

A NATURALISTIC INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTION OF ADJUSTMENT WHEN TRANSFERRING TO A LARGE RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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PERCEPTION OF ADJUSTMENT WHEN TRANSFERRING TO A LARGE RESEARCH  
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UNIVERSITY

Robert W. Eames, Jr.

Dr. Joe Donaldson, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This dissertation research investigated community college transfer students' perception of the adjustment process that takes place when transferring from a two-year college to a four-year college. The research question is: *How do community college transfer students perceive their adjustment experience at the University of Missouri?* The University of Missouri is a land grant institution conducting research at a very high level of intensity and is the flagship institution of higher education for Missouri. Participants in this qualitative research were adult community college transfer students 18 years of age or older who attended community college in the state of Missouri and transferred to the University of Missouri with the goal of baccalaureate attainment or admission to a professional program.

Data were collected during the final weeks of the spring semester 2013 and during fall semester 2013 using personal interviews and an online survey instrument constructed for this research, *Community College Transfer Student Adjustment*. Research participants were solicited from lists of community college students transferring to the University of Missouri during the fall semester 2013, seniors who were former community college transfer students who planned to graduate that winter or in the summer 2014, and community college transfer students transferring to the University of Missouri during the fall semester 2013. Total potential participants was  $N = 1040$ . Email solicitations for interviews and requests to take the online survey produced 49 personal interviews and 88 surveys. Analysis of data was performed using inductive logic, line by line coding, and the constant comparative method. Findings include that community college transfer student adjustment begins when the decision is made to become a community college student who will later transfer to a four-year school with the goal of baccalaureate attainment.

A Naturalistic Inquiry into Community College Transfer Students' Perception of Adjustment  
When Transferring to a Large Research University

**Chapter 1 – Context, Significance, and Research Intent**

Perhaps the greatest challenge of responding to the needs of community college transfer students lies in truly understanding the nuances of this important student population. Certainly, the experience of the transfer student is complex, multidimensional, and varies tremendously from individual to individual (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Laanan, 2000; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). And while community college transfer students share many similarities in their transfer experience, they also differ individually in unique ways, such as perception of age and having personal commitments that make responding to the needs of community college transfer students at their new college a challenge.

**The Problem**

There is a gap in the research literature on community college transfer student adjustment. Research into some transfer student topics is abundant, particularly in areas concerning the degree of success transfer students experience after matriculating to their new college. For instance, researchers have studied attendance patterns of transfer students (McCormick & Carroll, 1997), persistence (Tinto, 1993), retention rates (Ishitani, 2008), grade point average (GPA) (Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965), and transfer shock (Cjeda, 1997). Researchers have also focused on transfer student topics such as articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions (Ignash & Townsend, 2004; Mosholder & Zirkle, 2007), and

community college practices designed to prepare students for transfer to a four-year institution (Townsend, 2001).

But little research has focused on how well community college transfer students are engaged in and able to adjust to their new institutional environment when they transfer (House, 1989; Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010; Laanan, 2001; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Yazedjian, Toews, Sevin & Purswell, 2008). The freshman first-year experience has been widely investigated (Barefoot, 2000; Barefoot, 2005; Jewler & Gardner, 1987; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & associates, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & associates, 1989), so much of what is known about transfer student adjustment is mainly inferred from research on freshman student adjustment. In spite of their many unique individual differences, freshman students share a much more similar socialization experience than do transfer students. Additionally, when freshman students stay at their original choice of school until graduation, that socialization experience helps them to adjust and prosper along the way. This is clear from research into undergraduate student related topics like GPA and retention rates (Ishitani, 2008), and student engagement (NSSE, 2009; Ishitani, 2008; Laanan, 2004).

### **Ambiguity in the Need for Support for Transfer Students**

I believe that because of the widespread notion that community college transfer students are already experienced students who do not require much transition assistance (Townsend & Wilson, 2006), there is little *universal* recognition that many of these students may actually need more adjustment help than they receive at most institutions. For example, in one of the few available studies on the orientation needs of transfer students, researchers remarked that "...it is a widely held belief that transfer students are neither in need of nor interested in a comprehensive orientation program" (Jacobs, Busby & Leath, 1992, p. 91).

Townsend and Wilson (2006), in their qualitative look at transfer students attending a large urban research university, agreed this belief is widely held. Those researchers found that while indeed some transfer students were self-motivated to the extent they felt they did not need much assistance with the transition process, other transfer students felt very much akin to being a freshman at their new school due to various circumstances of institutional size, mission, and social environment. Some of these transfer students stated they would have welcomed additional levels of support during the transition process, in effect, "...a hand hold for a little bit" (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 456). Because there is a dearth of literature specifically comparing the adjustment of community college transfer students with that of transfer students from four-year institutions, it is also difficult to assess differences in the transition needs that might exist between those groups.

### **Roadmap for this Chapter**

The scope of the remainder of this introductory chapter includes my purpose statement and a discussion of the significance of this dissertation research in terms of research, theory, and practice, the declaration of my research question, some contextual background information, a discussion of the pipeline metaphor, an expression of pertinent definitions, and concludes with an elaboration of my theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

### **Purpose and Significance of this Study**

The purpose of this research dissertation is to use qualitative research methodology to coconstruct, interpret, and narrate community college transfer students' perceptions of the

adjustment process at the University of Missouri. This research has significance for research, theory, and practice which I will address in the following sections.

### **Significance for Research**

There is a clearly documented need to learn more about the adjustment experiences of students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Laanan, 2001). This research will supplement the meager existing research literature on community college transfer student adjustment and help to fill the gap in our understanding of community college transfer students' perceptions of the transfer process in general. This research also responds to calls from researchers for further in-depth qualitative inquiry into community college transfer student adjustment (Laanan, 2001; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Yazedjian, Toews, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008). Additionally, since the conceptual tools of locus of control (LOC) and self-efficacy have previously been mainly used in quantitative research, yet provide useful perspectives for qualitative methodology to enhance understanding of self-held beliefs, this research will help to provide some fresh insight into transfer student adjustment.

### **Significance for Theory**

My dissertation research uses the umbrella of social cognitive theory as the framework to shape and guide my inquiry. Previous research on transfer student adjustment has often been framed in terms of Tinto's (1975) model of student retention or Astin's (1985) theory of involvement. Social cognitive theory offers insight from a fresh perspective and, in particular, can provide a framework well-suited to guiding qualitative research into individual perception.

### **Significance for Practice**

Higher education practitioners need to thoroughly understand the student populations they support if they want to be successful in helping students adjust. This research will

contribute to our understanding of community college transfer students' perception of the transfer process and the various factors that specifically affect adjustment at the University of Missouri. Consequently, this research will help to provide greater insight into the needs of transfer students and will be useful to college administrators seeking to understand the essence of the community college transfer student experience from a qualitative perspective, and aid those practitioners who are interested in developing or improving support programs for transfer students in general.

### **Research Question**

Qualitative research questions generally assume the form of one or two central questions (Merriam, 2009). Research questions should also be broad, but flexible enough for modification as the data collection proceeds. The focus should be on understanding *what?* Or *how?* Built on my theoretical foundation of social cognitive theory and using the complementary conceptual tools of locus of control (LOC) and self-efficacy, my research question directly shaped my research intent. Accordingly, my central research question is: *How do community college transfer students perceive their adjustment experience at the University of Missouri?* Stated in this fashion, my research question is broad enough to be flexible to my research methodology, yet still specific enough to demonstrate a strong focus within the larger college transfer student discussion.

### **Background**

There is an old adage that first impressions are lasting impressions. In the case of community college transfer students, it is certainly possible that public perception and the perception of practitioners who work with transfer students in administrative and support roles in higher education have been influenced by popular notions in our culture about higher education, and especially about what it means to be a community college transfer student. There is

evidence at the highest institutional level of higher education, for instance, that suggests "...top community college students struggle against the mistaken perception by some college administrators and others that community college transfer students cannot succeed at elite institutions" (Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, 2013).

Enrollment of community college transfer students declined by nearly half from 1984 through 2002 at the most highly competitive private institutions and to a lesser extent at elite public institutions. Except for 1999, when higher education experienced a small bump in community college transfer enrollments, there has since been a general decline in transfer enrollments at every level of college selectivity in both the public and private sectors of higher education (Dowd & Cheslock, 2013). At the University of Missouri, community college transfer enrollment remains steady, with a slight increase in two-year transfer students in the fall of 2009 and 2010, but with negligible increases in the fall semesters since (University of Missouri, 2012a). Accepting that there is ample research demonstrating some transfer students experience some initial transfer shock (Diaz, 1992; Cjeda, 1997) and lag behind native students in persistence to graduation (Ishitani, 2008; Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010), I believe the popular notion widely held today about community college transfer students has its roots in the origin of the community college system and its mission. Before the establishment of the first public junior college in 1901, there was no national network of two-year colleges to produce transfer students (Cohen, 1998). In fact, it was the initial mission of the junior college to produce transfer students for four-year institutions, what Townsend (2001) identifies as the *upward* or *vertical mission*. It took more than half a century for the fledgling institution to evolve into the comprehensive community college as we now accept it (Townsend, 2001).

## **The Transfer Student as the Product of a Pipeline**

Although the mission of the contemporary community college is onion-like with layers of conceptual and functional roles, I think the general perception of this mission has much to do with the way community college transfer students are viewed today. During the expansion of community college systems nationwide, especially after World War II and the later explosive growth of community colleges during the 1960s, for the first time, noticeably large numbers of transfer students began moving from two-year colleges to four-year colleges (Cohen, 1998). This is when the term *junior college* became fixed in the mind of the public and many practitioners, and continues to persevere, demonstrating the power of first and ultimately lasting impressions. Indeed, the word *junior* itself implies less, or subordinate. It is not surprising then, that in the minds of some practitioners, community college transfer students suffer from a negative perception that devalues their academic efforts at the two-year college (Berger & Maloney, 2003).

