to one of the academic advisors due to their busy schedules.

You know if we could, I would love to see more student-to-student interaction. But again, I think the challenge is how to get those populations together, be it peers, be it past students, because I think as administrators we can say as much, you need to do this, you need to think about this, you need to do that. It’s that student to student that says yes, I went through it. It was tough but this is how we did it and this is what I did. But again it comes down to the fact that the transfer students are so busy.

Referring to a specific transfer student peer support program, the senior administrative staff member shared that peer interaction also contributed to enhanced transfer student involvement on campus.
We had hired a couple of transfer ambassadors and they would develop helpful, kind of helpful hints and kind of an on-line newsletter kind of thing for our transfer students. And quite frankly, I have no idea how many transfer students hit that website or used that or whatever. I think more of how they were effective was encouraging students to get involved and that they themselves were involved in some of our organizations, and so that made it more comfortable for other transfer students to come and participate. And then once they met other students, they felt more comfortable and felt as if they could have a voice.

In general, staff believed that peer support programs were beneficial to transfer student transition and that there was a need for more of these types of programs. One of the academic advisors echoed this sentiment and discussed the need for a peer mentor or buddy program, especially during the first quarter of the academic year. Such a program could assist students to better familiarize themselves with the campus.

I really feel like there should be some sort of a buddy program. When a transfer student comes to campus, it would be nice for them to be buddied up with someone for the first quarter, kind of learn the ropes, not just of how to enroll on your classes but where the coffee shop is, where, you know, just all the things that I can’t tell them as a staff member because I’m not a student. I’m not looking at the world through the eyes of a student who’s just come here. I don’t have the deer in the headlights look. You know who they are. You see them wandering around campus but just basics like don’t bring your car into campus at 10 minutes to 8 and think you’re gonna get a parking space. All those little things that they need to have someone who’s been through the ropes to do it. And so I don’t think
we can partner everybody with that. But I think that the more students that had someone to be with, excuse me, who’d maybe been here awhile that, that would help.

This same staff member summed up the importance of peer support programs due to current staff limitations and the need for student to feel a sense of belonging.

Can’t touch them all. So having a connection with another student who views the world more like they do than like we do is . . . I think it’s really important. And that sense of belonging and the sense of being comfortable with oneself and who they are . . . allows them to reach out even further when they have to start reaching further out to get help or get information or take that next step of going to grad school.

In addition to peer programs, making friends was also seen as an important part of transition.

**Importance of making friends.** Students discussed the importance of connecting to their peers in a variety of ways. Making friends was seen as essential to a successful transition, in addition to general satisfaction with the new environment of the university. One student commented, “It was hard transitioning because I didn’t know a single person when I came here. But I make friends easily and I’m a really easy-going person so that’s helpful.” Another student mentioned the importance of transfer housing in her ability to adjust to this new environment and its impact on her socialization to the campus and peer interaction:

My social adjustment has been great. . . . Having that environment [transfer housing] where you’re around other students who are going here and along the
same track as you. It’s been so much fun. I definitely did not have this many friends at community college.

Campus programs and other involvement opportunities contributed to students meeting their peers, according to one student: “Programs. . . . It’s good because you get to meet people through there, and you get to build a group of friends.”

One of the off-campus students talked about how much she was at home here at WU due to the friendships she has established.

I live in [name of city deleted to protect confidentiality], that’s not home anymore, this is where I live now. When I say I’m going home, I mean I’m coming back here from there. It’s just, it’s my place now, I guess . . . I met the best friends I’ve ever known here, at this school . . . I feel like the people that I’m closest to in the world are in this organization, or were my roommate or my boyfriend, so it’s, the place here, and I, I mean, which is great, because [name of friend deleted for confidentiality] and other officers I never would have met if it weren’t for how, I guess, I don’t know, welcoming is a weird word, but how welcoming [name of college deleted for confidentiality] was.

This next student described the importance of friends as a support system with his transition process. He knew he could always count on them for support.

I feel like friends are definitely the biggest help when it comes to transitioning.

To know that I have friends here that I can call and ask for help . . . that I feel like friends are definitely the biggest help that I had when it came to transitioning, or just even friends back at home that I could call and you know update them, kind of just talk to them about what’s going on here.
This final student summed up the general student perspective on the importance of connecting to peers.

The biggest thing is just connecting with other people. I feel like having those connections is such a big part of your university experience, because if you don’t feel like you have friends, then you don’t want to be at school. So, but that’s the main reason I went to everything was just to go meet people.

Peer interaction through involvement on campus and participation in programs and activities, student organizations, peer support programs, and residential life communities, all contributed to greater satisfaction with the new environment and, thus, transition. However, the largest single university program designed specifically for transfer student transition was orientation.

**Orientation**

Students needed to gain a better understanding of the expectations of their new institutional environment through a transition program. How the university addressed these needs influenced the student transition process. Orientation was the university’s formal transition program for new students and was designed to address the specific needs of transfers. Even though these students have experienced college, there were some distinctive differences between a community college and a research university. Key properties involved with transfer orientation included the program’s format and structure, peer involvement, and the challenges associated with addressing transfer student needs. The format and structure helped to frame the transition experience.
Format and Structure

Western University’s orientation has evolved over the years from a total face-to-face process to a hybrid program consisting of two main parts: (a) a virtual introduction to the college and university with electronic and web-based academic advising and course registration, and (b) an on-campus program with formal introductions to key college and university leaders, an overview of academic requirements, co-curricular opportunities, student support services, and an opportunity for students to meet their peers. According to the college academic advisor:

The orientation program is basically our first face-to-face, official face-to-face interaction with the students. There our challenge is to give the students something substantial. We’ve gone through kind of a progression because orientation has changed. In the beginning it used to be our way of doing what we now do online, getting them prepped for enrolling for classes, making sure they’re in the right classes. That all happens now prior to that face-to-face, so at orientation our challenge as we went through that transition is what do they need? What do we give them? What can be good and substantial? We don’t want to be just a talking head just going over procedures. We do always like to go over the requirements. And we do kind of shorten that a bit because we hope that they will have understood that already from their online experience. But, we don’t want to not have a time to go over it with them and to allow for questions. But we find that we don’t need to do that much. So what we have done now is shortened that part plus an introduction to their requirements and how to work with their requirements. We now have a degree audit process that gives them a one-page
look at all of their requirements. So we definitely go over all of that, so they know kind of what the big picture is. And then we do probably just as much on the other issues on transition, on how to get started, on what kind of things to think about, look at in prepping for your career at [institution name deleted]. So, that’s what we do at orientation.

Two of the college staff who directly planned and managed their respective college orientation commented on the format of their programs. The first staff member presented a chronological list of sessions in her college orientation. This program included: (a) a welcome, (b) an introduction to the orientation leaders, (c) a getting acquainted activity, (d) a college overview and principles of community presentation by the provost, (e) academic requirements and overview by the academic advising staff, (f) a campus tour, (g) processing of photo IDs, (h) ice breaker activity, (I) lunch, (j) overview of student life by the dean of student affairs, (k) a safety presentation by the Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention Resource Center, (l) a conference style offering of multiple sessions consisting of campus-wide resources where students can select three sessions of most interest to them, (m) Q/A time with orientation leaders, (n) dance activity, and (o) closing.

The orientation program. So, then it’s not that long. It’s from nine to four-thirty, one day. The orientation program will begin with our welcome to the college. I’ll give my story, a little bit about me, because I’m going to be with them the whole day, so they need to know just a little bit about me. Then I go ahead and I introduce the orientation leaders. I ask every orientation leader’s name, major, if they transferred in where did they transfer from, or if they came in as a freshman
what city are they from, and their major. Then I will ask who’s living at the [on-campus transfer housing name deleted for confidentiality]. Then we’ll do a celebrating diversity, just some questions. Please stand up if you were in the military. Please stand up if you are a current student of [name of college deleted for confidentiality]. Then we’ll have the provost come in and . . . share some interesting facts about [Western University] and [name of college deleted for confidentiality] college, and he touches upon the principles of community. He does a little welcome. Then academic advising comes in and does their great presentation, their very detailed presentation on the academic requirements and also mapping it out with your, with their major department. We do a tour, photo ID, ice breakers, then we have lunch. After lunch, our dean of student affairs does this outstanding student life presentation where she talks about the history of the college and how that impacts them, and how they are our activists. Then, I’ll do a SARC presentation. Sexual Assault Resource Center, every bit counts. Then we break into conference services style and we’ll tell them that on their pamphlets there is career services, there’s leadership development, there are campus-wide resources. So, they have three sessions they can go to and after those sessions we break into small groups. We do question and answer where the two orientation leaders, typically one transfer student and then one either, one transfer OL back as a new transfer and then one continuing, and we’ll do small group questions. Any questions, concerns, what are they looking forward to this year, and how are you going to accomplish that. There are different resources that are available for that. Then we do the dance. . . . Then we do a closing. And that is the day. So, some
business mixed with some food mixed with some fun mixed with more business, and then ending on a high note.

The second college staff member who worked directly with orientation shared that until recently course registration was conducted at the on-site orientation program, but was now done virtually in the middle of August. The on-site orientation program was designed to acquaint the students with the campus and with each other. She noted that programs for transfer students were also offered subsequent to orientation during Welcome Week, the first week of the fall quarter. During the campus orientation, she presented an overview of important information for students to successfully navigate the campus. A student panel offered a student perspective about the campus environment, and then time was provided for small group interaction with the orientation leaders. She emphasized the importance of keeping the students engaged.

Well, it starts off with orientation, of course, and whereby we’re actually enrolling them when they’re physically here on campus and then when we became more electronically savvy then we took the lead and their enrollment was electronically, and we were able to guide them electronically remotely to get them enrolled in classes and then would teach them all of the basics for navigating the campus and then get the down and dirty. Also, another one of the essentials of the program is so that they can meet other people. Not necessarily to make friends, but to have a study buddy or to have a co-commuter. This is before there was housing available readily for transfer students. Then, also doing programs during Welcome Week that are specific to transfers. Transfer welcome, transfer student faculty get-togethers, get to know you, and then trying to, trying to engage them in the
transfer organization that is based in the college. . . . So, you know, if you tell them right at the start, I understand you want to get out of here as soon as possible, but I’ll tell you, because the shoes you’re about to walk in are the shoes I did walk in, and I give it from a very personal perspective, you’re going to need to know about the following. So, let’s all take notes, and I give you a razzle-dazzle power-point while I explain these things, and you will be engaged with this. Also, having a student panel where they can ask specific things, student to student . . . then they are engaged. Then, let them have social time with those transfer orientation leaders and not be lectured to. So I think, and also, move them around. Physically let them be in different spaces during that orientation. I don’t care whether that orientation is 4 hours or 8 hours. Engage those students right there. Get them excited right there on the spot.

Since upper division students are primarily involved with their major, some of the academic departments also had orientation programs to provide transfer students with information about their major. The following two academic department staff discussed the content of those programs for their particular departments. The first staff member provided the reasoning for instituting their own orientation workshops. These workshops were initiated to better utilize staff time in addition to provide a needed service for transfer students.

Six or seven years ago now we started setting up workshops for incoming transfer students, during the summer . . . before that, we were doing kind of these advising sessions, one-on-one with each transfer student conveying a lot of the same information over and over, so we decided to set these workshops up just prior to
their registration time to go over even basic things about how to read the schedule of classes, specifically for [department name deleted for confidentiality] what’s a lecture, a discussion, a lab, how do you enroll in those things, what are the courses required for your major, looking at assists, looking at academic history, and all of that. So, it’s just kind of an information session that we do for incoming transfer students. As groups, we generally set up six workshops with anywhere between 40-50 students per workshop, the actual info session part is about an hour or so, depending on how many questions we get, and after that we invite all of the students back to come sit down with an advisor one-on-one if they should have specific questions, they all want to know “what class do I have to take in the fall?” and so we do that, and usually every summer we get about 50-60% of our incoming transfers that attend the workshop. What the other 40% do I think they think they can figure out on their own; I don’t have any hard numbers about what actually happened to all of the students after the quarter starts. But that, basically the workshops are what we try and do to prepare the new transfer students before they come in and register.

The academic advisor for one of the other departments talked about starting their own transfer student orientation program during welcome week as a supplement to the college orientation programs and to provide students majoring in [department name deleted for confidentiality] with more in-depth information about the major, research opportunities, how to contact faculty, and then answer questions.

During the summers, we’ve participated in the orientations that the colleges have, and what we started to do in the past 2 years is actually start to have our own
department orientation during Welcome Week and we program for about three of
them, depending on the response. So, the list that we have from Admit Day,
Transfer Admit Day, the students that have said that yes, they’re coming, that are
transfer students, we email them, let them know what’s kind of new and exciting
about the department, and also we’re having a department orientation, please
RSVP, and so we’ll offer up three dates and ask them what information are they
specifically looking for, so that when we do the presentations we can be more
specific now as opposed to just giving them the general information like we do at
transfer day, and Transfer Admit Day. And so during that time we try to be really
specific and answer people’s questions specific to classes that they may or may
not have showing up as credit on their academic history, how to petition, students
who are on the B.S. track, the differences between the B.A. and the B.S., but for
students that are on the B.S. track, when to start thinking about fulfilling their
research requirement, being familiar, again, with the research areas that we offer,
and helping them know how to contact faculty.

Although the university designed orientation to address the needs of this student
population, transfer students had a mixed view of their orientation experience. They
appreciated meeting the key university officials and receiving an overview of the campus,
and most of them enjoyed the opportunity to interact with their peers. They also
recognized the need for a variety of topics to be covered, but some of them believed the
sessions needed to be more engaging and not a series of mini-lectures.
According to the on-campus chemistry major, the program format and structure was good and effective. He particularly appreciated being formally welcomed by the college administration, and having a better understanding of university expectations.

When I came to the [college name deleted] orientation . . . where I met the orientation leaders and also when I met the administration that showed up and talked to us and the dean and they were present and so on, I felt a lot better. I felt like I was a lot happier. I was welcome here, and I was excited. So, I think [college name deleted] does a great job with the orientation. I had one recommendation but I can’t remember what it was now. But, overall, I was happy with how the orientation had gone other than, again, I wish it was sooner. But the orientation was good. We . . . I got a feel for how it was for transfer students. . . . Knew what I had to do as a transfer student after the orientation. And it was nice. I mean it was a nice time to be on campus. It was during the summer. It’s beautiful.

The off-campus economics major also enjoyed his orientation and believed that it helped him to connect with his fellow transfer students.

I think it was great. You meet a lot of transfer students during that day. . . . I remember when I first got there they all had us get into one big lecture hall and basically asked us, you know, to kind of get the crowd excited to see where everyone’s from and they asked the colleges and all that, and it seems like you’ll see who is here from your college that they transferred from. And you might know some of those people. You probably do. And then at the same time you also get to meet others, just talking around your aisle or people who are around
you, get to know some of them. I think it was a pretty good experience. We had lunch together, then they took us around campus to see where everything was, where our classes and future classes will be and, and I think it was a pretty good experience that day.

Although orientation was a bit long and boring at times, the literature major found the program to be helpful. She explained that nothing like this was offered at her community college, so she appreciated the information.

I know a lot of people complain about it, but I thought it was really interesting, I feel like you get a lot of good information from it. I’m probably biased, because I was really involved in it Admit Day this year, but I’m still friends with my orientation leader, and I, okay, I did leave part of it, because it was really boring, but it was only the part where they go over university, “this is what we expect of our students” kind of thing, and we hear that so much that it’s just, we hear it at orientation, we hear it at the beginning of every class, it’s just kinda, whatever, and I think it was a bit lengthy, whereas it was 8 hours or something like that. But, as for information, I think it was very useful, whereas you never get something like that at a community college, I didn’t have anything like that, so I think that was a good thing, actually.

Although the format and structure of orientation had an impact on the program, orientation leaders influenced the quality of the experience.

**Orientation Leaders**

Assigned orientation groups with a student orientation leader (OL) influenced the effectiveness of the orientation program and student transitions. Staff planning
orientation also saw the importance of having orientation leaders, especially those who were transfer students, so that they could better relate to the students being oriented. However, orientation leaders tended to be a mix of native and transfer students in most of the orientation programs. Although most students were generally satisfied with their orientation group experience, some transfer students had difficulty identifying with nontransfer student OLs. According to one off the college staff who worked directly with the orientation program, utilizing transfer students as OLs has been a recent phenomenon and has been a positive change.

Transfer students as orientation leaders. That’s only been for the last 3 years. We’ve noticed larger numbers of students who apply specifically for that because they had that experience at orientation and they go, “I want to do that. I want to get a quarter under my belt. I’ll go through the training, and I want to be that.” So, that’s been a very positive, positive assistance. . . . Having transfer orientation leaders, having added that component, has made, I believe, a very big different in seeing their positive responses in evaluations.

Another college’s staff member who coordinated orientation also saw the benefits of transfer students as OLs, but also utilized native students who were strong leaders and were better able to articulate the campus resources available because they had been on campus for a longer period of time than many of the transfer OLs. She saw advantages to having a mixture of transfer students and native students as OLs.