I believe the popular perception of what it means to be a community college transfer student became entwined with this highly visible transfer process, even though the community college transfer student population over time has exhibited quite diverse behavior, making it challenging to generalize about community college transfer students as a homogeneous group (Townsend, 2000). In fact, many community college transfer students face new psychological, academic, and environmental challenges different from those of the average freshman student (Laanan, 2001), including family and financial obligations (Townsend, 2000), transferring credits, and finding suitable housing (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Many community college transfer students struggle with these competing priorities. As well, more than a third of community college transfer students have children living at home, and well over three quarters of

them work, citing financial concerns as their number one concern and most likely reason to drop out (Recruitment & Retention, 2005).

Many community college students matriculate to community college right after finishing high school and are in the same age cohort as the freshman students who begin their higher education at a four-year college. If the former chose to transfer to a four-year institution after a semester or two, those community college transfer students may just as easily regard the first semester at their new four-year college as their first-year experience (Hoover, 2010).

### **Pipeline Metaphor**

Community college transfer students are often viewed as the products of a pipeline connecting the two-year college to the four-year college for those students seeking a baccalaureate degree (Hillman, Lum & Hossler, 2008; LeBard, 1999; Schneider, 2007). I believe understanding this notion is important because I think it lies at the heart of the popular attitude held by many persons about community college transfer students. The pipeline metaphor is a mechanistic image, however, that inadequately describes community college transfer student behavior because the majority of transfer students experience a swirling phenomenon of attendance at many colleges (Hagedorn & Castro, 1999; Hillman, Lum & Hossler, 2008; Townsend, 2000; Townsend & Deever, 1999). The pipeline metaphor posits that students will complete two years of transferrable college courses at the two-year college, receive an associate-in-arts or associate-in-sciences degree, apply for and be accepted at a four-year college, and then graduate after two more years having completed a baccalaureate degree from the receiving institution. In sum, transfer students will fulfill the traditional vertical mission of the community college (Townsend, 2000; Townsend, 2001).

However, because it is also apparent that anything traveling through a pipeline is going to be a homogeneous commodity with no discernable variation, there is an implication inherent in the pipeline metaphor that all community college transfer students are more or less the same, which is not the case. Consequently, acceptance of the pipeline metaphor further strengthens the popular perception that community college transfer students do not need much transition support (Townsend, 2000; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

### **The Four-year Graduation Myth**

Community college transfer students move to the tempo and dance to the rhythm of their new colleges as best as they are able. For instance, many transfer students either cannot complete their chosen coursework in two more years, (Rhine, Milligan & Nelson, 2000), or find that not all of their completed coursework meets the acceptability standards of the receiving institution, or both (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Thus, reaching the goal takes longer and consequently forces the transfer student to incur more costs on tuition and other expenses. Since many contemporary undergraduate students attend college part-time throughout much of their undergraduate experience, they may take five or six years or even longer to complete a baccalaureate degree (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010).

### **Definitions**

Community college transfer students are, like mosaic pieces, unique in detail and rich in character. Although most transfer students do tend to share some similar factors, it is their individual situations that most influence their adjustment during the transfer process. For instance, community college transfer students might be members of ethnic minorities, have low-income, be of non-traditional age (Laanan, 1996), or have had recent military experiences, or

some workplace experiences in their chosen major (Townsend, 2008). Even these categories are not inclusive and should not be considered too rigidly. Townsend (2008) explains that even though community college transfer students have prior college experience, being at a new institution causes many of them to feel like a freshman again with the resulting needs for information and attention, even though those transfer students still did not want to be treated like first-year students.

### **Transfer Student Definition**

For the purpose of this dissertation research, a community college transfer student must be an adult 18 years of age or older, have transferred 12 or more credits from the community college to the receiving institution, and have the goal of baccalaureate attainment. In arriving at this definition, I considered several dimensions since the definition of what constitutes a transfer student varies tremendously by study and focus. As one researcher puts it, "No consensus on a definition of who a transfer student is or what calculation is best to use....has been adopted by the educational or academic communities" (Sylvia, 2010, p. 569). Some researchers require a certain level of transferred coursework for their inquiries. For example, in her study of factors facilitating the success of community college transfer students, Townsend (2006) used transferring 24 credit hours as one threshold for her sample of transfer students to interview, and Peska (2009) used transferring 12 credit hours as a minimum for his study of community college transfer students). Similarly, in his report for the U. S. Department of Education, Adelman (2005) defined a community college transfer student as a student who started in a community college, and earned more than 10 credits from the community college before enrolling in a fouryear college.

Since there is no apparent universally accepted definition of transfer students, it simply depends on the type of study what requirements the transfer student may need to possess for that

piece of research. So, for many researchers such as Cuseo (1998), a broad definition that simply states any student moving from one postsecondary institution to another is a transfer student is sufficient.

**Age constraint.** My research is narrowly focused on understanding the perception of adult community college transfer students. These students needed to be a minimum of 18 years of age for the parameters of this research. I expected and found no difficulty in this respect because it is generally uncommon to find a community college transfer student much younger. Similarly, to strengthen that narrow research focus, I excluded post baccalaureate transfer students and transfer students from four-year institutions.

**Transferred credits constraint.** It seemed logical for my research purposes that the community college transfer students in this study should have completed enough coursework to demonstrate a clear distinction between their ongoing academic experience and that of a freshman student. Accordingly, I used the threshold of 12 credits transferred as a general criterion for inclusion. I did not expect the number of credits transferred by the transfer students in my research to be anything more than a minor consideration, however, because the enrollment figures from the University of Missouri for the fall 2010 semester, for example, revealed that the average accepted transfer credits for students transferring from two-year institutions was about 57 credits (University of Missouri, 2010). This relatively strong number of credits transferred indicates to me that many of these transfer students were likely admitted as juniors, or sophomores if they did not have program requirements in some instances, and are not much akin to being a freshman in their student experience.

**Baccalaureate attainment goal.** The implicit caveat for many studies seems to be that the transfer student has the goal of baccalaureate attainment (Davies & Kratky, 2000; Townsend,

2001; Ishitani, 2010). The precise number of credits already completed or transferred seems less salient than the notion that community college transfer students participating in my research have the goal of baccalaureate obtainment. It is not always possible for transfer students to be accepted into their program of study immediately because of various program prerequisites, so being on a plan directed toward degree attainment seemed adequate. Accordingly, those students who transferred to the University of Missouri for lifelong learning opportunities were excluded from inclusion in this research.

### **Transfer Student Adjustment Definition**

One clear characteristic of most freshman students is that they are right out of high school and have accumulated little life experience. Obviously, with individual variations, community college transfer students will have gained some life and academic experience by the time they transfer to a four-year institution. There are many nuances to adjustment, however, that challenge the exploration of the adjustment experience of college transfer students, and these subtleties make adjustment challenging to define.

College student adjustment has not typically been the topic of systematic research, nor do researchers rely on a universal definition (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). Consequently, studies tend to approach the topic from various perspectives. Research into attrition has been linked to adjustment (Bean & Metzger, 1985; Baker & Siryk, 1984), and adjustment has been analyzed in terms of psychological factors (Chartrand, 1992; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993), and alienation (Bennett & Okinata, 1990), usually with a common element of some sort of psychological distress for the student caused by the adjustment experience (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). As well, institutional characteristics may influence adjustment, such as college size (Attinasi, 1989; Laanan, 2001), sense of community, and isolation (Attinasi, 1989), as well

as racial climate (Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado, 1994), and diversity of opportunities for student life (Astin, 1993).

Much of the literature concerning student adjustment tends to focus on the continuums of academic, social, and personal adjustment issues (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). Since a precise or universally accepted definition of college student adjustment is lacking, this research will be guided by a flexible framework derived from the categories of academic, social, and personal adjustment and as used in Laanan's (2001) synthesis of research on transfer student adjustment: psychological factors, academic environment, and campus climate. In consideration of these factors, the definition of transfer student adjustment for this research is: *the individual process of anticipating and reacting to new environments and challenges in the context of becoming a new student at a new college, expressed through interactive learning behavior framed broadly by social cognitive theory.* A more robust discussion of college student adjustment will follow in the Chapter 2 literature review.

### **Other Definitions**

One clarification that is easier to make than a precise definition of a transfer student or transfer student adjustment, is the distinction between transfer students and *native* or *domestic* students. It is generally accepted that the latter are simply defined as those students who are already in attendance at some institution when a transfer student transfers there. I will use the terms interchangeably. Similarly, my use of the terms *community college* and *two-year school* should be considered synonymous, and I make no distinction between types of *four-year institutions* except in specific discussions.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework for my research is Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which asserts that individuals possess a self-regulatory system that helps them exercise some measure of control over their motivations, thoughts and feelings, and their actions (Pajares, 1996a; Pajares, 1996b). I used the conceptual lenses of locus of control (LOC) and self-efficacy that derive from social cognitive theory as tools to operationalize and shape my inquiry, and especially to help provide insight into individual behavior. Both my theoretical framework and the conceptual lenses are very complimentary, and are concerned with feelings, attitudes, and self-held beliefs. This seems entirely appropriate as a foundation for my inquiry into transfer students' perception of adjustment.

Interestingly, I found that LOC and self-efficacy have been utilized for past academic research almost exclusively as quantitative tools. For example, Hall, Smith, and Chia (2008) used linear regression in a six year longitudinal study of the influence of students' locus of control (LOC) on graduation rates and time to graduation, and de Carvalho, Gadzella, Henley, and Ball (2009) used correlation analysis on data provided by survey to study how stress levels affect students' LOC. Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) used a variety of survey scales to examine how first or second generational academic status affects academic self-efficacy. Similarly, Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007) used bivariate correlation to analyze data collected from self-efficacy surveys to study how high self-efficacy relates to better college adjustment.