Very purposeful with our orientation, transfer orientation is an exact balance of transfer students that are first time transfer students, or they transferred in last year, very recently, and then the second half of the group are continuing transfer
orientation leaders from the year before, or have served as a freshman orientation leader. And so it’s very intentional. We want that, we make sure that we have half the group that represents the students that we’re serving, and then that the other group is definitely, some of them have stronger leadership skills, and it really balances out. They have greater resource knowledge. And we pair them up, so typically during the orientation program they are in teams, and it’ll typically be a transfer student, a brand new orientation leader, with either a continuing orientation leader or a continuing orientation freshman leader.

Students, first and foremost, appreciated the small group engagement with fellow students. The student orientation leaders and orientation groups were seen as an important aspect of the program. One of the students emphasized the importance of peer interaction and networking in creating a positive orientation experience. He appreciated learning from a current transfer student.

I think that’s key. That’s one of the, like I said, one of the things I liked. That’s more of like a social networking. As a student that’s gone through it before, they can kind of advise you in some ways and it gives them a more personal feel to the orientation versus if you were just led along by a faculty member or something then I think, I feel like the day would be less productive and just, you really wouldn’t have the same affect.

Another student spoke about the strong friendship she developed with her orientation leader and the strong connection that persisted into the academic year. She stated: “I liked my orientation leader a lot. I’m still friends with him on Facebook”
Small student groups could also have a less than desirable effect if the student aggregate was quiet and nonparticipatory or the orientation leader was unable to facilitate the group effectively. The youngest student expressed her disappointment in the program primarily due to the lack of interaction within her orientation group.

Yeah, I just didn’t feel, I didn’t enjoy it that much. My group as a whole wasn’t very talkative. Nobody was really . . . I like went on a tour when everyone is just kind of, they’re keeping to themselves and walking around and I’m trying to think of how I would recommend to make it better but the, some of the talks . . . . A couple of them were interesting. Like I remember being fine with sitting in the one where the disability service and, but then another one, I don’t remember which one it was. Anyway, it was kind of boring . . . I didn’t really want to be there.

There was also some student feedback about the advantage of utilizing transfer students as orientation leaders because of their shared experience. One of the students encapsulated this perspective. She stated:

OL’s were sophomores coming in, or they had been freshman and now they’re sophomores. So, one, they weren’t transfers, so cool, you’re going to educate me on transferring? You came to this school as a freshman. Okay, what do you know?

While the overall feedback regarding orientation was positive, most staff and students saw room for improvement. Unfortunately, that was where the agreement ended. Staff found it challenging to address the needs of a heterogeneous group of students and the conflicting needs expressed by the transfers. Some students wanted a condensed
program because they have experienced college and do not want to be treated like freshmen. Others wanted a more comprehensive program similar to freshmen because they recognized the complexity of the research university. However, it was apparent that students needed to hear about the university experience from their peers. Although peer interaction was an integral part of orientation, challenges with framing this program continued due to the conflicting needs and expectations from transfer students and the limited resources of the university.

**Challenges**

Orientation was seen as an important component of the transition process. However, there were varied vantage points concerning the needs of transfer students in an orientation program and the best approach to address those needs. Should their program be similar to the comprehensive orientation provided to freshmen or should it be a condensed version of that program? These students have experienced college, but they have not experienced the disparate environment of a research university in comparison to their community college. Those who planned orientation tried to balance what transfer students wanted with what staff believe they needed. An additional conundrum was the conflicting perspectives among transfer students as to what they wanted and needed. The senior administrator closely associated with orientation commented about the puzzle of what students needed and the challenges associated with considering varied perceptions of student needs. She indicated that many transfer students did not know what they needed for transition to a research university.

And once again, that goes back to the whole issue of they don’t know what they need because they don’t know what they need. Or they’re not asking for that
because they don’t know what it is that they need, because they think that they
know it all. And I don’t mean it to sound like they know it all, but . . . this college
experience is a college experience, but it’s different.

This same administrator also discussed the challenges of meeting transfer student needs
through a condensed program. Freshmen traditionally had a 2-day program, whereas the
transfers had a 1-day or partial-day program.

I personally, having a 1-day transfer orientation and it not even being a full day
. . . I mean it’s just barely the surface that these kinds of issues are addressed. . . .
Because then they’re released to go meet with the advisors in the departments.
So, they come in, they’re introduced to the college. They’re introduced to what
our GE’s are. . . . And transfer orientation, as much as we try to make it
mandatory, we know not everybody comes. . . . There isn’t any kind of in-depth
kind of discussion with students about this, even with the orientation leaders. I
mean, maybe to some degree but not all of our orientation leaders are transfer
students. Some of them are freshman students, and so their experience is real
different. . . . And short of really dramatically changing the orientation program,
making it a 2-day program where you could really delve into a lot of these issues,
I think that it’ll just continue the way that it is unfortunately. Because there is
perception of, well, we don’t have time. We can’t go into that because half of the
day, I mean there’s just so much stuff that they’ve got to do when they come here
for transfer orientation in terms of their, they have, they need to see their academic
department advisors, and they need to get their ID, and they want to check
financial aid, and they’re worried about housing. So, it really is a cursory at best
orientation to the college and to the transfer experience. And so that may sound a little harsh, but I think that that’s the reality.

One of the college staff who worked directly with orientation shared in the challenges of planning an orientation for a heterogeneous group of students. She acknowledged that while community college transfers have college experience, they have not experienced the unique environment of a research university.

I would say that there is lots of room for improvement. It’s been challenging to actually ascertain what it is that our students want. You get varying responses from surveys, adapting the orientation programs to their needs and their desires, which don’t always match based on what we know from Student Affairs, that even though they have experience with higher education, they do not have experience with this institution which they’re transferring into. So, we know a lot of the basics of what they need, but they want to enroll in their classes and they want to be on their way for the most part.

More condensed program. Some students expressed the need for a more condensed program because they were older and had already experienced college and did not want to be treated like freshmen. Students also mentioned the importance of a more interactive format and the value of peer connections. One student also noted her frustration with the presentation about course requirements subsequent to her course selection and registration. Staff were challenged to have an interactive program with a partial-day schedule. However, the unintended consequence of a condensed program was a less engaging format and a series of mini-lectures to cover essential topics. One student
expressed his frustration with the format of the program. He expressed a strong need for a more interactive format.

Yes. Yes, it’s more, okay, sit there. We’re going to throw information at you.

Duh, duh, duh, duh, duh, just like bombard you with information then more of the student coming and experiencing and learning the information first-hand, you know? Students are, I feel like the majority of the students are more like visual and hands-on learners than just sitting in lecture hall, oh okay, that’s that, that’s that. I know some of that is procedural and it has to be done. But a . . . more interactive-based learning approach I think would be effective.

Some students also expressed their mixed reaction to orientation. Although these students had an overall positive experience, they expressed frustration with the length of the program and being treated like freshmen. One student believed that the information presented was good, but that the program could have been significantly condensed and still effective.

It was good, but they treated us like freshmen, like incoming freshmen, and for me that was very frustrating. . . . Spending legitimately 12 hours on this campus going through an orientation that I probably could’ve . . . done for myself in 3 hours, for me was so frustrating . . . I was very, very frustrated. But, the information that they gave me was good. I just feel that it could’ve been done in a much more condensed way. . . . If you present information to them and it’s available, and it’s very clear, I just feel like you should be an adult and people handle it, but that’s just me.
The off-campus biology major also thought the program was good but should be condensed because transfers were older and experienced.

I would say orientation, it was good. I feel like there was a little bit, some of the time was wasted, like there was, because we are older students. We’ve gone through a lot, where most of the transfers here are like 20, 21, or I was fairly like developed adults, or more developed adults. And so I, like a lot of the stuff they put us through I would say is a little bit excessive.

The management science major echoed the view that the day was too long, but learned a lot about the campus resources that were available for transfer students and appreciated being able to connect with his peers.

It was good and bad at the same time, just because it was so long that by the end of it everyone was just kind of over it. But, I was able to meet some people but I don’t feel like they really gave us time where you could like exchange phone numbers and call them up again, that sort of thing. . . . The positive part of orientation is just hearing all the different resources from caps to transfer, like the transfer student organization, that throw events, and to kind of take a tour around, I thought that was pretty good. But, aside from that it was just it being so long . . . we didn’t need to sit through that presentation. But mainly, just really long.

The psychology major thought that orientation was good, but was frustrated sitting through a session about course requirements, when she had already registered for classes remotely earlier in the summer. To her, it would have been more helpful to have heard that academic information prior to course registration.
Orientation was good, minus the fact that at that point, most of the information I was getting was already information I had had to figure out on my own. So, like all the sessions where you talk with the counselors, they come in, and they go pretty extensively over all of the requirements and stuff. At that point, I was just sitting there like I could’ve used this 3 months ago. It would’ve been really helpful. But now I’ve learned it all. And, I don’t really know whether there could be an earlier orientation, or maybe that piece of orientation could be earlier some way, just because you have to register for classes before orientation. So, that probably would’ve been helpful earlier. I think that was the most frustrating piece of the orientation.

**More comprehensive program.** Some students thought that a more comprehensive program was needed because WU was a new environment that was significantly different from a community college. More time was needed in orientation to provide information about the resources needed to be successful at a research institution and students also needed more assistance with the registration process. One student noted that the university needed to better communicate the significance of orientation to transfers so they would understand its importance.

The 23-year-old student noted that the university could better articulate the importance of orientation to transfer students. He seemed to indicate that transfer students have the same needs as freshmen: “Orientation was dumbed down because we were transfers . . . even in the planning of it, to this day that’s how it’s considered. I don’t know what is different between me and a freshman? Other than maybe 2 years?” He continued by stating, “I know nothing about this place. I need oriented just as much as a
Another student echoed this perspective that the freshmen seemed to have a more comprehensive orientation program. Although, she admitted that transfers did not necessarily need a longer program, they did need a little more guidance with the registration process. She stated:

I felt like freshman went through this very extensive, not that I think the orientation for transfers needs to be longer, but I just felt like theirs was this extensive, completely prepare you, which I understand as freshman they definitely need that, but I felt like, as a transfer, you need it more sooner than what I got.

The off-campus economics major thought that the program could be longer and more comprehensive to provide transfer students with a better overview of campus resources and to better prepare them for the rigors of a research university.

I think orientation, or that one day, just isn’t enough quite to basically get the transfer student accustomed to everything. Maybe have a few other days. Or have them, maybe make it a requirement make them go to at least two sessions of either knowing the college, where all the resources are, and at the same time give them a presentation of what they should be expecting at [Western University]. Those rumors they’ve heard that maybe it is so much harder actually are true. They’re not just rumors. If you don’t put in the time you won’t get what you expect or what you want out of [Western University].

Although there were a number of challenges with transfer orientation due to limited resources and conflicting expectations, one of the students summed up its overall importance to her transition:
It’s nice because you get to meet all the other students, it’s kind of like a rite of passage, where you go through orientation saying like, you are formally being acquainted with the university and I think it gives you a movement of actually acknowledging that you’re moving forward from community college.

One of the academic department staff emphasized that the campus has not adequately addressed the needs of transfer students in a comprehensive manner. She shared that these students have specific needs that need to be better addressed. She stated,

I think the whole group, the whole issue of transfer students, I think has been kind of left out there by campus. They are a unique group of students that I think needs a lot of help, the way in which it’s done isn’t really centralized.

Some staff believed that although many campus entities provided good support for transfer students during orientation, there was much room for improvement, especially from a more coordinated approach among campus services, the academic departments, and the colleges. While orientation served as the formal welcome and introduction to the university, transfer student preenrollment programs and services provided prospective students with their initial introduction to the institution.

**Preenrollment Programs**

A comprehensive approach to student outreach and recruitment was a focus of this institution. Many programs existed to provide prospective community college transfer students and their parents with a snapshot of student life at WU. Admissions coordinated this outreach to encourage community college students to consider WU. These efforts included programs such as campus tours, Transfer Fridays, Transfer Days College Night,
An Evening with Western University, the University Link Medical Scholars program, and the largest program, Transfer Admit Day. These preenrollment transfer support programs encouraged familiarity with the campus environment.

Familiarity With Campus

Campus tours and other preenrollment activities were seen as essential programs to familiarize potential students and their parents with WU. Offering a live or virtual view of the university was seen as an essential recruitment tool. Familiarity offered a sense of comfort with the institution. The more interaction students had with WU, the more comfortable they were within this new environment. These programs offered this sense of familiarity and thus, influenced transition. Although all of these programs contributed to familiarity with the institution, campus tours and Transfer Admit Day were seen as affecting the greatest number of students. Tours were offered year-round and Transfer Admit Day was the largest transfer student program offered by the university.

Campus tours. Tours were offered extensively with a video supplement to provide a snapshot of the institutional culture and to offer those students a glimpse of this university environment. According to a member of the Western University Admissions staff, campus tours were an important part of the recruitment process and were offered extensively throughout the year:

Well, this time of year we offer extended tour times, but typically the tour is only offered at 11:00 Monday through Saturday, excluding holiday weekends. . . . But we show about a 12-minute DVD video before each tour, and it basically is showcasing the campus. . . . It’s really a very dynamic video and there’s a copy of it on the website.
Campus tours provided an intimate view of WU. One student summed up her visit to WU: “I chose [institution name deleted] because it’s like a little city in itself . . . everything’s here. And when I saw the student center, I was just like, wow. This is amazing. Okay, I’m coming to [institution name deleted].” While campus tours were offered year-round, Transfer Admit Day was the largest program offered for community college students.

**Transfer Admit Day.** Western University’s Transfer Admit Day provided a series of programs, activities, and an open house atmosphere to community college students who had been admitted. This day provided these students and their parents with the opportunity to gain additional information about the campus and its environment to assist them in their decision of whether or not to accept the university’s admissions offer. The chancellor began the day with a welcome to all parents and potential new students. Subsequent programs and activities included college and academic requirements, a co-curricular programs and support services fair, meetings with academic departments, and campus tours. According to staff from Admissions:

> Obviously the biggest program in the spring is our Transfer Admit Day program, which we are responsible to organize and to basically execute in collaboration with all the campus partners, including the colleges. But, we basically put together that program. . . . That’s when we really want all of the transfer students who are admitted to come to learn exactly about all the transition programs that are available on the campus, through the colleges, through the departments, through career services, student life, Center for Student Involvement. All of these organizations are available on Transfer Admit Day so that students, when they are
deciding whether they should accept our offer or not, they will know exactly what kind of transition programs are available and then matriculate in the fall.

Transfer Admit Day essentially consisted of three major components following the chancellor’s welcome: (a) an overview of the colleges, (b) an overview of major requirements within academic departments, and (c) campus programs and services, including the on-campus transfer housing. Students, their parents, and guests were encouraged to participate in the array of these sessions, presentations, and resource fairs, to gain an in-depth and comprehensive overview of WU and its resources. Each of the colleges presented an overview of their academic requirements and co-curricular opportunities. Current transfer student leaders were also involved with the presentations to provide a student perspective on life at WU. One of the college staff emphasized the importance of having current transfer students involved with the program. She stated: “With Transfer Admit Day, one of the benefits is, again, students want to see themselves here. So, we have our transfer leaders, a panel, share their experiences, share their voice. They’re basically addressing the questions that students may have.” Another college staff member shared that there was room for improvement with Transfer Admit Day, especially in comparison with what the campus does for Freshmen Admit Day.

I feel like the campus as a whole . . . we don’t do the same types of things for transfers during Admit Day that we do a really heck of a great job for the freshman admits. . . . I’d like to see us do a better job at Transfer Admit Day. I wish we had the resources and the staffing to be able to do that. I wish that we could dedicate a person or two just to those transfer student needs. Wouldn’t it be great if there was just a counselor at every college that was dedicated just to
transfer students? But I know that those are, you know, because of limited resources.

The academic departments also participated in Transfer Admit Day and provided an overview of their department, the requirements of the major, and information about academic advising resources available to assist students in their transition. A staff member from one of the departments shared an overview of their session representing a typical academic department session. She encouraged the students to attend one of their workshops [department orientation session] to further assist them in their academic transition.

We do an info session, I think we only do one cause it’s a much smaller group, and it’s the same kind of thing with a little bit of a slant, we talk about Assist.org and what you need to be doing to get ready to transfer. And we talk about our summer workshops, making sure that if they do decide to come to [university name omitted for confidentiality], “Make sure you look at all the communication you’re gonna receive, make sure you sign up for the summer workshop,” so it’s kind of preemptive advising I guess, if you will. We let them know we’re more than happy to talk to them, if they want to come in and see an advisor, we let them know, so it’s really kind of making sure they know that we’re there, we are there to answer their questions, maybe not on that particular day, but they can always contact our office, we talk about research opportunities, because a lot of students come either knowing that’s what they want to do, or they’re not even sure that’s available to them as a student, so that is something else we usually always talk about also.
An academic advisor from another department also shared that they provided a comprehensive overview of their department resources and major requirements. She stated:

It’s like a power-point presentation, we’ve got handouts, and I kind of start with, so you’ve been admitted to [university name omitted] university, these are the things that you need to know how to function here as a [department name omitted] major. We talk about the petitioning process. We talk about the major requirements. We talk about the honors program. I show examples of what the quarter-by-quarter plans look like.

Transfer students were also very interested in viewing the on-campus transfer housing. Thus, transfer housing residential life staff coordinated information sessions and tours of the housing and its neighborhood to provide a comprehensive overview of on-campus living.

Basically it’s a huge open house for us that day and we invite the students and their families to come and they take full tours of [housing name deleted for confidentiality], so I think last year they got to see at least three apartments. We have several different floor plans. They got to see [the east and west housing areas], our restaurant, our market, and everything that we have to offer out there at [housing name deleted for confidentiality]. . . . This year, in particular, I think we will focus more on . . . the presentation first . . . and what it’s like to live there . . . handouts and materials that we can give to them so that they are all getting the same information and have a better idea of what they’re signing up for when they do sign up to live at the [housing name omitted]. Some of them, I think, don’t
know what they’re signing up for. They think they are just leasing a space in some ways, and when they get there they’re like, “Who is this RA?” and “Who is this RSO?” and “Who is this walking by my room?” or whatever, and “What are these quiet-hours?” They don’t understand that necessarily, but we want to make sure that everyone is coming in, they should know that before they come, ideally, so they’re not surprised.

Not all students attend Transfer Admit Day, but those that do gain a better understanding of what life would be like as a WU student. The off-campus biology major described his experience at Transfer Admit Day as a great overview of the campus and the opportunity to gain the information he needed to make a decision about attending the university. He stated:

I did attend Admit Day. . . . I came here with my mom. . . . I remember they had like a lot of booths set up and various like, oh yeah, these are the opportunities. . . . I thought that was good. . . . You can spend the time, and they have special shows. I remember they had tours and stuff like that. That’s a way for your family and you to kind of see the campus and see what to get involved in and how to get involved. So I liked that. That was one of the ways I also got involved in stuff that I’m currently involved in.

Another student who lived on campus also found the day to be helpful, as well. She appreciated the overview of requirements, the flow of the day, and the tour, especially of the transfer housing.

Transfer Admit Day was great. That was very helpful. They did go over kind of an initial of the requirements for, because you go with your college, where you
have a session with your college, and I know they went over a kind of brief overview of what you need. I just remember that day was just, it flowed well. They had the campus tour which was good. I had a chance to see the [transfer housing]. That’s when I decided I was actually going to live on campus. So, that was really a good day.

Preenrollment programs, such as Transfer Admit Day, served as a structural environment to recruit prospective students and present them with an overview of WU. This information provided community college students with the information necessary to make an informed decision about attending WU. Other programs also offered insight into the university.

Other Preenrollment Programs

Additional preenrollment programs included Transfer Day College Night and An Evening with WU. These two programs took the university experience off campus and to local high schools and to community college students in this region. Again, these events provided an overview of WU and answered questions about the institutional academic and social environment. Such outreach efforts demonstrated the university’s commitment to a comprehensive approach to recruitment. The transfer student specialist stated:

We have admissions officers go out and . . . meet with perspective transfer students and their parents, and to answer any questions they have relating to admission, general questions about financial aid, the colleges, and things of this nature. So, we’re trying to touch as many students as we can so that students know that if I want to go to [institution deleted] . . . there is an avenue to get support.
Academic departments were also involved with some additional preenrollment programs. Some of them participated in the university’s calling program to notify students about being admitted prior to the official email notification. This program involved university officials calling students to personally notify them of their admission to the university. It was designed to personalize the admission process and encourage students to accept admission to WU. One of the department advisors said:

The first interaction may be when we’ve helped making phone calls to let students know they’ve been admitted, and so we let them know our contact information, and the website, and our advising email address and that they can feel free to contact us there, that they should look at the information on the website.

This same advisor also shared that she has visited local community colleges to talk with students about WU and her [department name omitted for confidentiality] academic department. She stated, “I’ve actually gone out to [name of community college deleted for confidentiality], talking to students that are transferring to either [university names deleted for confidentiality].”

Touching as many students as possible was an important part of Western University’s Admissions approach to recruitment. In addition to these programs that reach out into the community, an on-campus program for a particular niche of students was the University Link Medical Scholars program. This was a campus residential-based program designed for community college students who were interested in the university’s track to medical school. This Admissions staff member stated:

The University Link Medical Scholars program is currently going on. It’s a 4-week residential program for community college students who are interested in
[institution name deleted], and we meet with those students, and we talk a little bit more about admissions. We talk about what they can expect. We talk about what the requirements are. We also talk about what might help them when they get here if they choose to actually apply.

While most of these programs offer community college students an overview of WU via a personal touch, the university’s communication infrastructure offers a virtual lens to what the university had to offer potential students. University communication, including the university website, provided comprehensive information about admissions, programs, and services available for community college transfer students.

**University Communication**

Campus communication, especially the university websites, provided students with the opportunity to review all pertinent information regarding the steps needed for a successful transfer student transition to the university and a comprehensive view of the institution available 24/7. Students needed a variety of programs and support services to assist them in their adjustment to this new university environment. How the university addressed these needs through institutional environmental structures, such as university websites, and other types of communication, influenced the student transition process.

With a technically savvy student population that expected immediate and around-the-clock access to information and services, the university websites played an important role in influencing transition. Students expected a comprehensive website for transfer support services and information that was easy to navigate. In general, they found the websites helpful with providing the information they needed. One of the off-campus
students encapsulated this student perspective about the websites. He found them to be informative, organized, and generally user-friendly:

They were very helpful I think. They have a lot of good information . . . don’t know necessarily any improvements they could make on that. I feel like they, they’re organized. They’re simple, easy to understand, so I liked it. I like the system already in place.

University websites were reported to be a valued resource.

**Web-Based Resources**

Accessible information was an important part of assisting students in transition. Students uniformly expressed the need for the institutional websites to be user-friendly, as well as have access to comprehensive information about the transfer student transition process and the university experience, in general. Everything a student would need should be available and easy to find. The university websites were central to providing this transition assistance around-the-clock and were seen as user-friendly by many of the students.

*User-friendly.* One student’s opinion was reflective of all students interviewed. She provided a summary of her thoughts on the university’s role with web-based resources offered as component of transition. She expressed the importance of a well-designed website that provided comprehensive information and links to other important sites:

Making sure everything’s available on the internet. That’s the most important thing for me, so I could just look for it. But also having the sites viewed
well-engineered, so they’re easy to guide to see, like they have links toward other things, too.

Although challenging to keep pace with technology and maintaining current websites, WU has put a premium on having all appropriate transfer student transition information available on the web in a user-friendly format. The following Admissions staff member’s comments illustrated this university priority and commitment to its transfer students. She punctuated the fact that the websites were comprehensive and provided a wealth of information: “Well, I know we have, for admissions we have the website that’s for freshman and then we have the transfer website . . . including everything that they need to know.” Comprehensive information available and easily accessible was seen as essential.

A few of the students found the navigation difficult at first, but were able to find things after investing some time. The first student had become accustomed to her community college website and at first had difficulty with the extensiveness of WU’s website.

I had a hard time navigating the website just because we didn’t use such an extensive website at my community college. Like, if you had questions you kind of just went in and talked to them. I feel like with [university name omitted] you do a lot more looking up. I mean, it took a little bit of time, but I felt like it wasn’t outrageous. I eventually could get it. . . . But yeah, I didn’t have too much of a trouble with the website, but I researched nonstop just because I had to figure out a lot of questions on my own.

Another student also had initial problems with the website navigation, but quickly became proficient with a bit of exploration. She stated:
The website is a little bit harder to navigate. You have to snoop a little bit. The links are sometimes ambiguous. . . . If you just spend a few minutes kind of just clicking stuff . . . . It’s not really hard but it just takes a few extra minutes.

**Comprehensive information.** Students and staff alike expressed the importance of having comprehensive transfer student transition information available on the university website. The staff transfer specialist from Admissions also noted the importance of the website being comprehensive, transfer-specific, and dynamic—utilizing current technology and virtual services. He stated:

The website is also dynamic. We have videos . . . lots of information, lots of links to other campus pages . . . we have links to the colleges. Transfer Student Services is unique in that we have our own page within the admissions page. We have a page for Transfer Student Services, and on that page we actually have a handbook, a handbook that we’re updating for next year, but it’s a fairly new development. . . . And it’s really a transitional tool for students. Not only can they find out about admission and how to apply, and all of those things. But what are the steps after matriculation in terms of registering for classes, finding out about dining, finding out about research opportunities. All of these factors are listed in our, what we call the Transfer Student Guide. . . . We also have these virtual fairs again where we do real time chatting. We also offer application workshops in the fall and we basically record those and put those on our website. So, we do quite a bit. . . . We also have all of the publications are actually online.
This same staff member also shared that admissions was trying to conduct more student outreach via the web with webinars, virtual college fairs, and videos to illustrate what it is like to be a student at WU.

The last 2 years we started doing a little bit more in terms of trying to utilize more of our staff resources to the best of our ability by incorporating technology and doing some of this reaching out to students. So, we offer webinars in the fall. We are part of the program called College Week Live, which is a virtual college fair. The entire [institution name deleted] system participates in that. College Week Live is an organization that sponsors the fair and then universities and colleges from all over the country basically participate like a college fair where students can go online and get answers to questions in real time. Also, video presentations where we have current students actually talk about the benefits of being a student at [institution name deleted], why they like being a student here, these kinds of questions. And so we’re looking to expand that even more and more. How can we utilize technology? Our creative services team is working on a series of videos to help support our mission, to help support what [institution name deleted] is all about, and how students can get more information about what it means to be a student here.

The University’s goal, according to this staff member was to reach students who could not come to the campus, but still wanted to experience WU. Because the campus tour was seen as important, the university placed a high priority on providing a virtual tour for those who could not physically experience a tour.
So, for the webinar program, that is really, the rationale behind that program again is to reach students. But this is to reach students who are unable to actually come to campus. So, we know that the campus tour is very important. The campus visit is crucial. But there are students that can’t come for whatever reason, whether they just can’t afford to or they’re too far away, whatever. But if they want to get information, that’s where technology is going to help bridge that gap so that a student can still learn about what [institution name deleted] has to offer.

The academic departments also had specific websites to provide important information about the major requirements. One of the department staff members explained the extensiveness of the information on their website and the need for students to be proactive and take the initiative to explore the site.

We have specific pages set up for freshmen students, for transfer students about what they need to be doing. . . . So, on that page, specifically for transfers, we have information about Assist.org, about their academic history, their degree audit, about our workshops . . . so, we go into a lot of detail without trying to overwhelm, because that’s the other thing, about what are kind of the steps they need to do for their first quarter. On our website we also have information posted about our course offerings for the year, so that while the dates and times aren’t specific, they can at least kind of plan out, for those students who want to plan out more than their first quarter, they can kind of get an idea of what courses we’re going to offer fall, winter, spring. We have our workshop information on there, we have course webpage information on there, we have research information, there’s kind of almost anything and everything a student would want to know is
on our website, it’s a matter of navigating and being able to get to it. Which, a lot of times when we sit down with a student, we’ll go through the website if they have specific questions about the major requirements. We’ll go through where to find it on the website and what that means, or if they have questions about, “well, I’m interested in doing research next year,” we’ll go through where that is on the website and what the application process is, and how to find a faculty, and all that kind of thing. We have a lot of information on our website, probably a little overwhelming, and I guess the thing is if I’m a student, and I don’t know exactly what I’m looking for, I’m not gonna know how to find it, but I think that’s where the responsibility of the student is to ask questions. If I’m interested in research, but I don’t know what to do, you have to start somewhere, so ask a question. Call our office, call career services, call the college, call somebody, and hopefully you can get somebody to at least get you to a starting point.

Students were generally satisfied with the comprehensive nature of the WU websites. One student, who represented the overall student opinion, noted that everything she needed was on line: “But I basically, I knew everything I needed to do to transfer because everything is accessible online.” Another student also expressed his appreciation of how much information was available on the university website. He found everything he needed.

That’s basically how I got all my information. Everything . . . the minute I got accepted, I mean every day I went on the [name omitted to protect confidentiality] website at least two or three times a day in terms of figuring out what to do. Financial aid, classes, dates when we move in. All those things. I mean I was on
there all the time. That and I wasn’t taking classes during the summer, so I had free time anyways to just browse around. That’s how I found out about a lot of services on campus was just playing around online.

Another student shared that because of the comprehensive nature of the university website, she convinced one of her friends to apply to WU just by providing her with a variety of links, an indication of the university’s impressive resources.

I used the site a lot . . . because there’s so much information on the website . . . and it’s funny, because I actually convinced one of my friends to apply here just by giving her different links to the site, and outback adventures and all the RIMAC classes, and just cause there’s so much here if you just know where to look, and it’s all on the website, which I think is great, so I love our website.

While comprehensive information was seen as important, having that information easily accessible and current was equally necessary.

**Current/accessible information.** A university academic advisor discussed their department website and noted the importance of maintaining up-to-date information about the campus environment, the academic program, and university programs and services that support the academic experience. Many academic departments have staff webmasters who develop their website with intentional design for the user.

Understanding student needs was paramount in the creation of a website. But, the challenge here is the need for continuous updates and constant changes in technology. This advisor stated:

I think that that’s an ever evolving topic of how we keep our information . . . we keep it up to date, but how do we keep it accessible for a population that changes
the way they use information very rapidly. . . . We’re dealing with the left-brain and the right brain and all those design features for web design that we’re supposed to be looking at. And in our department we have a Webmaster who has a background in web design. . . . And trying to figure out how best to design our website so that when a student, whether they’re a current student, a transfer student, a parent of a student, when they go onto our page in the beginning, how do you get them to find all the information that they need to get? . . . So, trying to figure out what it is they need is a process that I don’t think most of our departments and colleges have the budget or the staff to really be doing that kind of groundwork to figure out how do they need this information. . . . Because of how fast things change with information.

All university staff were committed to answering questions and addressing the needs of potential and current students. Email communication was used extensively to address many of these questions. According to an Admissions staff member,

If they want to get information, that’s where technology is going to help bridge that gap, so that a student can still learn about what [institution name deleted] has to offer. So any student, whether they’re a freshman, a transfer, a student veteran, a foster youth students, we will respond to their questions if they send us an email. One of the interviewed students also expressed his satisfaction with the design, ease of navigation, and the links to additional resources.

They are very easy to navigate. I don’t, I mean the main ones that I obviously use are to go onto the current student and look at my timeline, the account activity, everything that’s going on. And then for the Biology division, that website is very
nice. They have all the links right there on the front page. Class websites were a bit tricky in the beginning, but yeah, I feel they’re very well-designed.

The management sciences major commented on the easy access to his course information and PDF files for his major. However, he also noted that he was unaware of this website for a period of time.

The website is pretty good when it comes to having PDF files that you can download for your specific major and the classes you need, and it also has the professor that’s teaching each class and what quarter it’s offered. So, when it comes to that, it’s pretty good, like all the information you would normally need is there. But I didn’t even know about this [academic department name omitted] website until I think halfway through last year. I didn’t know you could just type [department name omitted] and it would just pop up so it was a pretty good discovery I felt.

In addition to the campus websites, other forms of communication were also utilized by the university.

**Other Forms of Communication**

Students commented on the influence of other forms of communication, including university email correspondence. The youngest student noted the helpfulness of the emails in addition to the important updates they provided, acknowledging that there was no email communication from her community college.

The emails that are sent out are incredibly helpful. Sometimes they can be overwhelming, because there’s so much information, and you’re not used to it. I mean I didn’t get any emails as a community college student. So, but the website
for the housing was definitely helpful for transfer housing. I used that. But other
than that, email communication has been the main way that I’ve stayed up to date
with what’s happening here at our school.

Still another student appreciated the fact that they received a lot of email correspondence
without being bombarded: “I felt like it was enough information, enough communication
to where they didn’t bombard you. But they had it out there available for you. So, I like
that. That was one part, I did like it.” The comprehensive college communications
received by a student helped him to feel welcomed. He noted that a friend of his enrolled
at another institution received limited university emails and newsletters. This disparity
contributed to his appreciation of correspondence from WU.

And I always got email or newsletters from [institution name deleted]. And then I
signed up for the chemistry newsletter, so I knew what was sort of going on in the
chemistry aspect of it. That being said, and I'll just say this because I was talking
to my friend. She just graduated from [institution name deleted] and they didn’t
really send out any newsletters or anything. They got, I think, one newsletter a
quarter, if that. And I told her about all the things I had and, after graduating from
[institution name deleted], she said as a transfer student she didn’t feel like she
was welcome as much because there wasn’t much information going out to her.

This student continued by explaining how the email communication provided him
with a step-by-step overview of the college transition process and what to expect.

Whereas for me I had this newsletter saying, “This is how it is to transfer. This is
your first quarter, sort of how it’s gonna go. This is when you can meet with your
counselor.” Or, “This is [college name deleted] College . . . this is how [college
name deleted] College works. This is how the university works. . . . You can see a difference between college, your major, and any other requirements. So, it was a little bit more clear for me in that sense. So . . . and I was only able to compare that to other students at other universities. So, I love the fact that [institution name deleted] does a pretty good job.

In general, students were very satisfied with the communication from the university. Following admission, the oldest student interviewed found a clear and sequential presentation of important steps in the transition process.