At the same time, both LOC and self-efficacy seem well suited as lenses to conduct a qualitative inquiry into transfer students' perception of adjustment, as Hall, Smith, and Chia (2008) acknowledge in their call for use of LOC in qualitative studies. Wang's (2009) extensive

analysis of national data concerning transfer students suggests that perceived LOC is a significant predictor of persistence for transferring community college students. As conceptual tools, LOC and self-efficacy provide avenues to explore innate feelings about control of life events, perception of ability, and desire to succeed. In the next section, I will discuss my theoretical framework of social cognitive theory and follow with in-depth discussions of LOC and self-efficacy.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

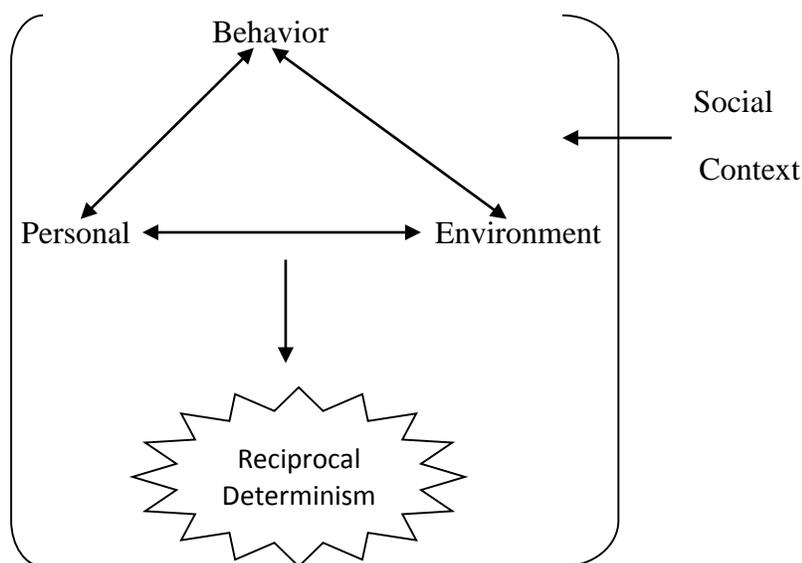
The idea of a self system is the core of social cognitive theory. The self system houses cognitive and affective structures, allowing individuals to learn from observing others, to plan alternative strategies for given situations, to symbolize, and to modify their behavior through self-reflection (Pajares, 1996a). In fact, the mediator between an individual's knowledge and action is self-referent thought (Pajares, 1996a), in other words, the ability to evaluate one's thought processes and experiences through self-reflection. Social cognitive theory asserts that individuals use this process of self-reflection to evaluate their experiences.

Individual knowledge, skills, and past accomplishments, however, are not always good predictors of future attainments (Bandura, 1986). Instead, the beliefs individuals have about their capabilities are much more powerful influences on their behavior. Accordingly, self-perceptions shape what individuals actually do with their knowledge and skills (Bandura, 1986). This is why social cognitive theory is well suited as a theoretical umbrella for my research on transfer students' perception of the adjustment process. Social cognitive theory is based on the power of self-belief to alter individuals' behavior, to reflect on that decision and the outcome, and perhaps to plan an alternative course of action for a possible next time. In this

sense, using social cognitive theory as my overarching framework will provide me with a reliable vehicle to drive my understanding of transfer students' perception of adjustment.

The foundation of social cognitive theory is *reciprocal determinism*, the notion that individual perception of performance alters self-beliefs and environment through interaction. This theory provides a view of human behavior that sees the self-beliefs individuals possess as key elements in the exercise of personal agency and control (Bandura, 1986). The core concept is *triadic reciprocity*. This includes personal factors such as cognition, biological events, and affectations that interact with behavior and various environments in a three-way interchange resulting in reciprocal determinism.

*Figure 1*  
Triadic Reciprocity



Adapted from information in Bandura (1986).

In the scenario depicted in *Figure 1* individuals are both producers of their own environments and products of their environments because their personal agency is always rooted in the social context (Pajares, 1996a). As the arrows indicate, the three-way interaction of triadic

reciprocity results in reciprocal determinism. In plain language, it is the human capacity to learn in social environments, make decisions, and alter one's behavior along the way.

### **Locus of Control**

Locus of control (LOC) is shaped by numerous lifelong factors in a cultural context and is useful for understanding individuals' life orientation (Carr-Ruffino, 2009). LOC is usually expressed in either internal or external terms. Generally, individuals with an internal locus of control (LOC) believe they are in control of their own destinies, while those individuals who believe outside forces determine their fate have an external LOC (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004). The LOC of transfer students influences decision making and perception of personal power in academic situations (e.g., internal LOC describes a condition wherein transfer students expect that outcomes are dependent upon their own behavior). In this sense, a grade outcome is perceived as a result of personal effort and perseverance. Conversely, external LOC describes expected outcomes in terms of luck, chance, or fate (Landrum, 2010). A grade outcome would be perceived in the context of those terms rather than as a result of one's individual striving.

**A trend toward externalism.** The LOC of community college transfer students relates directly to how students perceive the level of support received from their new college. There is some evidence to suggest that college students' LOC have become more external over time, in other words, college students increasingly believe that their lives are controlled by outside forces rather than their own efforts. These findings tend to indicate larger cultural changes in college student populations. As Twenge, Zhang, and Im (2004) explain it:

As individualism has increased, locus of control has become more external.

These data cannot determine the exact origins of the increase in externality;

however, several trends seem relevant. Greater cynicism and alienation leads

people to believe that their personal actions mean little. Blaming others for negative events has also become more popular, and people are less likely to believe that anyone can be a success despite obstacles in the way. Rather than leading to independence, the increasing individualism of American culture has led people to believe that there is little they can do to change the larger world (p. 315).

Further research needs to be done to support the notion of a trend toward externalism in students' locus of control (LOC), because this is the only mention of such a trend that I have found in the research literature.

### **Self-efficacy**

Like locus of control, self-efficacy is one of many conceptual approaches derived from the broad umbrella of social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy beliefs impact our personal choices and our emotional reactions, and affect how successfully our goals are accomplished by influencing our level of persistence and level of effort (Schunk & Pajares, 2001). Self-efficacy in an academic setting is defined as the extent to which students believe that they can control the outcomes of their attempts at learning (Wilhite, 1990), effectively asking the question: *Do I have the confidence that I can perform well academically here?* (Bean & Eaton, 2001).

Academic self-efficacy is not only the ability of students to control their own learning outcomes, but also students' perceptions of their own ability to develop and follow through on strategies to achieve success at college (Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008). Accordingly, self-efficacy is a complementary lens that enhanced the holistic qualities of this research.

Students, like any individual, exert a level of effort and persistence when challenged that depends somewhat upon their perceived self-efficacy (Pajares, 1996b). Since self-efficacy has a

tremendous influence on individuals' choices and motivation, and affects the way individuals react emotionally, students with high self-efficacy beliefs ought to be more confident in their ability to persist and deal with obstacles along the way (Bandura, 1997). Using self-efficacy as a conceptual lens in my research thus relates directly to how transfer students perceive their ability to develop and follow through on a course of action. In this sense, my hope was to gain in-depth insight on transfer students' perception of adjustment through the lens of self-held beliefs about potential for success or failure. Self-efficacy beliefs can be influenced through four channels: performance or mastery accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977).

Mastery experiences are simply defined as past successes or failures. These experiences form schemas individuals use to relate to other situations, whether the contexts are similar or different. These schemas affect self-efficacy. For example, repeated success forms strong self-efficacy, while failures reduce self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). It follows that the past academic successes or failures of transfer students are going to significantly affect self-efficacy beliefs and subsequently affect perceptions of the adjustment process. Vicarious experience is acquired by observing others perform some behavior that an individual might perceive as threatening and seeing them have no adverse consequences. This observation can be done through live modeling or symbolic modeling. If the activity or situation is perceived as 'doable', then self-efficacy will increase (Bandura, 1977). Verbal persuasion is a weaker influence on self-efficacy than mastery or vicarious experiences because it is not grounded in individual experience. Emotional arousal due to stress, fear, or some physical agitation has the effect of reducing self-efficacy, but can also be mitigated by relaxation techniques and other methods to reduce stress (Bandura, 1977). It seems reasonable then that if transfer students are feeling high

levels of stress, it might reduce self-efficacy and consequently influence perceptions of how well the adjustment process is going.

This chapter has clearly stated my research question, discussed the purpose and significance of this inquiry, established background context, delineated pertinent definitions, and elaborated on my theoretical and conceptual foundations. Chapter 2 will examine the appropriate literature on community college transfer student adjustment and explore the types of support programs provided for transfer students in higher education.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The scope of this literature review is to examine those bodies of literature most helpful to gaining an understanding of community college transfer students' perception of the adjustment process when moving from a two-year college to a four-year college. I will examine two pertinent literatures that are both limited and disparate: *transfer student adjustment* and *support programs targeted specifically at transfer students*. As part of the process of reviewing the latter, and because the existing research literature on community college transfer is sparse, I will also continue to use some literature about freshman students' adjustment in order to explore the relevance of ideas from that literature to community college transfer students. These comparisons must be accepted only in the most general sense, because a clear limitation is the assumption that the needs of both groups are similar. As Jacobs, Busby, and Leath (1992) put it:

...assumptions generally held about freshman students may not hold true for transfer students. Further research is needed to determine specific trends in transfer and freshman populations, and to ascertain the extent of the similarities and differences between freshman and transfer students. This would allow orientation efforts to be tailored to accommodate the needs of specific student groups (p. 97).

To offer some further perspective, I will examine the local state context by looking at the support programs provided for transfer students at some Missouri colleges. I will begin with some background material on how the transfer process can influence student adjustment, discuss some specific timing challenges for transfer students, review specific literature on transfer student adjustment, and conclude with a look at support programs for transfer students in Missouri.

## **Background**

Research studies into college student adjustment are almost exclusively quantitative in character and predominately use surveys composed of various scales to measure overall student adjustment (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). These various surveys are fairly ubiquitous in the literature, many times developed for the specific research investigation, and are quite often not available to, or in wide use by researchers at other institutions (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). This situation contributes to the lack of consensus on a universally accepted definition of student adjustment. It is significant that much of this survey research into adjustment uses similar scales to organize the data collection, for example, scales to measure academic, social, and personal adjustment. The emphasis varies by researcher. Personal adjustment often includes emotional factors (Baker & Siryk, 1984). Baker and Siryk's (1989) Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), for instance, was influential in establishing the categories of academic, social, and personal adjustment. Those researchers conceptualized college adjustment as a multifaceted construct within which adjustment could be measured and compared (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996).

### **Timing Challenges for Transfer Students**

The timing of when a student transfers can be a limiting factor that hinders community college transfer students' adjustment during their transition to a four-year campus (Barefoot, 2000; House, 1989). For example, community college transfer students who receiving institutions classified as juniors showed higher GPAs and higher graduation rates than those community college transfer students who were classified as sophomores (House, 1989). Astin (1993) and Tinto (1993) concur that understanding the adjustment process of students that

transfer at an irregular time is important because not only is adjustment regarded as the first step to students becoming integrated into the fabric of their new school, it is also directly correlated to persistence. The level of integration a new student can achieve depends considerably on their ability to become involved at the new campus, and it would appear that a mid-year transfer student will probably encounter greater challenges adjusting than a fall transfer student (House, 1989).

Many institutional support services and resources designed to help students adjust to campus life are offered during the fall semester only. Welcome weeks, academic convocations, mentoring programs, first-year seminars, and student clubs and organizational resource fairs are all designed to aid in the adjustment of entrants who enroll in the fall whether they are a freshman or a transfer student (Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989). In his unpublished dissertation, Peska (2009) explores the challenges of mid-year transfer on student adjustment. Factors related to timing include curricular challenges, such as registration appointments later than those of current students, attending larger classes, and discovery that not all of their previous coursework has been accepted. The availability of classes can also be an issue. Many second term courses are sequenced to follow fall courses, which can be a significant disadvantage for a transfer student who lacks the necessary prerequisites. Further, students who transfer mid-year have to contend with inclement weather across much of the country. At a minimum, this often forces students inside for academic, social, and other activities. Transfer students also find that mid-year is not the primary recruiting season for many campus employers or student organizations (Peska, 2009).

Mid-year transfer has received little research attention and existing research on transfer student adjustment is generally focused on fall transfer students. In the only published study I

could locate on mid-year transfer, Britt and Hirt (1999) interviewed 25 mid-year community college transfer students and 16 staff members at a mid-Atlantic university. Their findings add some insight but lack generalizeability. Researchers concluded that these particular mid-year community college transfer students experienced three broad types of adjustment challenges at their new four-year college: academic, social, and personal. This is actually affirmative of what we know about fall transfer students, so we need additional research in this area to expand our understanding of the significance of mid-year transfer.

### **Transfer Student Adjustment**

Psychological adjustment occurs during the transition process transfer students experience interacting with their new environment. Viewed through the lens of a model developed by Bean and Eaton (2001) to understand student retention, transfer students' psychological attributes are shaped as they interact with people outside the college, as well as by interaction with the college and its representatives (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Table 1, *Contextual Realms in Transfer Student Adjustment*, shows the various elements where student interaction requires some personal adjustment.

Table 1

#### *Contextual Realms in Transfer Student Adjustment*

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##### Bureaucratic Realm

Registration, financial aid, bursar's office, housing, orientation, advising, placement

##### Academic Realm

Faculty members (formally in the classroom, informally outside the classroom)

Advisors, librarians, tutors, computer center staff, other students

Table 1

*Contextual Realms in Transfer Student Adjustment*

## Social Realm

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Social contact with any person in the college, i.e. other students, faculty, staff

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Table developed from material in: Bean & Eaton, (2001, p. 75).

As the information in Table 1, *Contextual Realms in Transfer Student Adjustment*, indicates, transfer students are immersed in potential touch-points in their new college environment that might require some personal adjustment. And although these points of interaction have some overlap and are similar to those experienced at the community college, the difference is that the transfer students are experiencing this interaction in a dynamic new environment.

As noted in Chapter 1, the existing research on transfer student adjustment is sparse and has tended to focus on whether or not students stay in college or drop out, concentrating mainly on measuring GPA, student attrition, and making comparisons between native or ongoing students and transfer students. Little empirical research has focused directly on the adjustment experience of transfer students or community college transfer students (Laanan, 2001). As one researcher remarks, "what is missing from the literature is a comprehensive look at community college transfer student transition over time" (Flaga, 2006, p. 4).

Obviously, the challenge of studying freshman or transfer students will differ widely. Rebekah Nathan (2005) focused totally on the freshman experience, in her case enrolling in college and living in the dormitory as a freshman student in an effort to better understand the perception and behavior of her students. Since few community college transfer students actually live in campus-provided housing, the total immersion type of approach used by Nathan (2005) to

understanding freshman students is efficacious for that student population, but probably not practical for researching transfer students.

The research literature on transfer student adjustment has tremendous overlap in the labeling and content of adjustment categories. Laanan's (2001) synthesis of previous research on transfer student adjustment is organized by three prevalent themes in the literature:

psychological factors, academic environment, and campus climate. Using Laanan's (2001) taxonomy as a guide and beginning with psychological factors, the following sections will discuss the literature using those general themes.

### **Psychological Factors**

Research into the psychological aspects of the transfer experience provides a resilient framework to anchor our understanding of transfer student adjustment. As discussed in Chapter 1, students navigating a path through the various psychological, academic, and campus climate environments respond through the process of triadic reciprocity. How much stress an individual might experience in a particular higher education environment during this process will certainly vary with the individual.

**Stress.** As a significant factor in the adjustment of a transfer student, stress is important to explore because stress is an emotional arousal that can affect students' self-efficacy (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Like freshman students, transfer students have to deal with all sorts of stress-inducing demands at their new college. These challenges include academic demands, large lecture classes, a new environment, large campus size, stress-inducing challenges with housing and transportation, and coping with new services and new ways of doing things. The greater the dissimilarity between a student's previous experiences and their present situation, the greater the adjustment that will be required (Laanan, 1996). For example, community

college transfer students might have experienced a nurturing and protective institutional culture at the two-year college, but then perceive something quite different at their new four-year college (Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

We know from research into freshman adjustment that unfamiliarity with university life creates stress for new students and that attending a university for the first time may be a crucial test of an individual's successful adjustment (Dyson & Renk, 2006). Viewing the transition process within the greater context of adaptation (Dyson & Renk, 2006), and extrapolating from Townsend and Wilson (2006) that many community college students may need some handholding, one can see that many community college transfer students are often in the same age group or even the same age as freshman students, and would experience similar levels of stress adjusting to their new college environment.

Researchers such as Bean and Metzner (1985) and later Chartrand (1992) focused on the forces of stress and alienation, and created models to explain the phenomenon of adjustment among the general college student population. The most significant findings include the notion that stress for college students is derived from interplay between internal sources and the demographic composition and social climate of the school (Laanan, 2001). Demographics cover a lot of territory and include many factors, such as student body size, campus size, and even the age range of students. Social climate includes factors like ethnic or cultural diversity, and engagement with campus events.

The process of gathering information by prospective community college transfer students can also be challenging and a source of early stress. Transfer student admission information is complicated to summarize because admissions requirements vary considerably by major.

Handel's (2007) in-depth investigation into information and services provided to help ease the transition for community college transfer students suggests that few educational organizations have developed web-based search engines that allow community college students to search for four-year institutions based on any criteria specifically related to transfer admissions. Some information for transfer students is available from public sources, but it is not always easily accessed and may come with a price tag. For example:

Although *U.S. News & World Report* has compiled information on its Web site about colleges and universities that admit transfer students, you need to purchase the "premium version" of the database (\$14.95) to access the information, and students cannot search the database using any transfer-specific criteria (Handel, 2007, p. 69).

**Being a nontraditional student.** Chartrand (1992) tested an empirical model of nontraditional student adjustment based on conceptual research developed by Bean and Metzner (1985). The model used relevant factors such as family support and career related academic variables. This is applicable to community college transfer students since many fall into the nontraditional student categories of greater age and possessing outside obligations. Chartrand's (1992) model showed that both the academic and the non-college environmental variables were a strong predictor of continuance in school. Findings suggested institutional commitment was paramount in reducing psychological stress and helping students through the transition period of transfer (Chartrand, 1992).

**Minority student adjustment.** Some limited research exists on minority students' adjustment experiences. Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) researched Latino students and found that dimensions of campus climate affect student adjustment. Hierarchical regression of

data gathered from five data sets of Latino student behavior by a previously validated survey, the *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire*, indicated that Latino students who maintained their family support in the first year had a positive personal emotional adjustment. Better adjusted students in this study were independent, but also maintained a supportive relationship with their parents. Psychological challenges were considered to be a form of *transitional trauma* (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996).

Bennett and Okinaka (1990) used the same terminology in their research into the psychological factors alienating black and Hispanic students at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. Similarly refining and using a survey scale from previous research, those researchers labeled unfamiliarity with the values, norms, or expectations of the four-year college as transitional trauma. Smedley, Myers and Harrell (1993) found that many of the experiences reported by African-Americans at predominantly white colleges are actually experienced by and affect all college students. These include previously identified factors that influence the transfer process such as academic demands, relationship problems, financial worries, and so forth (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Anglin and Wade (2007) used a survey instrument to research how racial socialization contributes to overall college adjustment for black students. Findings suggested that students who develop a multicultural identity experience a more positive adjustment experience regardless of ethnicity, but there are few existing studies examining the role of race in adjustment to college (Anglin & Wade, 2007).