I’m a person that readily takes advantage of all the services before me, and honestly attempts to make use of them. . . . But after receiving the letter of admission, there was a series of here’s what you have to do, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, and a timeline of when those things need to be accomplished. As a person that plans extensively beforehand, it was very useful.

Although the communication was seen as beneficial, one student commented that a more personal touch would be beneficial and appreciated. He indicated that some phone calls would illustrate a genuine care and connection with students.

I think they could do better in the sense I feel like it’s easier said than done, I guess, but if it was a little bit more personal, I mean you’re getting newsletters which is fine. And you see your name at the top, which is automatically on there. However, I think if the colleges were to, for orientation say, “Hey, we have orientation coming up. We’d love to see you there,” or whatever it is. And just had maybe one phone call or something more than just what was already done. I think is the biggest thing. Regular communication from the university creates a
connection with the institution. Connecting to the campus environment also adds to this sense of familiarity.

There were multiple environmental structures that influenced the transition process of a community college student to a research university. Appropriate academic support was central to a student’s transition to an institution of higher education, especially to a top-tier research university. Faculty influenced the perception of academic expectations and comfort level in the classroom. Social support structures enhanced a student’s sense of belonging and connection to the institution. Orientation provided a formal transition to the university with an overview of academic expectations and a snapshot of university support services. Preenrollment programs offered familiarity with the institution and influenced the level of interest in enrollment. University communication environments, such as the institutional documents and websites, presented important transition information to both prospective and current students 24 hours a day. All of these structural environments influence community college student transition to the university. The following document analysis further describes university communication and the influence these documents have on community college transfer student transition to WU.

Document Analysis

Multiple data collection was used in this study. In addition to individual interviews with community college transfer students and university staff, a document analysis was conducted to triangulate the data provided by the staff interviews, student interviews, literature review, and university documents. University documents included the university’s Answers for Transfers, Discover [institution name deleted], the Transfer
*Advantage, Transfer Student Guide*, the Inter-segmental General Education Transfer Curriculum, and the institutional transfer student website. These documents were also a central component of the university communication environment and should also be considered as additional communication elements of the previous University Communication section. Interviewed students and staff were uniform in their view that the information provided on WU’s website (including the electronic documents) was comprehensive and easily accessible. All of the information a student needed was on the website. The first of these documents was *Answers for Transfers*.

**Answers for transfers.** The *Answers for Transfers* publication was a 49-page marketing booklet that presented an overview of the statewide university system, including sections on (a) considering the university, (b) what to expect when you transfer, (c) selection factors for transfer students, (d) coursework planning, (e) application procedures, (f) enrollment options, (g) transfer admission programs, (h) student programs & services, (I) housing, (j) educational financing & financial aid, and (k) majors, and is one of two printed publications available to potential students. All of the major components needed to understand the admissions process, academic environment, and social support system were clearly articulated. It was a comprehensive introduction that could lead students to more specific information about the individual campuses within the system. It was last published in May, 2009.

*Answers for Transfers* was the only comprehensive university publication that provided information about the state’s research university system. This document introduced the institution from a holistic perspective, including its academic prowess and prestige (academic support), accomplished faculty, research facilities, co-curricular
(social support) opportunities, and the extensive resources, programs and services available within this world class university. The two major environmental themes that emerged from this study—academic support and social support—were clearly articulated in this document. An academic overview was presented in a clear and comprehensive manner, including: academic and admissions requirements and the university’s articulation agreement with the state’s community colleges. The rigors of this institution were also noted with an emphasis on the challenges of the much faster pace of the quarter system. Faculty were described as dedicated and accomplished. Social support programs and opportunities, including orientation, were also presented and briefly described.

Readers of this publication were directed to specific websites for additional details for the many programs and services outlined, including admissions, campus programs and support services, and Assist.org, the state’s web-based student transfer articulation information system. Everything a student needed to know about the state’s research university system and its admission process was included in this publication. In addition to this document was Discover (institution name deleted for confidentiality).

**Discover Western University.** This document was a 24-page full color marketing publication that provided an overview of the Western University campus, including sections on: (a) academic strengths, (b) college system, (c-1) consist of an snapshot of each of the undergraduate colleges, (j) a place to call home, (k) housing and dining information, (l) costs and financial aid, (m) study abroad and college exchange programs, (n) campus recreation & athletics, (o) freshman requirements & eligibility, (p) transfer student requirements & eligibility, (q) majors, (r) fast facts, and (s) an overview of the local community. The document was in full color and presented a
striking look at this institution, its environment, strengths, and accomplishments. It was last edited and updated in 2011. This booklet also personalized its message through current student profiles and quotations about their experiences at WU.

*Discover* introduced Western University in terms of its national rankings, positive impact on the country, quality of faculty, recognition for being green and sustainability initiatives, and overall national prestige. Academics (academic support) was immediately emphasized and presented in terms of internationally renowned faculty, groundbreaking research, and a challenging learning environment. The uniqueness and benefits of the university’s college system, modeled after the Oxford/Cambridge University system, was also described as a significant institutional attribute. Following this introduction, each college was individually highlighted in terms of its academic and social environment and further described in terms of a current student’s personal experience with a quote (and their picture) describing their experience at the college and WU in order to offer a more personalized perspective. University programs and services, including housing, transfer student services, athletics, and costs/financial aid were also presented to illustrate the extensive resources and environmental support systems available. The final page invited students to contact the admission office for any questions they may have.

This document represented a quick but impressive overview of the WU campus environments for both freshmen and community college transfers with an emphasis on university prestige, its unique college system, and the personalized message from multiple students about their campus experience. Readers of this document should be left with a very positive opinion of WU and the rich resources and opportunities it offers. Transfer Advantage, an electronic document, is described next.
Transfer Advantage. This 4-page electronic document located on the institutions transfer student website briefly presented the advantages of attending WU. It presented a three-step process for admission, including: (a) admissions requirements, (b) preparation process for major, and (c) how to complete general education (GE) requirements, (d) articulation agreements, (e) prospective student programs on campus, (f) student support services, and (g) Western University rankings. This snapshot electronic document also presented quotes from a senior university official and current transfer students to add a personal touch to its message. This document was edited and updated annually.

Immediately, this electronic document presented the fact that over 90% of WU’s transfer students are from community colleges. These data demonstrated that community college students have a large peer group at WU contributing to a positive campus environment and large academic and social network for transfer students. Again, like the other publications, the prestige of the institution was highlighted through national rankings and impressive institutional accomplishments. Academically, it explained the three steps to success, including admissions, major preparation, and general education requirements. Current transfer students (with pictures and quotes) were presented to address the typical concerns a prospective transfer student may have. These quotes effectively addressed many of the apprehensions of prospective students and, thus, encouraged their consideration attendance at WU. The final page highlighted social support programs and services and invited the reader to contact/visit the campus. The next document was also only available via the website.
Transfer Student Guide. Providing a step-by-step guide for community college students to transfer to WU was the purpose of the Transfer Student Guide. This electronic document was 14 pages of specific information and numerous links to every university resource needed for a transfer student. Contents included: (a) application process, (b) admissions & enrollment, (c) planning course schedule, (d) welcome week, (e) tips for academic success, (f) around the campus, (g) academic enrichment opportunities, (h) graduation & beyond, and (l) student life. This comprehensive publication offered general information on every aspect of the campus with links to additional web pages with more in-depth information.

This very comprehensive and easy to navigate electronic document specifically for transfer students presented academic support, encouraging contact with professors, social support (including orientation and other transition programs), through step-by-step instructions and links to more detailed information about each of the key areas of transition. It also offered tips for academic success and a link to all of the important programs and support services available to transfers. It was an amazingly comprehensive explanation of the campus and its many academic and social support programs and services. This document in particular exemplified the comprehensive nature of the university communication provided to community college transfer students as expressed by the students and staff interviewed in this study. An additional important document was the IGETC guidelines.

Inter-segmental General-Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). According to Assist.org (1985a), “The Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum is a general education program that . . . Community College transfer students
can use to fulfill lower-division general education requirement” (para. 1). The IGETC is applicable at four of the six undergraduate colleges. The two remaining colleges have some additional requirements beyond IGETC. The general requirements included a subscribed number of units in each of the following categories: English Communication, Mathematical Concepts and Quantitative Reasoning, Arts and Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Physical and Biological Sciences, and Language other than English. This articulation agreement clearly outlined the university requirements for community college transfer. All recruitment and transfer related documents, as well as general university information, were available on the website.

This articulation agreement clearly outlined the course requirements for admission to WU. Course requirements were defined further at Assist.org.

ASSIST is an online student-transfer information system that shows how course credits earned at one public [name of state deleted for confidentiality] college or university can be applied when transferred to another. ASSIST is the official repository of articulation for [name of state deleted] public colleges and universities and provides the most accurate and up-to-date information about student transfer in [name of state deleted]. (Assist.org, 1985b, para. 1)

This web-based system identified the specific courses at each community college needed for a particular program of study at WU. Because Assist.org is the official repository of articulation for the state’s colleges and universities and, thus, provides the most accurate and up-to-date information available about student transfer in the state, it provided community college students with everything they needed to know about course transferability-articulation.
University transfer student services website. Western University’s transfer student website was a one-stop site with easy access to all information a prospective or current transfer student needed. It was comprehensive, easy to navigate, and provided relevant links to other campus related websites. The first page had a welcome and an immediate link to the Transfer Student Guide (described above), an electronic booklet with a comprehensive view of the university. Important links to other pages were identified on the upper left side of the webpage: (a) admission requirement, (b) application process, (c) application & admission timeline, (d) major preparation, and (e) transfer preparation programs. More links were listed on the right side, including: (a) transfer admission requirements, (b) transfer preparation programs, (c) IGETC, (d) ASSIST, (e) Guide for Transfer Students, (f) undergraduate research at WU, (g) Financial Aid Office, (h) scholarships, (i) residence for tuition purposes, (j) summer research scholarships, and (k) veterans’ programs and services. Additional campus and community information was also listed.

This website for community college transfer students was well organized, comprehensive, and easy to navigate, according to the students and staff interviewed in the study. It had everything a transfer student needed to know to be successful in their transition. This website was a powerful tool for students in search of information and answers 24 hours a day. It effectively outlined all of the steps needed in the matriculation process from a community college to WU, providing links to IGETC, TAG and Assist.org. Students were encouraged to utilize these academic support resources in concert with the academic advising offered by the colleges and academic departments. Meeting and interacting with faculty through programs such as Dine-With-a-Prof were
also presented. Financial aid, university transfer student housing, campus involvement opportunities, and other social support programs and services were also presented as a complement to a student’s holistic educational experience. All of these key academic and social support environments are important components of student transition and were effectively organized and presented on this website with links to additional and more in-depth information. This website represented a virtual one-stop-shop for everything a community college transfer student needed to know about the university.

All of these documents and websites represented an academic and social view of WU. Each one provided a view of the university through a different vantage point, with some being a snapshot of life on campus, while others provided a detailed description of everything the institution had to offer along with the steps necessary to apply, enroll, and succeed. The ease of accessibility to this information demonstrated the university’s commitment to community college transfer students and their successful transition to the institution. The themes presented in these documents focused on the academic and social environments at the institution. The university thus was presented as a top tier research university with an emphasis on rankings and accomplishments. Faculty were touted as world class with notable accomplishments. Social and co-curricular opportunities were also described to offer a more holistic educational experience. Student profiles were presented to add a personal touch to the documents and provided prospective students with more insight into the overall WU experience. It was interesting to note that although Western was described as a research university with many opportunities to participate in research opportunities with faculty. However, there were no descriptions of how this
research mission distinguished the university from the mission or culture of community colleges or other 4-year institutions other than the opportunity to conduct research.

**Summary**

This study considered two research questions:

1. What university environmental structures do community college students describe as significant to their successful transition to a research university?

2. What university environmental structures do university staff describe as significant to a successful community college transition experience?

The data collected from the community college students experiencing the transition in conjunction with the university staff that were facilitating the transition, in addition to the document review, presented multiple perspectives on the environmental structures involved in the transition process, including academic support, faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication.

Academic support environments could assist students to navigate through the academic environment of the institution, taking into consideration their previous academic preparation, the degree of course transferability, academic advising, and the academic expectations of the university. Faculty were central to the creation of an academic environment that framed their perceived approachability and level of engagement with students, their focus on research, and prestige as world class scholars. Social support environmental structures included student involvement in a variety of organizations, university programs and services, and living on campus in a transfer specific community. Orientation, a program designed to formally introduce new transfer students to the campus, influenced student transition through its format and structure.
Staff who designed and managed orientation confronted the challenges involved with meeting the multiple transitional needs of new transfer students. Preenrollment programs were the genesis of generating interest among community college students in considering WU as their choice to continue their educational journey. University communication considered web-based resources, campus publications (described under document analysis), and other forms of communication. All of these environments influenced the transition process of community college students to WU.

Chapter 5 discusses these findings and provides a conduit to the literature review in Chapter 2. The three research questions are answered along with recommendations for transfer student transition at WU.
CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the five sections: (a) a summary of the study, (b) findings, (c) conclusions, (d) implications, and (e) recommendations for future research. The summary includes an overview of the study with a review of the problem and type of data collected, the research questions, a brief review of the literature and how it informed the development of the research questions, as well as a description of the sample population.

Summary of Study

The majority of previous research regarding the transition process of a community college student to a university has focused primarily on academic indicators as the sole measurements of a successful transition. Although some progress in the transfer student transition process has been made, there continues to be a need to better understand the unique challenges faced by these students beyond academics, and the types of environmental structures needed to provide the necessary support for successful integration into the new institution.

A case study approach with a constructivist lens was utilized to investigate the environmental support needs of community college students as they transitioned into a research university. Through interviews, document analysis, and constant comparison, this research paradigm encouraged the emergence and interpretation of data that contributed to the construction of this case study. This study provided additional insight into the development of these needed environmental support systems and milieu management.
Twenty individual interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the community college to research university transition process. These interviews included 10 university staff who were intimately involved with transfer students and 10 community college transfer students who had just completed their first year-to-year and one quarter at WU. Staff consisted of four university academic advisors, one from a college and three from academic departments, an articulation specialist, a staff member from Admissions who specifically works with transfer students, three college staff, including a senior administrator and two college staff who work directly with transfer students, and a residential life staff member from the on-campus transfer student housing. The student interview participants represented a sample of community college transfer students attending WU during their third or fourth quarter of enrollment. Criteria used in selection of student participants included prior attendance at a community college, 18-24 years of age, enrolled as full-time students, both on- and off-campus students, and had completed at least two quarters at WU.

The literature review provided valuable insight into transfer student transition from multiple perspectives. Themes that emerged from this research informed the development of these research questions. In order to better understand how research university staff can assist in the environmental transition process of a community college student, this research specifically explored.

1. What university environmental structures do community college students describe as significant to their successful transition to a research university?
2. What university environmental structures do university staff describe as significant to a successful community college student transition experience?
Findings

In this study, I found that university environmental structures influenced the transition process of community college students to WU. Generally, both students and staff were in agreement about the challenges of transition and what environmental structures influenced the transition process of community college students to WU (Table 2). Six themes, representing university environmental structures, emerged from the data analysis. These environments included academic support, faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication. Each one of these environmental structures had an influence on the transition process of community college student to WU. The university provided academic support through academic advising and other academic support services. Students and staff both acknowledged the challenges of the semester to quarter transitions due to the higher academic expectations of a research university and the pace of the quarter system. Faculty framed the academic experience and were generally seen as unapproachable, making it more challenging for students to connect with this new academic environment. However, most students made little effort to engage with their professors or utilize faculty office hours. Social support programs and services were effective if utilized, but needed improvement to better address the unique needs and growing number of community college transfer students. Orientation contributed to a successful transition, but needed to more effectively address the multiple needs of a heterogeneous transfer population. Preenrollment programs offered an early introduction to the institution and familiarity to the new environment contributing to transition for those who participated. University communication consisted of a marketing publication and a website that served as a virtual transfer center,
Table 2
Structural Environments That Influence Transition—Student-Staff Comparison of Themes and Subthemes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Environments—Students</th>
<th>Structural Environments—Staff</th>
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<td><strong>ACADEMIC SUPPORT</strong></td>
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<td><em>Previous Academic Preparation</em></td>
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<td>Academic Rigor at Community College</td>
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<td>Articulation Agreement—IGETCI/TAG</td>
<td>Articulation Agreement—IGETCI/TAG</td>
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<td>Assist.org</td>
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<td>Advisor Accessibility and Virtual Advising</td>
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<td>Level of Service</td>
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<td>What a Student Wants/Needs</td>
<td>What a Student Wants/Needs</td>
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<td><strong>University Academic Expectations</strong></td>
<td><strong>University Academic Expectations</strong></td>
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<td>Pace of Quarter System</td>
<td>Pace of Quarter System</td>
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<td>Academic Environment and Rigor</td>
<td>Academic Environment and Rigor</td>
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<td><strong>FACULTY</strong></td>
<td><strong>FACULTY</strong></td>
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<td><em>Approachability and Class Size</em></td>
<td><em>Lack of Student Initiative</em></td>
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<td>Lack of Student Initiative</td>
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<td>Level of Engagement</td>
<td><em>Level of Engagement</em></td>
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<td>Dismissive and Research Oriented</td>
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<td>Engaging and Caring</td>
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<td><em>Caliber—World Class</em></td>
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<td>Ease of Involvement</td>
<td>Ease of Involvement</td>
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<td>Establishing Friendships</td>
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<td>Importance of Making Friends</td>
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Table 2 (continued)

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<th>Structural Environments—Students</th>
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<td>Challenges</td>
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<td><strong>PREENROLLMENT PROGRAMS</strong></td>
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<td><strong>UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
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<td><em>Web-Based Resources</em></td>
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<td>User-Friendly</td>
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<td>Comprehensive Information</td>
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<td>Current/Accessible Information</td>
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<td>Other Forms of Communication</td>
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providing a comprehensive source of transfer student information and university resources.