At the same time, minority students also experience more unique stressors endemic to their minority status, such as heightened feelings of not belonging that tend to interfere with their ability to integrate into the new school community (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993). Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) concluded that the entire spectrum of

campus climate influenced the successful transition of students and, in particular, feelings of discrimination or not belonging caused stress. Although the students in these research studies were not transfer students, it is reasonable to generalize that adjustment for transfer students would be similarly influenced by these factors.

In one of the few generalizable research studies on transfer students' adjustment, Laanan (2007) took a cross-sectional look at a cohort of 717 students at a large multicultural university. The researcher used multiple regression on survey data to explore the social and psychological aspects of the transfer students' adjustment process. The findings showed that students who indicated they had a low self-concept of their intellectual ability had difficulty in adjusting academically, while students who were able to focus less on the competition and more on their individual learning experience had a positive academic adjustment (Laanan, 2007). What Laanan (2007) is describing in part are variations in innate self-efficacy beliefs held by transfer students in respect to their individual perceptions of their ability to complete both their short- and long-term academic goals.

### **Academic Environment**

In the academic environment, transfer students will interact with faculty, staff, and other students. These interactions will have elements of formality in the classroom and elements of informality outside the classroom (Bean & Eaton, 2001) and will occur on various levels (e.g., peer to peer relationships, student to faculty relationships, and student to support staff relationships). This section will investigate elements that affect adjustment in the academic environment.

**Creating high academic expectations.** Setting high expectations for academic performance generally results in students rising to the occasion. But to accomplish this, faculty

must be supportive throughout the process. One method to build this climate of support is to begin socialization of students to have high academic expectations early on in the term (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). University of Miami has a Summer Scholars program for high school juniors and seniors, for instance, designed to shape incoming freshman students' academic expectations for the upcoming fall term (University of Miami, 2012).

The academic rigor of the four year college, however, can be overwhelming for many transfer students from community college (Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Keeley and House's (1993) longitudinal study of the effects of transfer shock on college adjustment, and Townsend's (1995) qualitative narrative about the academic challenges of community college transfer students transitioning to a large research university, have similarly concluded that transfer students face academic challenges. Other researchers have pointed to the crucial role of student-faculty interaction in mitigating this academic challenge to successful college student adjustment (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1987).

Sometimes an institution's reputation alone conveys an initial message to incoming freshman students that the school has a climate of academic excellence. Colleges such as George Mason University's School of Information Technology and Engineering try to smooth the transition created by such a reputation and a very high attrition rate by sending early letters to admitted students stressing the need to perform well in their classes in their senior year of high school and to take the necessary placement tests and any summer courses that might make them more prepared for college work (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010).

Additionally, following their individual philosophies of student engagement, colleges design all sorts of programs to support and encourage their students to attain academic success.

These appear to be abundant across the country. At the University of Maine at Farmington, for example, students and faculty celebrate Symposium Day. Throughout the academic year, students focus on the process of project creation and development, and on in-depth academic research, which is then exhibited during Symposium Day in the form of papers, oral and poster presentations, original student readings, art gallery exhibits, and performances (University of Maine, 2012).

From this perspective, successful student engagement has two key components. The first is clearly the amount of time and effort that students put into the academic side of their school life. The second factor of student engagement is the manner in which the institution allocates resources, learning opportunities, and services in order to draw students in, gain their attention, and socialize them into the rhythm of the campus (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). If students are able to make it through their first year successfully, the chances that they will persist improve considerably (Levitz & Noel, 1989).

**Capstone experiences.** Capstone courses for seniors are an example of how institutions of higher education can challenge students intellectually. These capstone efforts are usually designed by major and applied across the curriculum to provide students with a deep, engaging intellectual experience as well as becoming a vehicle to increase student-faculty interaction. On some campuses, the capstone course has become almost ritualized, with students planning and looking forward to the required projects and topical material semesters ahead of time, sometimes even from the freshman year. "For many students, the level of rigor expected in the final product is comparable...to a graduate-level thesis" (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010, p. 188).

Although transfer students do not have the luxury of planning for a capstone course in their freshman year, they are still required to participate in the mandatory curriculum. Because a

capstone course is a culminating experience at the end of any given program, transfer students are going to have the opportunity to engage with other students and faculty nearly as much as any student. This situation begs a few questions: 1) *Does the capstone require an extra out of class time commitment?*, 2) *Because of pressure from outside commitments, to what extent will the transfer student be able to engage in meaningful out-of-class activities that will help to produce a favorable outcome for them in the capstone course?*, and, 3) *Will a feeling of marginalization influence the transfer student to do most of the work on their own?*

Certainly to be balanced, it is necessary to point out that in a student's academic career, a senior taking a capstone course is also older, although maybe not as old as the transfer student. It makes sense that the student who is a senior may also have developed personal commitments and financial obligations by this time. So, I think that in the case of a capstone course as a type of student engagement, a student's response is going to be formed not necessarily by their status as a continuing freshman or transfer student, but rather by the attitude that they have developed over time about their academic career and most certainly by their study skills.

**Active and collaborative learning.** Active and collaborative learning is a pedagogical approach that colleges successful in creating student engagement use to teach students how to succeed. Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Furthermore, when students collaborate with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material, they acquire valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the "messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily, during, and after college" (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010, p. 193). Table 2, *Educationally Enriching Activities*, lists the types of effective educational practices that a student would perform if they were considered to be engaging with their education (NSSE, 2005).

Table 2

*Educationally Enriching Activities*


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Work on paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources

Use email to communicate with an instructor

Ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions

Receive prompt feedback from faculty on academic performance (written or oral)

Include diverse perspectives in class discussions or writing assignments

Discuss ideas from class readings or classes with others outside of class

Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments

Make presentations

Tutor other students

Participate in community based projects

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Table contents developed from information in NSSE (2005), NSSE (2009), and Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, (2010).

Actually performing the tasks in Table 2, *Educationally Enriching Activities*, such as *Discuss ideas from class readings or classes with others outside of class*, is going to be more challenging for transfer students if they perceive it difficult to make friendships or are experiencing feelings of isolation. Subsequently, community college transfer students report fewer educationally enriching experiences than freshman students, perceive their new campus environments as less supportive than that of their previous college (NSSE, 2008; NSSE, 2009), and participate in fewer educationally enriching activities (NSSE, 2005; NSSE, 2009).

**Student-faculty interaction.** Transfer students in general tend to report they have less interaction with faculty and perform less active and collaborative learning with their instructors

than do ongoing students (NSSE, 2008; NSSE, 2009). At many colleges, however, a portrait of student engagement with faculty can be painted from a vibrant palette of choices. Students can discuss career plans with faculty, or ideas from readings or class material, receive prompt feedback on academic performance and updates on progress, or even collaborate with a faculty member on a research project or some activity other than coursework, like an internship or committee assignment. It is especially important that students perceive that faculty is available to them. Depending on the institutional climate, students may be expected to seek faculty out, or faculty may go out of their way to make a connection with students (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). Research over the last decade has shown that transfer students do not seek as high a level of interaction with faculty as native students (NSSE, 2009). This impacts the amount of active and collaborative learning that transfer students will participate in, except in those instances where participation is mandatory.

**Importance of writing skills.** Although approaches differ, many schools realize the importance of stressing writing skills to facilitate student academic success. Some schools enact a writing emphasis that is applied across the entire curriculum for incoming freshman students, while others may require a specified number of writing intensive courses. In any case, providing feedback to students is an essential quality of all writing intensive requirements (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). Because of the importance of developing writing skills, many schools develop writing centers. This is the case at the University of Missouri, where peer tutors at the Student Success Center assist students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, and who have varying levels of writing experience (University of Missouri, 2012). Similarly at the University of Kansas, The Anschutz Learning Studio provides writing support from peer tutors and staff at their main location, as well as at convenient locations across the campus (University

of Kansas, 2012). The ability of peer tutors to create vibrant learning environments has been well-researched (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010).

**Importance of reading skills.** Reading support programs are just as important for students as writing support programs. Many campuses have learning centers which combine the efforts of developing intensive reading and writing skills. This is the case at the University of Kansas (University of Kansas, 2012) and the University of Missouri (University of Missouri, 2012). Peer tutors like those helping students in learning centers are able to foster a climate that teaches students to critically analyze their own work and that of their peers. This is a valuable support resource. Tutors typically benefit as much if not more than those being tutored (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). Unfortunately, compared to native students, transfer students tend to participate in many fewer support programs like the writing and reading centers that are available on many campuses. This tends to increase transfer students' feelings of marginalization as well as fostering a less favorable attitude toward the school in general (NSSE, 2009).

**Making support programs relevant.** Programs and activities to affirm and support new students need to be high quality and engage substantial numbers of students if they are to be most effective (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). All students, not just those students with academic deficiencies, can benefit from academic assistance programs (Walter, Goman, Guenzel, and Smith, 1989). Because such support programs must balance the academic challenge with various types of meaningful activities, there is a recognized trend to include more academic activities in orientation type programs (Barefoot, 2005). Fayetteville State University's Freshman Year Initiative is a solid example. Because of the high number of students with attributes placing them at risk of dropping out of the university, a facet of this

program is the Early Alert System, designed as a safety net to identify and provide extra assistance to those students who experience special difficulties in their first year. At the same time, the program avoids imposing unnecessary constraints on students who demonstrate little need for assistance. Students are required to participate in math tutoring, and may participate in student study groups and study skills workshops, as well as meet with faculty or advisors regularly (Fayetteville State University, 2012).

Support efforts like the Freshman Year Initiative allow faculty and staff to demonstrate their commitment to student academic success by holding students accountable to high academic expectations, while at the same time offering encouragement and support. This is exactly what Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2010) mean when they talk about creating high academic expectations to challenge new students. When they are a freshman, transfer students do have the opportunity to engage in these types of programs. I think the real difficulty for transfer students is not that they lack experience as a freshman, because they do have that, but that some time has passed and now they are in a new and unfamiliar environment. The passage of time can create uncertainty, particularly if the new college environment is quite different from any other they might have attended.

### **Campus Climate**

Research into the ways campus climate affects college student adjustment has given us insight into how certain institutional characteristics such as size and racial climate are significant *influencers*. Adjustment to college is a complex process linking students' attitudes, motivations, and skills with those institutional features (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999). The campus climate literature generally focuses on the freshman experience and is multidimensional, with many sub-fields including racial balance, institutional size, and the

availability and level of support services. Although this literature concentrates on the college freshman experience, it does shed some light on the adjustment of transfer students because one of the things we know about transfer students is that they face many of the same challenges as freshman students (Townsend, 2008).

In this section, I will focus on institutional factors and student engagement. Existing studies on transfer student adjustment are widely scattered by topic of inquiry, so our knowledge of this phenomenon is similarly fragmented. Regarding the gap in this literature, Laanan (2001) says "...research that examines the factors that contribute to post-transfer adjustment is very limited, especially in regard to students' emotional and psychological development at the four-year institution" (Laanan, 2001, p. 6).

**Institutional differences.** Adjustment for some transfer students is complicated because four-year colleges can differ dramatically from community colleges in size (Laanan, 1996). Townsend and Wilson's (2006) qualitative study of students transferring to a large urban Midwest research university from a small community college found this applied to class size as well as physical size, and influenced students' perception of the institution's transfer process and the quality of interaction with faculty (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Even those students who perform well academically at the four-year college may not be prepared socially and psychologically for their new environment, which is often less personal and not as student-centered as that of the community college (Laanan, 2001). One researcher likened this adjustment process as a negotiating behavior wherein the transfer student must make adjustments to fit in with their new academic, physical, and social environments (Flaga, 2006). Flaga's (2006) recent qualitative study of community college transfer students researched transfer students' experiences as they transitioned to a large urban research university. Research

findings were summarized in five dimensions of transition that helped to explain how students engaged with the transfer process, including learning resources, connecting, familiarity, negotiating, and integrating.

Learning resources include the variety of tools used by transfer students to gain information about their new academic and campus environments. Connecting is concerned with the development of relationships in the academic, social, and physical environments, while familiarity develops as students become more confident in their new environments. Negotiating behavior occurs when students adjust their behavior to be successful in their new campus environment and integrating occurs when a student achieves some developmental change from that interaction (Flaga, 2006).

Although we can draw insight from studies like Flaga's (2006), it is not generalizable to all transfer student populations. However, viewed in concert with Townsend and Wilson's (2006) qualitative study of transfer students, also to a large urban university, we can begin to see the powerful influence of trends such as institutional size on transfer student adjustment. In the next section, I will discuss how transfer students' engagement with their new campus similarly seems to be a powerful influence on transfer student adjustment.

**Student engagement.** To understand how institutions of higher education foster and evaluate student success, one group of researchers performed in-depth investigations at 20 institutions considered to be high-performing colleges and which had programs in place to promote student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). The researchers found that a principle key to student success was student engagement, but also that there exists no true blueprint for facilitating this success. Instead, autonomy and local control shape the approaches and freshman student support programs that are used on any particular campus (ASHE, 2010).

Within this scenario, student satisfaction becomes a product of various types of engagement. Certainly, there exist many differences in the level of engagement of freshman and transfer students (NSSE, 2009). These engagements include the level of student-faculty contact, participation in active learning, cooperation with other students, receiving prompt feedback, spending the requisite amount of time on academic tasks, having high expectations, and respecting diverse ways of learning. Just as importantly, institutional expectations for students need to be set at high, but attainable levels, must be clearly communicated to students, and be perceived by students as affirming and inclusive (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010).

*Using NSSE data to understand engagement.* For about a decade, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has endeavored to understand student engagement in higher education. The survey created benchmark clusters to examine significant student behaviors and institutional environments that unambiguously communicate high but reasonable expectations to students, while at the same time affirming support. Similar to the engagement factors articulated by Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt (2010), NSSE's clusters include level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, supportive campus environment, and enriching educational experiences (NSSE, 2009). These clusters interact with one another and overlap in a type of symbiosis. Kun, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2010) analyzed this aspect of the NSSE clusters:

For example, when large numbers of students on a campus work with faculty members on research, student-faculty interaction is likely to increase. Student-faculty collaboration on research can also increase the level of academic challenge, especially if research activities are woven into other aspects of undergraduates experiences, such as a senior capstone seminar or conference

research presentations. Similarly, the activities that make active and collaborative learning a powerful pedagogy may be manifested in enriching educational experiences out of class (p. 174).

What the researchers are really talking about here is the use of best educational practices. Better student engagement yields payoffs in terms of grades and retention (NSSE, 2009). At institutions where faculty members report using effective educational practices more frequently in their classes, students seem to gain more from college and are more engaged overall (NSSE, 2009). Compared to native students already continuously attending any given institution, transfer students report less frequent interaction with faculty, lower quality campus relationships, and lower overall satisfaction with college. In actuality, many transfer students feel marginalized compared to native students who began as a freshman and continued on at the same institution (NSSE, 2009).

**Off-campus activities.** Similarly, learning and personal development are enriched and deepened when students actively participate in academic activities that take place both on and off campus. This includes having conversations with peers and applying knowledge to realworld situations or problems. Because of environmental context, these activities will vary from school to school and what will work to engage students and foster learning at one institution may not be the best recipe at another (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010).

It is simply not as easy for transfer students to participate in off-campus activities as it is for freshman students because transfer students are much more likely to have serious commitments outside of school such as jobs and family. Additionally, transfer students are not going to be members of Greek houses and they are going to join far fewer campus groups overall. Transfer students are generally older and more likely to have established obligations, so

they are less likely to go on field trips, or meet for socializing and educational activities outside of class, or to engage with their professors outside of class (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; NSSE, 2009).

**Peer relationships.** Research conducted by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience has found that nearly three quarters of colleges and universities offer special first-year seminars to assure that new students have at least one small class in which a primary goal is the development of peer relationships (Barefoot, 2000). For transfer students, a lack of peer relationships is one of the factors identified by recent research that makes their adjustment a challenge at their new campus and differentiates their experience from that of freshman students (NSSE, 2009).

The notion of having a social life is analyzed in the summary of findings in Chapter 5. Certainly, practitioners need to understand the importance of peer relationships to transfer students as part of their student experience in obtaining a baccalaureate degree. The NSSE (2009) has included peer relationships as one of their measuring categories for student engagement for nearly every annual research report.

Ishitani and McKittrick (2010) performed regression analysis using recent NSSE (2009) data in a generalizable study, finding that transfer students tend to feel isolated and are less engaged with their new college than current students. Research results also indicated that transfer students enrolled full-time were more engaged than those who were enrolled part-time (Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010). This is in line with the findings of an earlier NSSE (2005) report which revealed that transfer students who frequently became involved in spirituality enhancing activities also engaged in a broader cross-section of collegiate activities, although transfer students participated in fewer educationally enriching activities overall.

Some transfer students tend to be disconnected from and feel overlooked on their new campuses. A recent NSSE (2009) report revealed that transfer students from both community colleges and four-year institutions participated in fewer high-impact activities, interacted less with faculty, and rated their campus relationships lower than those of native students. The study did not indicate specifically what constitutes a high-impact activity, but it may be logical to conclude that this would mean involvement in structured social or academic activities that require a commitment of time and energy.

By conducting multivariate statistical analysis on survey data gathered from 2,492 incoming transfer students, Wawrzynski and Sedlacek (2003) found that, as a population, transfer students simply do not all share the same expectations and experiences when transferring to a new school. Racial background and gender were important factors that influenced engagement. Accordingly, the researchers cautioned against stereotyping transfer students as a monolithic group (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). These are reasonable findings that support what is known about transfer students in general, for instance, that they may be older, but that the age span may be broad, and they may also possess commitments to jobs or careers, and also have important family and financial responsibilities (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; NSSE, 2008).

To summarize, we know that transfer students' adjustment is affected by racial background and gender (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003), and institutional differences at the receiving school such as class size and campus size (Laanan, 1996; Townsend, 2006). Similarly, we know transfer students often have feelings of isolation, participate in fewer rewarding campus social and academic activities (NSSE, 2005; NSSE, 2009), and are affected by their full-or-parttime status (Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010). As well, transfer students have *functional* experiences participating in campus life such as dealing with financial aid, paying bills, and

learning and following institutional rules and regulations (Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2009). Davies and

Kratky (2000) summed up the challenges this way:

They [transfer students] express their frustrations with the actual process of applying, gaining admission, transferring their credits, and registering for their senior institution courses. They tell of difficulties in making new friends, getting involved with academic organizations or clubs, and learning about services available (p. 410).

In the following section, I will discuss support programs specifically designed for transfer students.

### **Support Programs for Transfer Students**

Transfer students receive considerably less attention and support than freshman students. Practitioners have traditionally focused much more on providing the freshman experience because "...many campuses regard transfer students as second-class citizens--second class in the sense that much of the available time, attention, and thought are focused on the entering freshman" (Jacobs, Busby, & Leath, 1992, p. 91). Further, integration efforts are often lacking at the receiving campus after a student has transferred (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). While the transfer process has garnered the attention of researchers for many decades, most of the research has focused on the challenges facing two-year institutions (College Board, 2011). A recent qualitative research report revealed results of interviews with 21 leaders in higher education from 12 four-year institutions known for their commitment to transfer students. Researchers found that:

Relatively little attention has been paid to the role of four-year colleges and universities. Yet these four-year institutions, both public and private, are responsible for admitting transfer students, evaluating and accepting students' course credits, and awarding financial aid. Four-year colleges and universities represent the pivotal gatekeepers in the transfer pathway, although they have rarely asserted their role in the transfer process (CollegeBoard, 2011, p. 16). The obvious implication is that four-year colleges might not be doing everything for their incoming transfer students that they could and should be doing.