Table 2 provides a comparison of the themes and subthemes identified by students and staff. As this table illustrates, there were very few differences in the comparison of these subthemes.

This extensive alignment of subthemes is indicative of the agreement between students and staff concerning the environmental structures in place and their influence on community college student transition. Findings within each theme and subtheme are in the following sections. The first environmental structure is academic support and was central to the students’ transition.
**Academic Support**

Academic support included students’ previous academic preparation, course transferability, academic advising, and university academic expectations. Previous academic preparation consisted of the degree of academic rigor at the community college and the students’ ability to manage their time. Staff saw key differences in academic rigor due to the university’s higher expectations, especially in reference to critical analysis. Although some of the students believed they had rigorous coursework at their community college, they were unanimous in their view of WU’s higher academic expectations. Students noted the increased expectations in the classroom—increased reading requirements, more time devoted to studying, including staying up all night, and the much faster pace of the quarter system. Both staff and students expressed the need for better time management due to this more challenging academic environment. In addition to academic preparation, course transferability also influenced transition.

Western University’s articulation agreement, the Inter-segmental Transfer Core (IGETC) served as the cornerstone of course transferability. The IGETC defined the lower division general education (GE) requirements for the majority of undergraduate colleges at WU. This agreement in concert with the transfer guarantee program (TAG), providing community college students with an assurance that they would be accepted if they completed the outlined requirements prior to transferring. In addition to IGETC and TAG, Assist.org was also seen as a valuable course transferability resource. Students and staff valued the articulations agreement and its contribution to a smooth transition.

Assist.org is a web-based system designed to assist students with transfer course requirements. Assist.org offered an electronic student-transfer information system that
showed what course credits earned at a community college could be applied to WU (Assist.org, 1985b). All but one of the students interviewed found Assist to be very clear and helpful in identifying the courses needed at their community college to successfully transfer to WU. The single student who found it unhelpful had not yet selected a major, but found that the system actually helped him to determine his major. Less than half of the students commented on the guidance received from their community college regarding Assist.org. Interestingly, most students discovered Assist.org through family and friends, not their community college. Both students and staff commented on the important role Assist played in the student transition process. While Assist.org provided course transferability information via a web-based system, academic advising offered a more personal approach to transfer.

Academic advising consisted of student advising at both the community college and university. The issues involved with this service included advisor accessibility, level of service, and the type of advising a student wanted versus what they needed. There were significant differences in advisor accessibility and quality of advising between the community colleges and university. Advising at WU was seen as accessible both in person and through the virtual advising system, and where students had access to have basic questions addressed 24/7. Students also noted that some of the university advisors were proactive and went above and beyond their expectations. However, university advisors also discussed the challenge of providing students with the advising support they wanted versus what they needed. While some students wanted to be told which courses to take, the advisor wanted them to be more self-directed and make course selections based on major and career goals. A few of the students expressed concern about too
much staff emphasis on being self-directed with the development of their academic plan. In some instances, advisors referred students to their degree audit without providing the information or support needed for students to fully utilize this resource. Some students were in need of more personalized support from the advisor. This is an example of where students and staff were not in accord with the level of academic support needed.

While some had a good community college academic advising experience, most of the students interviewed found advising services at the community colleges as less accessible and unhelpful in comparison to the university. One student compared his community college advising with the service level of state’s Division of Motor Vehicles, a notoriously slow, frustrating, and inefficient system. Another student expressed her overall frustration with the quality of community college academic advising. Her decision to not utilize these services was indicative of the continuous long lines and appointment delays. Western University staff also perceived that many community college students seemed to be underadvised, but the reasons for this deficiency were unclear. Was it due to a lack of up-to-date information about course transferability, inadequate resources, students not asking the right questions, students not utilizing advising services, or just ineffective advising? In addition to employing academic advising services to navigate the institutional academic environment, students had to adjust to university academic expectations.

Academic expectations were informed by the pace of the quarter system, the significantly different university academic environment, and the rigor associated with a research university. A common perspective of all interviewed students was their limited understanding of the change from a semester to quarter system until experiencing it.
They knew it would be a challenge, but were not expecting the difference to be so significant. Staff echoed the perspective that students had difficulty adjusting to the pace of the university. Students also noted the increased academic rigor was not only due to higher level course expectations, but also because of the accelerated pace of the quarter system. There was a substantial increase in the amount of reading, and grading was on a curve, contributing to a more competitive and stressful academic atmosphere while discouraging student collaboration. The increased level of critical thinking and analysis of course material was also seen as a research university expectation. Students and staff were in general agreement about the significant differences in academic expectations between a community college and a research university. The university was more demanding academically and faculty were instrumental in framing this academic environment.

**Faculty**

Faculty were central to the student academic experience at WU and influenced the university environment through their approachability and class size, level of engagement with students, and perceived stature as world class scholars. While community college faculty were seen as nurturing, accessible, and focused on teaching, university faculty were viewed as distant and more focused on research. While many students saw university faculty as unapproachable due to their stature and larger class size, students made little to no effort to approach faculty or avail themselves for faculty office hours. Many of these students regretted not having more interaction with faculty during their first year. Staff also commented on the need for students to be proactive regarding engagement opportunities with professors. According to students, most professors were
distant and disinterested in engaging with undergraduates. However, a few students noted faculty standouts recognized for their high level of engagement in the classroom and their genuine care for students. Although students and staff noted the importance of engaging with faculty, students struggled with how best to approach their professors. While faculty framed the overall academic environment, social support systems helped to create a more holistic experience for students.

Social Support

Social support structures included campus involvement, university programs and services, transfer housing, and peers. Each of these subthemes contributed to the social environment of WU. Involvement opportunities consisted of student organizations, campus events and activities, and other experiences that connected students to the institution. Every student shared how important these involvement opportunities were to their satisfaction, success, and transition. They noted that living on campus provided an ease to becoming involved due to proximity. While university emails and other forms of university communication provided information about various programs and events that encouraged student involvement, a few of the students still found it challenging to identify involvement opportunities. The off-campus students commented on initial involvement challenges due to already established student aggregates primarily composed of native students, but explained how persistence provided them with eventual inclusion and a stronger connection to WU. Establishing friends was an important outcome of higher levels of involvement. Without friends, transition would be much more challenging. Both students and staff saw the importance of involvement and balancing academics with a co-curricular experience. They were uniform in their belief that a
holistic education provided a more satisfying student experience and greatly enhanced transition.

Multiple programs and services were currently available to assist community college transfer students. However, staff expressed the need to enhance this support due to the increasing number of community college transfer students at WU and the distinctive needs of this population. One staff encapsulated the needs of transfer students by stating they do not need their hand held; they need to be aware of the resources available to them. Students commented that they appreciated the services available when used, but also shared that some of them were distracted from utilizing these services due to their focus on adjusting to the new campus academic environment or because of a general lack of awareness. Some students also alluded to needing multiple communications about available support services in order to be reminded. The university needed to provide ongoing communication to this population to ensure they were aware of the support programs and services available. On-campus housing provided another social support structure.

On-campus housing for transfer students has been a recent addition to WU and has enhanced students’ acclimation, involvement, and connection to the institution. Every one of the staff and students interviewed expressed how this new on-campus housing was creating a stronger transfer student community and a greater ease for these students to become involved. Living on campus also allowed these students to focus more on their university experience instead of dealing with transportation issues and other matters off-campus students needed to manage. The seasoned Admissions staff member also expressed the impact transfer housing has had on generating more transfer student
interest in WU. This new housing has symbolized the university’s commitment to this population and has facilitated a stronger sense of community among these students. In addition to on-campus housing, peers offered additional support to community college transfers.

Peers was the final subcategory within social support and included formal peer support programs as well as informal peer interaction—making friends. University staff commented on the significance of peer interaction, especially with peer support programs. Student-to-student mentoring was seen as an effective supplement to staff resources. Students also wanted to hear from other students, and, in many cases, those peer influences were more effective than student-to-staff interactions. The orientation leader program was seen as a good example of an effective peer program by both students and staff. However, some staff expressed challenges associated with recruiting enough transfer students to serve in this peer support role. Challenges with maintaining and establishing these types of peer programs included the lack of university resources and the busy schedules of transfer students. Informal peer interaction, or making friends, was also seen as an essential component of a successful and satisfying transition. The plethora of university programs, activities, and student organizations offered students with many opportunities for peer interaction and developing friendships. While many of these activities assisted students to connect to the new institution, the largest university program for transfer student transition was orientation.

**Orientation**

Orientation provided transfer students with a better understanding of WU’s expectations and the information needed to navigate this new environment. How the
university addressed the needs of these students through this program influenced their transition to the institution. The format and structure of orientation, orientation leaders, and the challenges of addressing transfer student needs, were components of this structural environment.

Western University’s orientation has evolved over the years into a hybrid program. This program consisted of: (a) a virtual introduction to the college and university with an electronic and web-based academic advising and course registration process, and (b) an on-campus program with a formal introduction to the college and overview of academic expectations, university support services and co-curricular opportunities. Orientation leaders also played a strong role within orientation by facilitating a more intimate and interactive environment. Students enjoyed the opportunity to interact in small peer groups and appreciated interacting with a more experienced student peer facilitator (orientation leader), especially if they were a fellow transfer student. There were also challenges with orientation. Although the university attempted to provide transfer students with a comprehensive program in an abridged version of freshman orientation, the feedback from transfers has been mixed. Some have appreciated this condensed format due to their previous experience as a college student, while others felt like they were being short-changed. While students expressed the need for a more engaging program, staff struggled with the development of transfer orientation due to the mixed messages from transfer students as to what they wanted and needed, the priority of freshmen orientation, and the lack of university resources. The desire to enhance orientation at WU was seen as an ongoing process by both students and staff.
And, while orientation was a front-line transition program for new students, preenrollment programs served as the primary introduction to WU.

**Preenrollment Programs**

Preenrollment programs offered prospective students with an introduction to WU. These programs were designed to provide an overview of the campus, including academic requirements and the overall university experience. Providing a sense of familiarity with the institution could eventually influence transition if students were accepted and choose to enroll. If students were familiar with their environment they tended to feel more comfortable, and therefore, this familiarity contributed to their transition.

Although multiple programs were offered both virtually and in-person, campus tours and Transfer Admit Day were the two programs that seemed to have had the most significant influence on students. Other preenrollment programs tended to be tailored more toward specific subpopulations and involved fewer students. Tours were offered year-round and introduced students and parents to the institution. Transfer Admit Day was the single largest transfer preenrollment program that offered the most comprehensive overview of WU. Many community college students attended this program to help decide whether or not they would accept admission. Some staff wanted to see improvement with Transfer Admit Day, especially in comparison to the much larger production of Freshmen Admit Day. Both students and staff acknowledged the impact of these programs on student transition. These preenrollment programs served as both virtual and personal introductions to WU, while university communication provided a printed, electronic, and web-based presentation of the institution.
University Communication

University communication consisted of web-based resources, printed publications, and other forms of communication. Today’s technically savvy students expected easy access to information around-the-clock. Western University’s website was designed to provide easy access to information about the university and the application, admissions, and transition process for community college students 24/7. Staff described university communication as comprehensive and informative, while most of the students described the university transfer student website as accessible and comprehensive with the information it provided to transfer students. One student was unaware that there was a main transfer student services website. This suggested that the university may want to focus more on promoting a single webpage for all transfer students to initiate their virtual contact with the university. This site described all steps needed for a successful transition and provided links to other important resources, and although a few students initially struggled with website navigation, they adjusted quickly to fully utilize this resource. Transfer student publications were also available in print or electronically on the university transfer website. Students and staff both agreed that the university website served as a valuable virtual transfer center. Other university communication included email correspondence and electronic newsletters to keep newly admitted students up-to-date on important information during their transition.

Conclusions

Community college transfer students and staff recognized both the challenges and successes associated with transition to WU and the influence the institutional milieu had on transition. In order to better navigate the academic environment, students needed to
enhance time management skills and utilize university academic advising services. The transfer guarantee program (TAB), IGETC, and Assist.org were effective articulation resources for course transferability and were seen as effective advising supplements, especially since many community college academic advising services were seen as deficient. Faculty were central to the university academic environment, but the large class sizes contributed to their general lack of engagement with students. Thus, faculty needed to consider strategies for increased student engagement both inside and outside of the classroom. Students also need to be more proactive in their approach to faculty and take some responsibility to initiate engagement with their professors. Staff saw a need for more robust programs and support services for transfer students, including a more comprehensive and engaging approach to transfer orientation. While improvements to the social environment were seen as important, the relatively new transfer-specific housing was viewed as a significant step toward an enhanced campus experience for this population due to its influence on student involvement and its contribution to building a stronger sense of community among transfers. More peer-to-peer support programs were also desired. Students appreciated learning from their peers and frequently listened to peers more than staff. This peer interaction was particularly seen as important by the students in orientation. And, developing friendships, the essence of peer interaction, was seen as essential for satisfaction, success, and transition. While preenrollment programs contributed to student familiarity with the campus, especially campus tours and Transfer Admit Day, some staff saw a disparity between the larger production of Freshman Admit Day in comparison to the transfer student program equivalent and sought enhancements for this program. University communication was seen as a comprehensive virtual transfer
center, but some transfer students were initially challenged to connect to the appropriate websites and required better direction. The mission and environment of a research university could also have been better articulated to encourage students to consider their “fit” with the new institution. Many students do not fully understand and appreciate the differences in a research and nonresearch focused 4-year institution. Although WU has some environmental structures that need improvement, many of their current programs and support systems are effective and contribute to community college transfer student transition and success.

In the following section, I will answer the research questions of this study and draw conclusions while providing a reference to my literature review. I will also utilize my 30 years of professional experience in higher education to supplement this discussion. The first question considers student perspectives.

Environmental Structures—Students

Based on the responses from the student participants, the following research question was addressed. *What university environmental structures do community college students describe as significant to their successful transition to a research university?*

Students found a number of environments significant to their successful transition to WU, including academic support, faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication. The first of these structures was academic support.

**Academic support.** Multiple factors contributed to the structural environment of academic support. These factors included the need for better time management due to the more rigorous academic environment of the university, the utilization of IGETC, TAG, and Assist.org for assistance with course transferability, the quality and accessibility of
academic advising, and the challenges associated with moving from a semester to quarter academic calendar due to the accelerated pace of this new system.

Students expressed the need for strong time management skills. The rigor of the university in comparison to community colleges underscored the importance of being disciplined with the use of time. University students were expected to manage a larger course work load with more demanding academic expectations. This was illustrated through the greater reading requirements, the increased level of critical thinking and analysis, and more time needed for studying. Grading on a curve also contributed to the rigor by creating a more competitive academic environment and, thus, a feeling that whoever put the most time into their studies would receive the highest grade. Davies and Casey (1999), Laanan (1995), Rhine et al. (2000), Townsend (1995), and Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that the significant cultural differences between these institutions contributed to the challenges of the community college student transition to the university. Also contributing to this transition was transfer shock, a decline in their first quarter grade point average of new transfer students. According to Hill (1965), with subsequent supporting research by Cejda (1994, 1997) and Glass and Harrington (2002), this phenomenon contributed to the challenges of transition and may be influenced by inadequate time management skills. It was apparent that community college students did not have a clear enough understanding of the differences in academic rigor and expectations between their community college and a research university causing challenges with their time management. Although managing time was a challenge, the university articulation agreement framed through IGETC, TAG, and Assist.org was considered an effective transition support system.
The IGETC and TAG are components of the university’s articulation agreement to assist community college students with their transition to the university. The IGETC is the Inter-segmental Transfer Core and defines community college courses that meet WU’s lower-division general education (GE) requirements for most of the undergraduate colleges. The Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) program offers guaranteed admission to WU for students who complete a core set of courses at one of the state’s community college one full term prior to transferring. Assist.org is a web-based articulation support service that allows students to identify the courses that are required for transfer. Students appreciated the smooth transition provided by the articulation agreement—TAG and IGETC. They also found that Assist.org was very helpful due to its comprehensive data and user-friendly system. Articulation was the cornerstone of course transferability and Assist.org provided students with the most up-to-date information about which community college courses will transfer to the (state name deleted) 4-year institution of their choice. It was interesting to note that less than half of the students interviewed initially learned about Assist.org through their community college. The remaining students heard about it through family, friends, and acquaintances.