There is a dearth of research literature on support programs for transfer students, so there is no way to know the extent or nature of these efforts at four-year colleges nationwide (Davies & Kratky, 2000). There seems to be a growing realization that more needs to be done to help transfer students adjust and become successful. A recent NSSE (2008) notes that, "...institutions of all types need to consider early and ongoing programs to engage their transfer students" (NSSE, 2008, p. 16). Further research is needed to determine the extent of similarities and differences between freshman and transfer students, and to understand specific trends in transfer student and freshman populations. This would allow support efforts to be tailored to the specific needs of both groups (Jacobs, Busby, & Leath, 1992).

### **Seminars**

Although there is a lack of research on transfer student seminars (Davies & Kratky, 2000), existing research on seminars for freshman students offers some insights. Developing a seminar for new students is a process that can take years to be successful (Austin, 1988), but the rewards for first-year students include more active and collaborative learning activities, and more frequent interaction with faculty (NSSE, 2005) for those students. First-year students who

participate in seminars also have an increased likelihood that they will use campus services in the future. These services include planning or advising help for academic and career interests, financial advice, and other assistance in the form of tutoring or access to resources like a writing or math center (NSSE, 2005).

First-year students report they were more challenged academically as a result of participating in a first-year seminar, perceived the campus environment as being more supportive, and reported that overall they were more satisfied with their college experience (NSSE, 2005). Additionally, first-year seminars have improved retention rates and grades, improved students' internal locus of control, and increased students' use of campus services (Barefoot, Warnock, Dickinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998). Seminars vary in length and many will last a semester or a whole school year (Gentry, Kuhnert, Johnson & Cox, 2006). I will discuss some specific instances of seminars for transfer students I have discovered later in the section on support programs for transfer students in Missouri.

### **Orientation Programs**

The formal orientation program is the most recognizable support program for students and is used in virtually all colleges (Barefoot, 2005). Orientation programs are designed specifically to aid students in their adjustment and transition to college (Gentry, Kuhnert, Johnson & Cox, 2006; Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2009) and "...can be considered as any effort by an institution to help students make a successful transition from their previous environment into the collegiate experience" (Hollins, 2009, p. 15). The objectives of these support programs include increasing student-to-student interaction as well as student-to-faculty interaction, increasing student involvement and time on campus, increasing academic

expectations and levels of academic engagement, and assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college (Barefoot, 2000).

Although orientation programs have been a tool to smooth transfer transition in higher education for over a century (Hollins, 2009), more students and parents participated in orientation programs between 1980 and 2000 than ever before (Strumpf, Sharer, & Wawrzynski, 2003). Today about nine-tenths of students attend an orientation program (NSSE, 2005). Orientation is usually scheduled sometime before the fall semester and is rarer for the spring semester. Most four-year schools require attendance at orientation, but only about half of community colleges require attendance (Barefoot, 2005).

Orientation programs vary in length and timing. Community colleges are most likely to limit their orientation offerings to a half-day and liberal arts colleges are most likely to design an orientation that lasts two or more days (Barefoot, 2005). Gentry, Kuhnert, Johnson, and Cox (2006) used a combination of surveys to investigate the impact of a weekend-long orientation program on new incoming students at a large southeast university. Research results indicated students who attended the orientation were more involved inside and outside of the classroom as compared to students who did not attend. Attendees were able to build relationships and friendships, enhance their ability to network on and off campus, and gain a sense of community with the university. The researchers concluded that even a brief, but highly involved or concentrated orientation like one lasting a weekend can aid students in becoming involved in college (Gentry, Kuhnert, Johnson & Cox, 2006).

At Westminster College in Salt Lake City, where transfer students are just less than half of the student population, an event tailored to prospective transfer students, *Dinner with the*

*Deans*, allowed transfer students to meet with faculty members and academic administrators. The idea was that since Westminster's transfer student population was composed of nontraditional transfer students coming from many different institutions, the school could meet with them, make connections, and distribute specific department and program information. Specific numbers of transfer students in attendance was not mentioned. This event was a follow-up to a previously successful event for transfer students, *Breakfast with the Deans* (Recruitment and Retention in Higher Education, 2006). Although administrators at the college recommended replicating the program at other institutions, a visit to the college's website found no evidence of the program, so the effort appears to have been transitory. Westminster College in Salt Lake City offers a four day orientation program for new students, but provides only open house sessions lasting a few hours for transfer students (Westminster College, 2011).

Colorado State University created the Vital Connections Transfer Program to assist community college transfer students transferring from the states of Colorado and Wyoming to the university. The program aids in the application process and provides scholarship information and advising services. Information relating to the efficacy of the program is collected during focus groups held with the community college transfer students after they have been at the university for a year (Davies & Kratky, 2000).

**Pre-orientation programs.** Some colleges have established pre-orientation programs for new freshman students (Greene & Greene, 2005). These are sometimes wilderness type activities with team-building exercises like the pre-orientation programs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, at Dartmouth, and at Middlebury in Vermont. The array of preorientation activities is practically limitless and might include rock-climbing, working in a soup kitchen or performing some other focused community activity, or taking advantage of

opportunities for participation in leadership and faith-based activities (Greene & Greene, 2005). The rationale for these early support programs includes attracting new applicants, facilitating college transition, and improving retention of first-year students. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for instance, operates a pre-orientation program to attract freshman students who fit its profile by designing programs that fit the core identity of the college. The goal is to reinforce students' overall impression of and attraction to the college (Greene & Greene, 2005). Gass, Garvey, and Sugarman's (2003) longitudinal research into a university's first year wilderness orientation program indicated that the effects of such programs are longlasting and significant for the participants. In that particular study, researchers compared the experiences of new incoming students to those of students who had participated in the wilderness orientation program 17 years earlier (Gass, Garvey, & Sugarman, 2003).

The most effective college orientation programs are rooted in the context of students studying and learning (Upcraft, Finney, & Garland, 1984). The overarching goal of these orientation programs is to raise awareness of personal adjustment and academic preparation issues for students and parents during the transfer transition process (Perigo & Upcraft, 1989). Gentry, Kuhnert, Johnson, and Cox (2006) suggest that the impact of orientation programs on participants includes missing fewer classes, engaging more with faculty and staff, participating more in extracurricular activities, attending learning activities like panel discussions and lectures, and establishing relationships with diverse students. Overall, participation enhances students' ability to be involved both inside and outside the classroom (Gentry, Kuhnert, Johnson, & Cox, 2006), while the efficacy of a program is associated with the perceived quality of the orientation program and the orientation staff (Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2009).

Even though the use of orientation programs is widespread, one set of researchers remarked, "Despite their ubiquitous presence on college campuses, orientation programs and their effects on student learning are rarely the focus of scholarly research" (Mayhew, Vanderlinden & Kim, 2008, p. 321). There is research indicating that students participating in new-student orientation programs have a generally improved academic performance (Busby, Gammel & Jeffcoat, 2002), overall developmental gains (NSSE, 2005), and higher retention rates in community college (Derby & Smith, 2004) compared to those students who do not participate, but we know virtually nothing about the differences in orientation outcomes between newly enrolled students and transfer students (Mayhew, Vanderlinden & Kim, 2008). The freshman orientation experience has been widely researched, for example, Barefoot and Fidler's (1996) look at over a thousand freshman seminars, while nothing comparable exists in the research literature about the nature or impact of transfer student orientation seminars. Much of the existing research on the impact of orientation programs on students' experiences has focused on the relationship to academic performance and student persistence for freshman students (Hollins, 2009). Hollins' (2009) review of research comparing GPA of participants and non-participants in orientation programs reveals mixed results with regard to academic performance. Research on the impact of orientation programs on retention is similarly mixed (Hollins, 2009), with most studies, such as Sidle and McReynolds' (1999) longitudinal investigation at a medium-sized public four-year university in the Midwest, finding higher retention rates for participants in orientation programs. That particular study looked at incoming students in the fall semester over three consecutive years (Sidle & McReynolds, 1999).

**Importance of orientation programs for parents.** The vast majority of four-year institutions today offer some type of orientation session for family members, while the practice is much less

common at two-year colleges (Barefoot, 2005). Parents were not recognized as an influential factor in student engagement before the 1980s, although individual parents did seek out information by phoning, writing letters, or visiting campuses (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008). Agliata and Renk (2008) examined parent-college and student-college expectation discrepancies and concluded in part that parental influence on college students' adjustment is frequently underestimated. College students often set their goals based on their perceptions of their parents' expectations, and discrepancies between these two sets of expectations affects students' adjustment. Students perceive lower levels of self-worth and adjustment when these discrepancies are high. Further, frequent communication between college students and their parents provides one way to relieve adjustment challenges (Agliata & Renk, 2008). Today, disengagement from family and friends is not a viable strategy for successful adjustment to college, and research indicates parental support shapes student expectations of college, directly influences the degree of satisfaction students have with college (Jacobs & With, 2002), and students with strong family support are more likely to be successful (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). Parents remain a powerful influence on the lives of students as they transition to a more independent lifestyle. At this time in their lives, college students are seeking a new and separate identity, and although they are beginning to take responsibility for their own decisions, college students still view their parents "as authority figures who have the right set rules and expectations for their behavior" (Agliata & Renk, 2008, p. 967).