Articulation agreements need to be in place and clearly defined, and Assist.org provided this course requirement information in an easy to understand and accessible system in order to enhance course transferability. According to the literature, it was important for articulation agreements to be in place and clearly defined (Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1998; Handel, 2007; McGowan & Gawley, 2006). The IGETC, TAG,
and Assist.org provided this course requirement information in an easy to understand and accessible system to enhance course transferability to WU.

Exposing students to more information about course transferability through Assist.org offered them an effective tool to manage their transition plan and provided them with more confidence about community college course transferability. Assist should be highly visible to all first year community college students who may be considering transfer to a university. It is a powerful and comprehensive transfer student transition tool. It appeared that Assist.org was not adequately promoted at many of the community colleges. In addition to articulation, academic advising was seen as an important support service for students in transition.

Students saw a distinct difference in the quality and accessibility of academic advising services between community colleges and the university. Most transfer students found academic advising services at the university as effective, while most viewed academic advising at the community colleges as deficient. In general, community college advising was seen as less effective than the university. Academic advising was in most cases inaccessible due to long lines, appointment delays, and minimal time to meet with an advisor. A majority of the students expressed dissatisfaction with this community college service. There appeared to be an inefficient scheduling system for student appointments and an underutilization of technology to support this process. University services at WU were generally seen as accessible and of high quality. Students could:

(a) schedule one-on-one meetings with an advisor for more comprehensive discussion,
(b) walk-in for an appointment on designated days/times for less complex issues and questions, and (c) utilize the services of virtual advising, a 24/7 web-based service, for
quick questions. Most advisors spent quality time with students, provided helpful information and appropriate referrals, and in some cases went above and beyond student expectations due to their pro-active support and service. Advisor accessibility through a variety of modalities, including one-on-one appointments, walk-in advising, and the 24/7 virtual advising, was the hallmark of the university’s advising services. Advisors were perceived as knowledgeable and service oriented, and in some cases seen as exceeding expectations through proactive recommendations. Students appreciated this extra effort. But, advisors also needed to continue to challenge the students to be self-directed and find their own answers. Students should be encouraged to manage their own educational journey, using the advisor as a guide. The student is the driver, while the advisor provides navigational tips and the rules of the road. Some students reacted negatively to this focus on students being self-directed, especially due to their unfamiliarity with the expectations of a research institution. Some students wanted more assistance, where the advisors wanted students to take more initiative to find their own answers.

The literature found that effective academic advising could greatly assist students who were moving between disparate academic environments. However, it also found that, in general, community colleges were not effective with this service (Davies & Casey, 1998; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1995; Townsend, 1995). Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that, while students were not receiving academic advising help from their community college, some of them were not asking for it; they also found that “some transfer students may need more of a hand hold for their initial weeks” (p. 15) at the university. Flaga (2002, 2006) found that academic advising would improve if 2-year and 4-year institutions coordinated efforts, including university sponsored information
sessions for community college academic advisors to keep them abreast of academic requirements. She also noted the importance of developing a culture of open communication between the two types of institutions to encourage community college advisors to contact university advisors “for specific information when working with students” (Flaga, 2006, p. 10). In addition to using advising services, students were challenged to navigate the pace of the university.

The pace of the university quarter system also challenged student transition, and although this was a struggle for students who were unprepared for this change, it was also a challenge for those who had anticipated and prepared for this faster pace. Students did not truly understand the rigor of the university quarter system until experiencing it first-hand. The accelerated pace in conjunction with higher academic expectations contributed to this challenge. According to the literature, the varied missions, cultures, and academic expectations of these disparate institutions contributed to the challenges of transition (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Davies & Casey, 1999; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1995; Rhine et al., 2000; Townsend & Wilson, 2006), but the accelerated pace of the quarter system also contributed to this transition challenge (Laanan, 1995). As was discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, community colleges have multiple missions, including vocational education, developmental education, continuing education, and general education to prepare students for transfer to a 4-year institution. These 2-year colleges also have open admission and a focus on teaching, while a research university has selective admissions, significantly higher fees, larger classes, a focus on research, and higher academic expectations. The significant cultural and environmental difference between these institutions adds to the challenges of transition.
Unless the university changed from a quarter to a semester system, this pace would continue to be a challenge for transfer student transition. Even if this change occurred, there would still be significant challenges with the increased academic expectations and rigor of a research institution. Providing more opportunities for students to enhance time management skills at the community colleges and at the university may assist with this transition. Students also needed to be reminded of the academic advising services that are available to them. Perhaps the virtual advisor could offer a time management tutorial. However, as the interviewed students indicated, there was no substitution for experiencing this phenomenon. They needed to experience it first-hand for true understanding. While the pace of the quarter system posed a challenge to academic transition, faculty framed the overall student academic experience.

Faculty. Faculty were central to creating the academic environment of WU due to the combination of their credentials and prestige, high academic expectations, and students’ perception of them being distant, nonengaging, and more focused on research than teaching. Their counterparts at the community colleges were considered to be highly engaged with their students and focused on teaching. This perception of students’ inability to approach faculty at the university was also influenced by the sheer size of the courses. With classes as large as 300 and limited faculty engagement in the classroom, students felt intimidated to approach them. However, while many students avoided faculty in the classroom, they also made little to no effort to engage with them outside of class or utilize faculty office hours, contributing to the distance between students and their professors. According to the literature, faculty interaction with students both inside and outside of the classroom significantly influenced student satisfaction and persistence.
(Astin, 1984, 1993; Flaga, 2006; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2007). Therefore, strategies to enhance this interaction are imperative.

It is clear that students were frustrated with faculty emphasis on research instead of teaching. It is also important to realize that WU is a research university where faculty are expected to generate new knowledge through research. This research focus is an institutional priority, whereas it is not part of the community college mission. However, it should also be noted that WU does little to differentiate its mission as a research university in comparison to other 4-year institutions on its website, or within its marketing and recruitment publications. Such an explanation through university communication systems should result in transfer students having a clearer understanding of this faculty research environment. According to Townsend and Wilson (2006), the university needed to better articulate the mission of a research university. Western University provides a limited explanation of what distinguishes a research university from other educational institutions and could clarify this communication in an effort to inform community college student expectations and, thus, transition. In addition to the academic environment, social support systems were also seen as important for transition.

**Social support.** Significant findings within this structural environment included the importance of involvement, university programs and services, transfer housing, and peers. Students recognized the importance of involvement and its contribution to a holistic education—learning both inside and outside of the classroom. The complement of a co-curricular experience through a variety of campus involvement opportunities, including student organizations, programs and activities, provided students with important leadership and life skills in addition to what they learned in the classroom.
Astin (1975, 1984, 1985) has conducted numerous studies supporting the importance of involvement on student satisfaction, persistence, and success. Involvement opportunities also facilitated student interaction and promoted the development of friendships, while contributing to the co-curricular experience. Astin (1993) also found that peers had the most significant impact on the undergraduate development of a student. Thus, opportunities for peer interaction served as environmental structures to enhance transition; WU provided significant opportunities for this type of peer interaction.

On-campus transfer housing has had a significant impact on transfer student involvement and sense of community. Students found it easier to become involved due to their proximity to involvement opportunities and the encouragement offered by their peers. They also felt a sense of community at the transfer student housing complex due to its composition of transfer students. Sharing the common experience of being community college transfer students living together, while facing the challenges of transition, created a sense of community for this population. This shared experience significantly influenced their transition. According to Astin (1984, 1993), Flaga (2006), Hockey (2009b), and Moos (1979), on-campus housing encouraged students to become more involved, enhanced satisfaction, and assisted them with their transition to the new institution. This recent addition of transfer housing at WU has significantly influenced the transfer student experience and reinforced the perspective offered by the literature. On-campus housing also provided more opportunities for a holistic university experience. Orientation also served as an important social support program and time for peer interaction.
Orientation. Students appreciated a formal welcome to their new institution and an introduction to the academic expectations and social support resources. They also wanted a program designed specifically for transfer students. However, there were challenges associated with this program due to its format and structure. A conundrum existed due to the conflicting orientation needs expressed by the heterogeneous aggregate of community college transfer students. Some students wanted an abridged version of freshman orientations because they were older and had already experienced college, while others wanted a more comprehensive program similar to what was offered to the freshmen. Students were uniform in their desire for more interaction, especially with each other and in small groups with an orientation leader. Unfortunately, one of the unintended consequences of a shortened program was a less engaging format. According to McGowan and Gawley (2006), Cuseo (2000), Flaga (2002, 2006), Hockey (2009a, 2009b), Townsend (2008), and Townsend and Wilson (2006), community college transfer students have unique needs that require an orientation program designed especially for them, including small group interaction and the opportunity for social networking. Adding to the challenges of transfer orientation was not fully utilizing transfer students as orientation leaders. Students serving as orientation leaders who came to WU as freshmen had a different campus experience, and therefore, could not relate as well to a community college transfer. Some university staff expressed frustration in their inability to attract transfer students and the impact of using native students as “peer” mentors. Townsend (2008) also found that, although transfer students did not want to be treated like freshmen, they wanted a program with some elements of freshman orientation, including a multiple-day program and interaction with current transfer students to hear about their

Although WU has struggled with finding the ideal format and structure for transfer orientation, regular assessments have continued to inform the ongoing development of this program and the components needed to meet the transition needs of community college transfer students. Progress is being made, but more work needs to be done with innovative approaches, peer involvement, and acquisition of additional university resources. In addition to orientation, preenrollment programs offer the initial introduction to WU.

**Preenrollment programs.** The University’s campus tours and Transfer Admit Day provided a sense of familiarity with the institution. Campus tours were available year-round and offered an overview of the campus and a walking tour led by a trained student guide. This program was designed to present a brief overview of university life and a sense of the campus environment. Transfer Admit Day served as WU’s premier preenrollment program for all newly admitted transfer students. For those students who attended, it was a positive experience and exposed them to a more comprehensive introduction to the university and an opportunity to ask questions of key staff. Through participation in this in-person overview of the campus, community college transfer students gained the information needed to make an informed decision about whether or not to accept admission. Unfortunately, many community college transfer students do not attend this program. Davies and Casey (1998) found that visiting the university campus
provided extremely helpful information and added to the smooth transfer transition.

Flaga (2002, 2006) also found that familiarity with the campus assisted with transition. Preenrollment programs contributed to students utilizing the university website and other forms of communication. Western University needs to consider how to broaden participation in this type of preenrollment program. Creating this sense of familiarity with the institution appears to be the best way to attract and connect with potential students. This increased university connection would then contribute more to the student transition process. While preenrollment programs offer multiple ways to experience the institution, university communication offered 24/7 access to important community college transfer student information.

**University communication.** University communication included web-based resources, marketing publications, the articulation agreement, and other forms of communication. This communication environment provided students with important information about the university, including the transfer student transition process, in addition to other resources and support services. Western University has a comprehensive and user-friendly community college transfer student website. This site is a virtual transfer student center for the information needed by community college transfer students from the time they are considering WU, during the transfer process, and as they continue their transition while attending the new institution. The literature consistently discussed the need for a centralized source of transfer information. Having a university hub with easy accessibility to all transfer related information assisted students with their adjustment to the campus with minimal difficulty (Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1999;
McGowan & Gawley, 2006). Hockey (2009b) also reinforced that this one-stop center for transfer students could be virtual in lieu of a campus facility or department.

The only thing noticeably missing from the institution’s communication was the unique role of a research university in comparison to other institutions of higher education in the state. This clarification would provide students with a greater understanding of the university academic environment. Townsend and Wilson (2006) expressed the need for this research priority to be clearly articulated by the institution. In addition to the student perspective of influential environmental support structures, staff offered their point of view.

**Environmental Structures—Staff**

The following research question was addressed based on responses from staff.

*What university environmental structures do university staff describe as significant to a successful community college student transition experience?* Staff found a number of environments significant to successful community college student transition to WU, including academic support, faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication. The first of these structures was academic support.

**Academic support.** Staff found a number of environments significant to students’ successful transition to WU, including strong time management skills, a clear and comprehensive articulation agreement (IGETC, TAG, and Assist.org), academic advising, and the pace of the quarter system. The first of these structures was academic expectations and the implications of time management and the pace of the quarter system.

Staff understood the differences in academic expectations of these two disparate institutions as contributing to the challenges of transition. Students were expected to
think and analyze more critically and handle a larger volume of work in a shorter period of time at the university. Although time management was seen as critical to this transition, the pace of the quarter system exacerbated this challenge. Institutional differences in mission and culture were fundamental factors contributing to the challenges of transition from a community college to a research university according to the literature (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Davies & Casey, 1999; Handel, 2007; Laanan, 1995; Townsend, 1995; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Additional support programs and services provided by both the community colleges and university directed at preparing students for these institutional differences could assist with transition. While contrasting institutional environments contributed to the challenges of this conduit, a comprehensive articulation agreement contributed to transition.

Staff were in concert with students regarding the many university academic support environments that were significant to transition, course transferability, academic advising, and university academic expectations. Course transferability was also seen through the combined university support systems of IGETC, TAG, and Assist.org. While students focused on the actual articulation web-based support provided by Assist.org, the state’s articulation agreement repository, they appreciated the smooth transition provided by the university’s articulation agreement—IGETC and TAG. Staff viewed course transferability primarily from the vantage point of the requirements outlined in IGETC and guaranteed admission (TAG) if students followed the appropriate requirements. However, they also noted the importance of students utilizing Assist.org to navigate the specifics of course transferability. All of these articulation support components provided students with the benefit of knowing what was required for transfer. Offering a
comprehensive transfer student guaranteed admission agreement based on the completion of prescribed requirements provided students with a more seamless transition (Cuseo, 2000; Davies & Casey, 1998; Handel, 2007; McGowan & Gawley, 2006). This comprehensive articulation agreement outlined in IGETC and TAG with the web-based application of Assist.org, were strong contributing factors to student course transferability and transition. This coordinated effort among all public institutions of higher education in the state provided students with clear information of the courses needed to transfer. In addition to the influence of a strong articulation agreement, academic advising offered a more personal approach to transition.

Academic advising was seen as significant to transition. This service provided students with the information needed to successfully transfer and navigate the new academic environment. Most of the transfer students found that advising provided by the university was superior to this service offered at community colleges. However, staff were more discrete in their interpretation of the potential reasons for this disparity. Among the possibilities were: (a) a lack of academic advising resources at community colleges in terms of staff and technology support services for more virtual advising, (b) the ability to keep current with transfer requirement for multiple 4-year institutions, (c) the lack of advisor training, (d) students not asking the right questions, (e) students not meeting with a community college academic advisor, or (f) poor advising. Davies and Casey (1998) echoed the problems with community college academic advising, but were more direct in their negative critique of this service and the general lack of effective advising in community colleges. Handel (2007) discussed the importance of training opportunities for these advisors. Ironically, community college advisors in this state are
offered the opportunity to attend an information and training conference sponsored by the state’s research university. Although it appears that most community colleges need to provide greater accessibility to advising and a higher quality of service, it was unclear if most 2-year colleges had the resources to provide sufficient advising services and advisor accessibility or if they were just inefficient and/or ineffective with providing this service.

University academic advising staff were also adamant about the need for students to be more self-directed with their academic journey. Some students expected to be told what courses to take, while advisors viewed their role as providing students with academic options and allowing them to make course selections based on their major, academic, and career goals. This particular dilemma was not evident in the literature and could be a unique situation at WU or an underresearched issue that is a reflection of this millennium generation, an aggregate that tends to need more direction and structure.

**Faculty.** Staff had limited commentary regarding the influence of faculty. They discussed the higher academic expectations of university faculty, the priority of research and graduate student education at a research institution, and acknowledged that undergraduates should take some initiative to engage with faculty. Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that community college students did not fully understand the research priority indicative of a research university. Cohen and Brawer (2008) discussed the unique mission of a university in comparison to the broad priorities of community colleges, while Merrow (2007) reiterated the fact that university faculty put a premium on research. It would seem that WU could better articulate its unique role with research and how that priority influences the university environment and students’ academic
experience. While faculty defined the academic environment, social support programs and services frame this important environmental structure.

**Social support.** Significant findings for staff regarding social support included student involvement, university programs and services, transfer housing, and peer programs. All of these social support components influenced students’ transition to the institution. Involvement is the first of these to be discussed. Staff found that students who became involved on campus outside of the classroom were more satisfied and had an easier transition to WU than students who just went to class. Involvement provided students with the opportunity to better connect to the institution and to their peers. Astin’s (1984) Involvement Theory was central to supporting the notion that student involvement contributed to student satisfaction, persistence, and success, and therefore, transition. In addition to involvement, providing students with needed programs and support services also contributed to transition.

Staff confirmed that transfer student support services were available, but not as robust as they should be, especially since transfer student enrollment numbers have continued to increase at the university. These growing numbers have been creating a greater necessity for enhanced services to support this population. The opinion that transfer student support programs and services needed to be enriched was unanimous among staff. Flaga (2006), Hockey (2009b), Laanan (2001), Townsend (2008), and Townsend and Wilson (2006) all emphasized the importance of university programs and services designed to support transfer students and their transition to the university.

Western University currently has a broad array of support services for its community college transfer students. However, the need for these programs continues to
increase due to the increasing enrollment of transfer students. This population is expected to reach 50% of the student body within the next few years. Boosting services for this growing population must become an institutional priority. One staff member believed that the university was disconnected in their approach to assisting transfer students and should better coordinate support and services for this population. Another staff member believed that a comprehensive transfer student assessment should be conducted to better identify community college transfer student needs. All staff wanted more to be done. In addition to university programs for transfers, transfer housing had added a new dimension to the university.

Another uniform opinion among staff was the positive impact of transfer student housing. This on-campus living experience provided transfer students with the opportunity to become involved more easily and to establish a stronger connection to the university. By having transfer specific housing on campus, WU was sending a strong symbolic message to community college transfer students about their institutional priority. As a result of this housing, transfer student applications have increased. Again, Astin (1984, 1993), Flaga (2006), Hockey (2009b), and Moos (1979), all found that living on campus enhanced the transfer student experience and, thus, transition. The second phase of this housing opened recently and has further contributed to the community college transfer student experience at WU. While transfer housing brings transfer peers together and creates a stronger transfer community, campus peer support programs can provide additional support for these students.

Staff saw peer programs as an opportunity to better connect with transfer students and to supplement the support services provided by staff. In many cases,
student-to-student interaction can be more powerful and effective than student meeting with staff. Peers can also provide additional support to transfer students through peer advisor programs within campus departments for services that otherwise might not be available due to limited staffing. A few staff noted that the more people that can touch a new student, the better the connection they will have with the university, and that staff alone cannot touch them all. This sentiment expressed by staff emphasized the need for peer programs. However, limited university resources and the lack of transfer student participation was hampering the development and maintenance of these programs. Astin (1984, 1993) found that peers had the most significant impact on the undergraduate development of a student. Students appreciated hearing from their peers. Peers had first-hand knowledge of what these new transfers were experiencing. Therefore, peer support programs were an important component of the transition experience. Perhaps the recent addition of transfer housing will contribute to higher levels of participation in these peer support programs due to their proximity. The use of peers within orientation can also influence transfer student transition.

Orientation. Staff perceptions about the orientation program were virtually identical to the feedback offered by students. Staff were struggling to frame and manage a transfer orientation program that could meet the mixed needs expressed by a heterogeneous group of transfer students. Although the students appreciated the orientation program in general, many of them were frustrated with its structure and format. Some wanted a program that was concise, while others wanted a more extensive program similar to the native students. Contributing to this challenge was the priority attributed to freshman orientation and the limited university resources available for the

Western University continues to explore the ideal format. Yearly assessments inform the design and offer insight into the orientation needs of transfer students. This analysis needs to continue in order to develop a more effective program and a stronger effort to recruit transfer students to serve as orientation leaders needs to be pursued.

Orientation served as the main program for student transition, while preenrollment programs offered an initial introduction to the university.

**Preenrollment programs.** Staff provided the most discussion regarding the influence of preenrollment programs. While many of these programs were successful, the two of particular importance were campus tours and Transfer Admit Day, the largest and most popular programs designed for transfer students. Both of these preenrollment programs brought community college students to the WU campus and provided an overview of the academic requirements and the co-curricular environment. Campus tours were offered throughout the year and provided a more limited campus overview, while Transfer Admit Day was more comprehensive in nature. This day started with a welcome from the chancellor, followed by an overview of the colleges and the opportunity to visit academic departments, campus support services, and co-curricular programs. Students and their parents could tour the campus and gain a better feel for the WU experience. Final questions could be answered to determine if this university would be a good fit. Flaga (2002, 2006) found that programs that developed familiarity with the new
institution contributed to student transition. Hockey (2009b), McGowan and Gawley (2006), and Cuseo (2000) found that universities can also develop intentional plans to identify needs of transfer students and provide the appropriate support services for this population. These plans could include a designated university staff member to coordinate programs and services specifically designed for transfer students (Cuseo, 2000; Hockey, 2009b; McGowan & Gawley, 2006). The transfer specialist in the Admissions office serves as this designated staff member and is intimately involved with the development and implementation of these preenrollment programs. Western University also has an effective Transfer Admit Day program for community college transfer students. However, this program is lean in comparison to the admit day programs offered to freshmen. If transfer students had a similar experience, they may be more inclined to attend WU and have a greater understanding of its resources, programs, and services, and, thus, have a better transition. University communication supplemented the on-campus experience provided by many of the preenrollment programs.

**University communication.** Staff were in tandem with the students regarding the most significant communication environmental structures. Staff and students agreed that the university website was comprehensive and informative. However, students were mixed on the navigability. While most found it user-friendly, a few found it initially challenging, but then quickly acclimated. University publications as described in the document analysis were also helpful and available via the website. Although the literature had limited information about the influence of websites on transition, Townsend and Wilson (2006) found that the university website was instrumental in creating a more
seamless transfer process. This electronic communication detailed the resources of the university and the steps needed for a successful transition.

**Theoretical Context**

This study was framed in environmental and transition theory with a constructivist lens. Environmental theory posed by Lewin (1936), Astin (1991), and Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the influence environments had on the person. Strange and Banning further defined types of environments as physical, aggregate, organizational, and constructed. A physical environment could be transfer student housing or a large classroom. An aggregate includes an orientation group, a student organization, or faculty. An organizational environment could be an academic advising department, an orientation program, or a website. A constructed environment could include the academic rigor/reputation of a university or the transfer community feeling created by on-campus transfer-specific housing. In this study, all of these were considered to be structural environments or support systems as identified by transition theory.

Transition theory, according to Goodman et al. (2006) also encompassed the environment, with particular reference to the theory’s Coping Resources Four S System—situation, self, support, and strategies reviewed in Chapter 2—with special attention to support. This support consisted of the university environmental structures that influenced transition. Western University’s structural environments, including academic support, faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication, influenced student transition in many ways. Now that these influences have been identified, the university has the opportunity to consider the steps needed to improve the transition process of community college students.
Implications

In this section, I will identify recommendations of what should be done to facilitate successful community college transfer student transition and how university structural environments can be developed or enhanced based on my findings, the literature review, and my 30 years of experience as a university administrator and someone who has worked directly with transfer student transition. These proposals are listed within each environmental structure: academic support, faculty, social support, orientation, preenrollment programs, and university communication. The following recommendations could also be applied to similar 4-year institutions.

Academic Support

Recommendations within Academic Support include: articulation agreement, Assist.org, virtual advising, university academic advising, degree audits, transfer transition support programs, and uniform general education requirements.

Articulation agreement. Western University has a comprehensive and clearly defined articulation agreement as part of a systematic approach within the state to encourage and support community college transfer to the state’s public universities. The path to transition is clearly articulated and significantly contributes to successful student transition. More states should establish this coordinated effort for community college students to encourage transfer and support transition.

Assist.org. Assist.org is a valuable community college to university course transferability tool available via the web for any student from any location and should be promoted more as a resource for community college students, especially during their first year at the community college. Fortunately, all of the students interviewed took
advantage of this resource. However, most of them learned about it through relatives, friends, or acquaintances and not their community college. Community college students may benefit by being made more aware of this resource during their first year of community college enrollment—the sooner the better. It may be beneficial if every community college utilized strategies to better inform their new students of this resource, especially for those who express interest in the transfer curriculum. The university may also want to bolster the importance of Assist.org on their website and within other university communications and transfer student resources. The earlier students are able to confirm an academic plan and identify the needed courses for transfer, the better prepared they can be for the transition to the university.

Virtual advising. With the limited resources of today, community colleges may need to reconsider their delivery of academic support services. Meeting varied student needs through a variety of approaches may better utilize limited resources, while streamlining student advising support services. Providing a three-tiered advising system may be the optimum. This system would offer scheduled one-on-one appointments for complex issues and walk-in or virtual advising for simple questions. The university may want to consider reaching out to the state’s community colleges to encourage or facilitate the implementation of a virtual advising system to enhance advisor accessibility. Students with simple questions could be streamlined through this virtual service, allowing academic advisors more time to meet with students with more complex matters. Offering virtual advising as an option at the community colleges may better accommodate student needs and optimize advisor time. It has worked well at WU.
University academic advising. Although some effective collaboration exists among WU’s colleges and academic departments, there is also opportunity for these advising units to better coordinate their advising services to community college transfer students. Some transfer students do not fully understand the differences in these advising units and would be better served if these roles were more clearly identified and communicated.

Degree audits. Multiple students expressed frustration with being referred to their degree audit without any additional advising support. University academic advising services may want to examine this practice to ensure that community college transfer students have adequate information about the use of a degree audit within their academic planning process. While students need to take initiative and be self-directed, adequate resources and a clear explanation of a degree audit must be readily available to support community college students in their transition.

Transfer transition support programs. Because the pace of the quarter system exacerbates the challenges of transition, the university may want to consider providing more opportunities offering concrete strategies for transition to this new research university environment, including peer support programs, transition workshops, a course or program designed to provide comprehensive transition assistance throughout the first quarter, or opportunities for community college students to enhance their time management skills through web-based tutorials and on-campus workshops at the university or at the community colleges. This emphasis on the importance of time management in conjunction with other support programs, would offer community college transfers additional resources to better navigate the pace of the university. A required
university transition course could be the ideal solution. Such a course could further explain university resources, provide information on the role of a research university and the importance of research, and enhance connections between students and faculty/staff.

Uniform general education requirements. University staff commented on the challenges experienced by community college academic advisors with the varied requirements they must track for multiple universities. Contributing to this issue are the varied GE requirements among the colleges at WU. It would simplify community college advising, and the student transfer transition process, if all of the colleges at WU were uniform in their acceptance of the university articulation agreement IGETC requirements.

Faculty

Recommendations within Faculty include: How to engage with faculty webpage, faculty engagement programs, research priority, and faculty pedagogy.

How to engage with faculty webpage. The university may consider the development of web-based resources to provide students with strategies on how to approach and engage with faculty, including why this engagement and interaction is important and how it may benefit the students’ educational experience. Such a webpage could provide students with a step-by-step approach to conversation techniques and other interaction strategies to encourage robust student-faculty discussion, stronger student-faculty engagement and, thus, student satisfaction, success, and transition.

Faculty engagement programs. Programs that enhance student-faculty interaction outside of the classroom can assist students with transition. Such programs may provide a less intimidating faculty environment for students. Western University currently offers two programs to encourage student interaction with faculty outside of the
classroom: (a) Dine with a Prof offers students the opportunity to invite a faculty member to lunch, and (b) Coffee with a Prof offers students the opportunity to take a professor to coffee at one of the many coffee locations on campus. The cost of these two programs is covered by the university in order to encourage students to engage with faculty outside of the classroom. The university may want to consider additional programs designed to encourage and increase student-faculty interaction.

**Research priority.** Many students do not understand the different missions of institutions of higher education within the state and how those disparate institutional priorities contribute to the academic environment and classroom experience. The university may want to consider better articulating the unique mission of a research university, the priority for faculty to conduct research, and the implications for the classroom experience. Having a clearer understanding of this research environment should contribute to student expectations and transition.

**Faculty pedagogy.** Faculty may want to reconsider their pedagogical approach to teaching in large classes. Minor tactical changes could be incorporated to have students quickly meet peers who are adjacent to them to discuss a topic and provide feedback. Other nuances to encourage interaction, even if limited in scope, could vastly improve the classroom environment and enhance student/faculty engagement.

**Social Support**

Recommendations within Social Support includes: On-campus transfer student residential life needs assessment, and comprehensive approach to transfer student needs.

**On-campus transfer student residential life needs assessment.** On-campus housing for transfer students has been a recent addition to WU; its impact has been
significant. Community college transfer students have increased their level of involvement and have developed a stronger sense of community by virtue of proximity and the bonding that has occurred through this common on-campus living experience. This new housing has also demonstrated an institutional commitment to this population. More community college students are considering WU because of this housing and perceived university commitment to transfers. Now that this housing is fully operational, the university may want to consider an assessment to gain a better understanding of transfer resident needs and how those needs can be addressed through the transfer residential life program.

**Comprehensive approach to transfer student needs.** Western University is a decentralized organization with many institutional components providing support to transfer students. However, many of these departments are not communicating with each other. The university may want to bring together all key campus constituencies that interface with transfer students and discuss a more strategic approach to serving this population. Coordinating efforts could better identify the needs of transfer students and provide a more effective and seamless approach to address those needs. As a part of this strategy, the university may want to consider conducting a campus-wide transfer student assessment to determine the needs of this population and how the university could further contribute to a successful transfer student experience. This assessment could be done in collaboration with the transfer residential life program assessment to avoid a duplication of efforts. Focus groups could be conducted to supplement a questionnaire.
Orientation

Recommendations within Orientation includes: Structure and format and transfer and orientation leaders.

**Structure and format.** As the primary transition program to WU, and according to the transfer students, transfer orientation needs to be more engaging and provide these students with a comprehensive transition experience. The university may want to consider providing a full-day or multi-day orientation program that could offer community college transfers with a more comprehensive overview of the university, a better understanding of institutional resources, and enough time for sessions to be more engaging and interactive. In lieu of a full- or multi-day program, a partial day with afternoon optional sessions may also be an option. This format would have a structured morning with program essentials and an afternoon schedule allowing students to select from a variety of session electives and, thus, address a wider range of student needs. The university may also want to examine its allocation of resources toward this effort in order to enhance this transition experience. This new model may require more staff and/or higher transfer orientation fees. Designating orientation as a university priority may also be a consideration to allow orientation programs to have facility priority over other types of university programs.

**Transfer orientation leaders.** Peer-to-peer interaction through student orientation leaders provides a highly engaging and more interactive experience for new students. And, although student-to-student interaction of any kind is helpful, a true peer interaction is the most effective. Hence, having current transfer students serve as orientation leaders is critical in order to have the most significant impact on the
orientation experience of new transfers. Enhanced efforts to recruit and encourage community college transfer students to consider this role may be considered, as well as a stronger marketing effort within the transfer housing area. A transfer student is the only one who may be able to appreciate and understand the transition process of another transfer student. The most successful transfer student orientation I have ever experienced was a 1 1/2 day program utilizing only transfer students as orientation leaders. The students were highly engaged and the retention between the 2 days was nearly 100%.

Preenrollment Programs

Western University offers a comprehensive array of preenrollment programs on the campus, in the community, and virtually. Their use of technology encourages virtual interaction to supplement an on-campus experience or provide those who are unable to come to campus with an opportunity to be touched by the university. The largest such program offered is Transfer Admit Day, an on-campus program designed to offer a comprehensive view of the university and answer questions about the academic requirements and co-curricular environment. Although this program is currently successful and offers community college students with a greater understanding of the institution, Freshman Admit Day is a much larger event with a more comprehensive presentation of the university and many more programs, services, and activities available during the day. It would be beneficial to create a Transfer Admit Day on the same level. Unfortunately, Transfer Admit Day is held subsequent to Freshman Admit Day, adding to the challenges of resource allocation in the development of a similar experience for transfer students. Western University may want to investigate the possibility of either
building a stronger Transfer Admit Day or creating a single admit day or open house for both freshmen and transfer students.

**University Communication**

Recommendations within University Communication include: Virtual transfer center and clarity of university’s research mission.

**Virtual transfer center.** Western University’s web-based communication is a true virtual transfer center for all information needed by a transfer student. It is comprehensive, user-friendly, and easy to navigate if students begin with the main transfer student page. It includes all of the information necessary for community college transfer students to understand the transition process to the university. This is a great service offered by the university. One possible improvement could be to better promote a single entry webpage for transfer students and direct all community college transfer students to that site. This page could also include a comprehensive transfer student check list (and possibly customized for each college/academic department) to itemize the important components of transition. In addition, WU could consider ongoing transfer student focus groups to provide feedback on the nuances of the website and how it might be improved.

**Clarity of university’s research mission.** Many students do not understand the difference between the missions of community colleges, research universities, and other 4-year colleges and universities. Western University may want to increase the clarity of its mission as a research university and the implications for the campus academic environment. Faculty are creating new knowledge through their research and are able to present this cutting edge information to the students in their classes. Students also have
the opportunity to engage in research with faculty. However, this focus on research and the larger class sizes of a research university also impact faculty in their ability to be as teaching centered as their counterparts in 2-year and other nonresearch 4-year institutions. Students need to understand this difference while they are making their admissions decision about institutional fit. Perhaps the university could ask students on their admissions application to explain how a research university will contribute to their major and/or career goals. This approach would not only encourage students to gain a better understanding of a research institution, but would incite them to articulate how this type of institution would contribute to their educational journey. Community college transfer students should not expect the same academic environment and faculty interaction they experienced in the more intimate classroom setting of their community college. The university may want to be more strategic with how it presents itself as a research institution.

**Future Research**

Community college student enrollment continues to grow as more students enter higher education through the state’s community college system. Many of these students plan to transfer to a 4-year institution. Western University’s transfer student population continues to increase and will reach 50% of total undergraduate enrollment in the near future. Because of this increase, the university must better address the unique needs of transfer students. Gaining a better understanding of these needs will contribute to a more seamless transition and encourage more students to transfer. Additional research is needed to enable 4-year colleges and universities to design and enhance institutional
environments that will contribute to the transfer student transition experience, and thus their satisfaction and success.

Future research recommendations include interviewing community college academic advisors who are on the front line of working with community college students who plan to transfer to a university. Gaining a first-hand perspective of the academic advising services at community colleges could greatly assist in understanding the transfer student transition process. The data from this study, in addition to much of literature, were critical of community college advising services. Most of the students interviewed found it to be inadequate, especially in comparison to the services provided by the university. Further research would provide a more comprehensive view of the transition process from the vantage point of the community college.

University faculty could also be interviewed to discuss how pedagogy influences the academic experience, especially for students in their first year at the university. Are faculty aware of the unique needs of transfer students and the challenges these students experience due to the university’s higher academic expectations and the pace of the quarter system? Are they aware of how they are perceived by transfer students? Could more student interaction be facilitated by faculty in large classes? Because many courses at the university are taught in large lecture halls, gaining a better understanding of pedagogy from university faculty may provide insight into their teaching strategy. Future research to enhance community college student transition will only benefit the university.
REFERENCES


Cuseo, J. (2000, November 1-4). *The case for careful attention to the transfer transition*. Paper presented at the National Conference on Students in Transition, Cincinnati, OH.


Appendix A

Student Consent Form

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject for One-on-One Student Interviews

(Community College Transfer Student Transition to a Research University)

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators: I, Paul DeWine, am the only investigator for this research study, and my education is as follows: I earned a B.A. degree in Communication from the University of Toledo, and a Master’s Degree in College Student Personnel from Bowling Green State University. I am currently in my second year of San Diego State University’s Ed.D. program. My dissertation advisor at San Diego State University is Professor Dr. Marilee J. Bresciani, who also holds a Ph.D. in Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction from the University of Nebraska and a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Hastings College.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to better understand how a research university can assist in the environmental transition of a community college student.

Description of the Study: This study will be to explore the structural environments that influence the transition process of a community college student to a research university. University students who transferred from a community college, will be asked questions about their transfer student transition experiences in individual interviews, which will last approximately 90 minutes.

Interview participants will be asked eight open-ended questions about their experiences in their campus’ transfer student transition programs and services. The individual interviews will take place on campus either in a campus conference room or another campus location that is of convenience to the participant.

The criteria for inclusion of subjects in this study is as follows. All selected students will:
- have attended a community college prior to transfer
- be 18-24 years of age, will
- be enrolled as full-time students, will
- have completed two quarters of their first year at Western University

There will also be a mix of students living in on-campus residential facilities and those who reside off campus, and an effort to have a cross section of students from the six colleges.
It is essential to note that: (1) your participation is voluntary, (2) you will receive a $20 gift card to the university bookstore upon completion of the focus group interview, (3) your real names will not be used, (4) you can drop out of the study at any time, and (5) your consent form must be signed prior to participating.

Risks or Discomforts: If a participant may have had an unpleasant experience with the transfer student transition process, a participant may reflect upon unpleasant memories while responding to the interview. If he/she begins to feel uncomfortable, he/she may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

Benefits of the Study: I anticipate that the potential benefits resulting from my research will be: (1) a greater awareness of the programs and support services needed by transfer students, (2) potential improvements in the transfer student transition process, (3) a campus environment more supportive of transfer students, and (4) the potential for enhanced transfer student retention, persistence, and satisfaction. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Confidentiality: As the researcher, I realize the importance of maintaining confidentiality, and (1) I will personally collect all of the consent forms and secure them along with all notes and recordings in a locked file cabinet in my office. I am the only person, who will have access to the key. (2) I will maintain your confidentiality by not using your actual name. (3) I will assign codes to all the participants, and I will never identify you by name when I take notes and write my findings. (4) I will be recording your conversations, which you can review up for up to 30 days from the time of recording; and (5) I will destroy all of the recording after my dissertation is completed. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law. Federal regulations require that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) periodically review all approved and continuing projects that involve human subjects. To ensure that your rights as a subject are being protected in this study, it is possible that representatives of the Institutional Review Board may come to this research site to inspect study records.

Incentives to Participate: There is no incentive of any kind for participating in this study.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty.

Questions About the Study: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact Paul DeWine at 619/299-4666. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).
Consent to Participate: The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board’s stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this consent form. You have been told that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

____________________________________     __________________
Signature of Participant                                        Date

____________________________________     __________________
Signature of Investigator                                     Date
Appendix B

Staff Consent Form

San Diego State University
Consent to Act as a Research Subject for One-On-One Staff Interviews
(Community College Transfer Student Transition to a Research University)

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators: I, Paul DeWine, am the only investigator for this research study, and my education is as follows: I earned a B.A. degree in Communication from the University of Toledo, and a Master’s Degree in College Student Personnel from Bowling Green State University. I am currently in my second year of San Diego State University’s Ed.D. program. My dissertation advisor at San Diego State University is Professor Dr. Marilee J. Bresciani, who also holds a Ph.D. in Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction from the University of Nebraska and a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Hastings College.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to better understand how a research university can assist in the environmental transition of a community college student.

Description of the Study: This study will be to explore the structural environments that influence the transition process of a community college student to a research university. University staff members, who work closely with transfer students in transition, will be asked questions about their transfer student transition experiences in one-on-one interviews, which will last approximately 30-60 minutes.

Staff will be asked five to six open-ended questions about their experiences in their campus’ transfer student transition programs and services. The one-on-one interviews will take place on campus either in the staff member’s office or another campus location of convenience to the participants.

The criteria for inclusion of subjects in this study is as follows: The selection process for one-on-one staff interviews will be based on how closely the staff member works with community colleges transfer students.

It is essential to note that: (1) your participation is voluntary, (2) you will not receive any monetary compensation or incentives of any kind, (3) your real names will not be used, (4) you can drop out of the study at any time, and (5) your consent form must be signed prior to participating.
Risks or Discomforts: If a participant may have had an unpleasant experience with transfer students, a participant may reflect upon unpleasant memories while responding to the interview. If he/she begins to feel uncomfortable, he/she may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

Benefits of the Study: I anticipate that the potential benefits resulting from my research will be: (1) a greater awareness of the programs and support services needed by transfer students, (2) potential improvements in the transfer student transition process, (3) a campus environment more supportive of transfer students, and (4) the potential for enhanced transfer student retention, persistence, and satisfaction. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Confidentiality: As the researcher, I realize the importance of maintaining confidentiality, and (1) I will personally collect all of the consent forms and secure them along with all notes and recordings in a locked file cabinet in my office. I am the only person, who will have access to the key. (2) I will maintain your confidentiality by not using your actual name. (3) I will assign codes to all the participants, and I will never identify you by name when I take notes and write my findings. (4) I will be recording your conversations, which you can review up to 30 days from the time of recording; and (5) I will destroy all of the recording after my dissertation is completed. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law. Federal regulations require that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) periodically review all approved and continuing projects that involve human subjects. To ensure that your rights as a subject are being protected in this study, it is possible that representatives of the Institutional Review Board may come to this research site to inspect study records.

Incentives to Participate: There is no incentive of any kind for participating in this study.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact Paul DeWine at 619/299-4666. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

Consent to Participate: The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board's stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp.
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this consent form. You have been told that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

____________________________________  ___________________
Signature of Participant                                        Date

____________________________________  __________________
Signature of Investigator                                     Date
Appendix C

Student Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your transition process to the university?

   Follow up questions to include:

   a. regarding degree of course transferability?

   b. regarding university communication—transfer related publications and websites?

   c. regarding your counseling and advising experience at both your college & academic department?

   d. regarding your social adjustment?

   e. regarding your academic adjustment?

2. What has been your experience with faculty? (e.g. interaction with faculty?)

3. How would you describe your university orientation program experience and other transition programs (such as Admit Day and Welcome Week)?

4. How has your participation in university services, programs, and campus activities influenced your transition and experience during your first two quarters?

5. How would you describe the effectiveness/helpfulness of these programs and services on your transition?

6. What helped/hindered your transition?

7. What was missing from your transfer experience that you wanted or felt you needed?

8. How would you define/describe a successful transfer student transition?

9. What has surprised you the most about your transition experience? (will ask if time permits)
Appendix D

Staff Interview Questions

*College Senior Administrator and Staff*

1. How would you describe your transition programs and/or services for community college transfer students?

2. Please describe each program/service and its rationale, and how it is designed to assist with the students’ transition.

3. How would you describe the effectiveness of these programs and services?
   a. What other programs/services would you recommend to improve the transition process?

4. What do you see as similarities/differences between the needs of a transfer student from a community college and a transfer student from a 4-year college or university?

5. How would you define/describe a successful transfer student transition?

*College Academic Advisor*

1. How would you describe your transition programs and/or services for community college transfer students?

2. Please describe each program/service and its rationale and how it is supposed to assist with the students’ transition.

3. How would you describe the effectiveness of these programs and services?
   a. What other programs/services would you recommend to improve the transition process?
4. What do you see as similarities/differences between the needs of transfer student from a community college and a transfer student from a 4-year college or university?

5. How would you define/describe a successful transfer student transition?

Department Academic Advisor

1. How would you describe your transition programs and/or services for community college transfer students?

2. Please describe each program/service, its rationale, and how it is designed to assist with the students' transition.

3. How would you describe the effectiveness of these programs and services?
   a. What other programs/services would you recommend to improve the transition process?

4. What do you see as similarities/differences between the needs of a transfer student from a community college and a transfer student from a 4-year college or university?

5. How would you define/describe successful transfer student transition?

Transfer Student Services Specialist

1. How would you describe your transition programs and/or services for community college transfer students?
   a. What do you see as similarities/differences between the needs of a transfer student from a community college and a transfer student from a 4-year college or university?

2. How would you describe the effectiveness of these programs and services?
3. Please describe each program, its rationale, and how it is designed to assist with the students’ transition.

4. Please describe the university’s communications (publications & websites) to community college transfer students and how these communications influence the students’ transition to the university.

5. How would you define/describe a successful transfer student transition?

**Articulation Specialist**

1. How would you describe your transition programs and/or services for community college transfer students?

   a. Please describe the university’s articulation agreement with community colleges, including its influence on course transferability, and its impact on the students’ transition to the university.

   b. Please describe the university’s communications (publications & websites) to community college transfer students and how they influence the students’ transition to the university.

2. How would you describe the effectiveness of these programs and services?

3. What do you see as similarities/differences between a transfer student from a community college and a transfer student from a 4-year college or university?

4. How would you define/describe successful transfer student transition?
Appendix E

Dissertation Chair Support Letter

Faculty Sponsor's Assurance

Student-initiated research involving human subjects, whether dissertation, thesis, or other research projects, must be supervised by an SDSU faculty member to ensure the compliance with procedures and regulations relating to the protection of human subjects.

The signature of the faculty sponsor is required on all research where the student is identified as the principal investigator. The faculty sponsor's signature verifies that the research has been reviewed by the department and is in compliance with federal and SDSU policies.

Name of Investigator: Paul R. Neuwirth
Department:
Project Title: The influence of structural environments on the success of the student transition process from a community college to a research university
The faculty sponsor is responsible to:
1. Meet with the investigator to monitor study progress.
2. Be available to the investigator to supervise and to address problems should they arise.
3. Oversee the prompt reporting of any significant or unforeseen adverse effects within 5 days of occurrence.
4. Arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume these duties when unavailable (vacation or sabbatical).
5. Monitor the research activity to ensure that the protocol approved by SDSU IRB is followed.

The faculty sponsor has reviewed the protocol for the following:
1. Research design is sound and appropriate to the discipline.
2. Subject selection is fair and subjects are informed as to how they were selected.
3. Recruitment procedures help ensure voluntary inclusion.
4. Inform consent language is appropriate to subjects.
5. Privacy and confidentiality are protected.
6. Potential benefits are described.
7. Potential risks (psychological, social, physical, economic, legal) are identified and managed.
8. Benefits outweigh the risks.
9. Informed consent document is attached to the submitted protocol (parental permission and assent when applicable).
10. Participating agencies/institutions' letters of approval are attached to the submitted protocol.

Your signature below verifies your understanding of the responsibilities and review requirements noted. Your signature also certifies that the student investigator is familiar with the ethical practices, regulations and policies that pertain to human subjects research and has sufficient training to conduct this study as described in the submitted protocol.

Signature of SDSU Faculty Sponsor: [Signature]
Date: [Date]

The signature of a faculty member who has been designated by the department as responsible for preliminary human subjects review is required. If the department does not have an assigned person for this task, a faculty sponsor may sign this form.

Signature of Faculty Member Approving for the Department: [Signature]
Date: [Date]
Institutional Review Board Approval

April 8, 2011

Student Researcher: Paul DeWine
Faculty Sponsor/Thesis Chair: Dr. Bresciani
Department: Administration Rehabilitation and Post-Secondary Education

IRB Number: 665119
Title: The Influence of Structural Environments on the Success of the Student Transition Process from a Community College to a Research University
Risk Level: Minimal
Exemption: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1 & 2)

Dear Mr. DeWine:

The project referenced was reviewed and verified as exempt in accordance with SDSU's Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protections within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46.101). This review applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol.

The determination of exemption is final and requests for continuing review (progress reports) are not required for this study. However, if any changes to your study are planned, you must submit a modification request and receive either IRB approval (per 45 CFR 46.110 or 46.111) or IRB verification that the modification is exempt (per 45 CFR 46.101). To submit a modification request, access the protocol via the WebPortal, on the protocol Main Page, you will need to click on "Modifications" under Protocol Maintenance and enter a report. Once you have filled in your responses on the report form, click "Submit". Additionally, notify the IRB office if your status as an SDSU affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer an SDSU faculty member, staff member or student).

Please note the following for all exempt studies:

a) If this research involves the use of existing or secondary data sources, information obtained must be recorded so that subjects cannot be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

b) If information will be obtained from individual medical records, please check with the organization authorized to provide access to these records to determine whether regulations relating to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) pertain to your research. Likewise, if academic records are accessed, Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements must be respected. Notify the SDSU IRB office if protocol revisions are necessary to comply with HIPAA regulations.

c) If recruitment will take place through an outside agency or organization, confirm with that institution that you have permission to conduct the study prior to initiation of any study activities. If this research involves the use of existing or secondary data sources, confirm with
the data owner that you have permission to access the data.

d) Approval is contingent upon the completion of the SOSU human subjects tutorial (found at: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~sra/login.php) by all members of the research team. This certification must be renewed every 2 years.

For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the IRB office (619) 594-6622 or e-mail irb@mail.sdsu.edu. To access IRB review application materials, SOSU's Assurance, the 45 CFR 46, the Belmont Report, and/or any other relevant policies and guidelines related to the involvement of human subjects in research, please visit the IRB website at http://pra.sdsu.edu/research.php.

Graduate Students: This notification may be used as documentation to register in Thesis 799A. Attach a hard copy of this notice to your Appointment of Thesis/Project Committee form prior to submitting the completed forms to Graduate and Research Affairs - Student Services Division.

Sincerely,

Jeannine Nichols
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Brianna Larsen-Mongeon
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Amy McDaniell
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Choya Washington
Regulatory Compliance Analyst
Appendix G

Student Interview Recruitment Email

Dear ________:

I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at San Diego State University and am conducting research involving the transition process of community college students. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how a research university can assist with the transition of a community college student.

You have been referred by your college as a student who may be interested in assisting with this study. Your potential participation would include a 60-90 minute interview about your transition experience with a group of five other community college transfer students.

All selected students will:

• have attended a community college prior to transfer
• be 18-24 years of age, will
• be enrolled as full-time students, will
• have completed two quarters of their first year at Western University

There will also be an effort to obtain a mix of students living on campus and those who reside off campus and have student representation from the six colleges.

My goal is to select a group of students who meet the above listed criteria and who best represent this year’s cohort of community college transfer student. Please respond to this email if you are interested in participating in this study. Students who are selected and complete the focus group interview will receive a $20 gift card for the campus bookstore to compensate them for their time and thank them for their participation. More details will be provided at a future meeting.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you must be 18 year or older to be eligible. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with SDSU or any researchers in the study. The actual names of the participants will not be used.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Paul R. DeWine
Dean of Student Affairs
Earl Warren College
619/299-4666
Appendix H

Staff Member Telephone Call Script

I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at San Diego State University and am conducting research involving the transition process of community college students. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how a research university can assist with the transition of a community college student.

You have been identified as a university staff member with close contact with community college transfer students and who may be interested in assisting with this study. Your potential participation would include a 30-60 minute interview about the transition experience of community college students.

Staff members will not be compensated for their participation and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with SDSU or any researchers in the study. The actual names of the participants will not be used.

Can I answer any questions that you may have?

Are you interested in participating?

If no…Thank you for your consideration!

If yes…Let’s schedule a time to meet to review the study participant consent form.
Appendix I

Criteria for Student Interview Participation

All selected students will:

- have attended a community college prior to transfer
- be 18-24 years of age, will
- be enrolled as full-time students, will
- have completed or nearly completed two quarters of their first year at Western University

There will also be a mix of students living in on-campus residential facilities and those who reside off campus, and an effort to have a cross section of students from the six colleges.