New parental behaviors such as *helicopter parenting* and increased parental needs for information have emerged particularly in the last decade of the twentieth century (Barefoot, 2006). Helicopter parents are generally described to be members of the baby boomer generation who hover over and protect the needs of their millennial aged children (Ward-Roof, Heaton &

Coburn, 2008), in effect, today's incoming freshman students and many transfer students. This greater parental engagement has obliged practitioners to "reevaluate and readjust the ways in which they work and relate to students" (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 44). Bers (2005) extensive survey research of parents of students enrolling at five community colleges suggests that parents are highly involved early on in their children's higher education choices. This parental involvement begins in high school before the student has applied to college, and often includes a strong parental focus on ensuring that the community college accepts their students' credit work and GPA. Parents are an important part of the equation for community colleges because parents may often finance part or all of the cost of attendance and influence their students' choice of school (Bers, 2005).

As parental attitudes toward involvement have changed over time, the response by institutions of higher education has been redefined to meet the new challenges. As Coburn and Woodward (2001) put it, "the days of *in loco parentis* are over" (Coburn & Woodward, 2001, p. 28). Designing and implementing an effective parent orientation program is not a standardized process. Because institutions of higher education are highly varied in size, mission, and organizational culture, no single formula exists. Orientation programs for families have become more sophisticated, however, as student populations and family compositions have grown more diverse (Coburn & Woodward, 2001).

This increased parental involvement has also not been entirely productive to student learning. Researchers have found that some parents of today's college students exhibit a variety of intrusive behaviors including:

...parents editing college papers, complaining to faculty about course or assignment grades, contacting academic advisors about class times, and

attending career fairs with their students. Additionally, the introduction and proliferation of cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging, and the like perpetuate these acts, causing administrators to view students and parents or family members as seemingly attached via their technological umbilical cord (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008, p. 44).

Providing information to parents of prospective students seems to be one key to success for the orientation process. Jacobs and With (2002) stress that involved parents view their child's education as a partnership, and so engaging in the information gathering process is one way for them to further that relationship. As well, information allows parents to provide the best advice to their children. Including parents in the orientation process often means the entire family, including siblings and other family members. Typical program offerings for siblings, for example, might include interactions with the institution mascot, tours, classroom visits, inspirational talks, or involvement with anything unique to the campus (Jacobs & With, 2002). The University of North Texas and Texas A & M University, for instance, share a joint program aimed at involving families of prospective community college transfer students by disseminating information through a common website. Similarly, the University of Texas at San Antonio has established a transfer student center that offers monthly events for transfer students and their families (Mangan, 2009).

Family orientation programs are common practice across the country, varying in delivery and timing (Jacobs & With, 2002). As Ward-Roof, Heaton, and Coburn (2008) explain: Parents of traditional eighteen- to twenty-year-old students often will attend one- to two-day orientation programs with their students, whereas family members of nontraditional students may be more likely to attend a weekend or evening program.

Other models include online resources, a series of meetings, week-long events, written information, or shorter time frames of interactions (p. 46).

From the institutional perspective, orientation programs also present the opportunity for colleges to remind parents about the expectations the campus community has for their involvement.

Parent-family handbooks, calendars, and other written material can inform parents of campus policies (Ward-Roof, Heaton & Coburn, 2008), and set the stage to minimize intrusive parent behaviors, helping parents to know when to support their children from a distance, and when to intervene (Coburn & Woodward, 2001).

At University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), there is a website dedicated to current students' parents and transfer students' parents are invited to participate (University of California Santa Barbara, 2011). Sometimes, colleges will stage one-time events for transfer students, but these can vary in approach and focus. California State University at Northridge (CSUN), for instance, conducted an Open House to attract prospective students, including transfer students, and surveyed their perceptions of the event. The majority of students attending viewed the event positively (Fischbach, 2006); however, no distinction in the data was made for the exact count of transfer students versus prospective freshman students and no analysis was presented for the several open-ended questions. A visit to the CSUN website revealed no information on the event.

The University of Missouri has an Office of Parent Relations which serves all parents of students. Related support services include a Parents' Center which provides on-campus services for those students who have children. The provision of these sorts of support services is much less common at two-year colleges (Barefoot, 2005). A review of information provided by

websites of several mid-Missouri community colleges generally found links providing parents with financial aid information, but no evidence of any parent-relations efforts.

**Participation and cost.** New student orientations may or may not be mandatory. Two-year colleges are the least likely to require attendance, about half mandating participation. More than three quarters of baccalaureate granting liberal arts colleges require attendance at orientation. Orientations will also sometimes be scheduled for various student populations, for example, about two thirds of research institutions offer special orientations for honors students. Additionally, four-year colleges are more likely than two-year colleges to offer special orientation sessions for distinct student subpopulations (Barefoot, 2005). At one private liberal arts college in Missouri, for example, separate orientations are given for international students (Westminster College, 2012d).

As for cost, the practice of charging a fee for orientation is most common in baccalaureate granting liberal arts schools and research institutions, while only about a third of general education baccalaureate institutions charge a separate fee. The cost for Summer Welcome at the University of Missouri is \$150 (University of Missouri, 2012c). Only about a tenth of two-year colleges charge for orientation (Barefoot, 2005). In the next section, I will discuss other pertinent sources of information about transfer support programs that come from the public reporting press.

### **Commentary Opinion**

Despite the lack of research literature on support programs to help transfer students adjust, there are commentary articles and opinion reporting in the popular press that are useful and provide avenues to discover pertinent information. For instance, Hoover (2010) discussed a recent College Board Conference where discussions focused on the characteristics of transfer

students and on the need to build transfer receptive cultures at four year institutions. This is certainly in accordance with the NSSE (2008) perspective. According to Hoover (2010), some experts at the conference echoed the call for destination institutions to do more to help transfer students become successful during the transition. Further, discussions included the idea that creating a transfer receptive culture means that colleges must make transfer students' success an institutional priority, getting 'buy-in' from faculty, presidents, trustees, and legislators rather than only relying on transfer students as part of a strategy to fulfill enrollment goals (Hoover, 2010).

Some colleges are beginning a larger effort to understand and serve the transfer student population. In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Lipka (2008) reports, for example, that the State University of New York College at Oswego has begun a program of peer mentors for transfer students, which it promotes at local community colleges. A visit to the college's website confirms a full-time transfer coordinator. There is no official orientation program, but transfer students are invited to sign up for a campus tour and to attend the same open house program as freshman students (State University of New York at Oswego, 2011).

Similarly, Lipka (2008) reported that the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) recently established some transfer student services, including a course for transfer students that meets once a week which is led by staff members and student mentors. The optional four credit course is entitled Transfer Success Course, ED 118 (University of California Santa Barbara, 2011). The course requires transfer students to engage with the campus in a variety of ways, for example, participating in study skills workshops in the university's learning center, taking stress management sessions at the counseling center, and undertaking various activities with student organizations (Lipka, 2008).

All transfer students at UCSB receive a monthly e-newsletter announcing events, workshops, advice, deadlines, and other topics of relevance. Additionally, UCSB has established a Transfer Student Association whose purpose is to facilitate an easier transition for transfer students through academic workshops and social activities. Although there is no permanent transfer student office at UCSB, school representatives have dedicated job duties to assist transfer students enrolling at the university (University of California Santa Barbara, 2011).

Lipka (2008) also reported that at Texas Tech University (TTU), transfer students can make their voices heard by serving on a council that reports to the Student Government Association (Lipka, 2008). I was unable to confirm this during a visit to the college's website. Information regarding transfer students at TTU's website was fragmentary and not well organized. There is no specific orientation for transfer students at TTU, but they are invited to register with freshman students for a two day orientation event (Texas Tech University, 2011). Another reporter has discussed TTU's transfer student support programs after interviews with the Director of the Center for Campus Life (Mangan, 2009); however, this account of peer mentors and an advisory council for transfer students is also not verifiable through the college's website. Similarly, the University of North Texas, Texas A & M University, and the Texas Association of Community Colleges have partnered to develop the *Transfer 101* program, a web-based information site providing instructions on choosing a four-year school, applying for financial aid, and transferring credits. The program is accessible throughout the state's 50 community colleges (Mangan, 2009).

At Our Lady of the Lake University in Texas, personal success coaching services were offered to all first-year and transfer students. The program was funded by a one-time grant from

AT&T. The idea was to establish a peer mentoring program to help improve graduation rates (Farrell, 2007). A visit to the college's website revealed no mention of services for transfer students specifically and no evidence of continuing program life for personal success coaches (Our Lady of the Lake University, 2011).

### **Programs for Transfer Students in Missouri**

Despite a lack of literature on transfer student support programs, we can compare some current local orientation program offerings for new students and transfer students in the context of the programs already discussed. At Missouri State University, for instance, newly enrolled students must participate in a mandatory one and a half day orientation program. Transfer students at that school are required to take an online orientation presentation and quiz. An email link is provided for those students who have questions. Both student populations have significant information available on the college's website. Transfer students are provided with links to inquire about financial aid, housing, and advising among others. What is significant is that transfer students receive no face-to-face contact with representatives from the receiving school. Additionally, there is no dedicated permanent presence on campus specifically for the support of transfer students (Missouri State University, 2011).

This is also the situation at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and at the University of Missouri-Columbia, both of which have no permanent office dedicated to transfer students. Freshmen at the former must attend a mandatory one day orientation session, while transfer students can enroll in a non-mandatory four hour orientation for either day or evening students (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2011). Similarly, the University of Missouri-Columbia

provides access to transfer evaluators through its website for prospective transfer students, and provides non-mandatory summer, fall, and winter orientation sessions for new students (University of Missouri, 2011).

Additionally, the University of Missouri's Transfer Interest Group (TRIG) seminar has 12 available semester long one-credit courses organized by major and facilitated by a faculty member and a peer tutor (University of Missouri, 2011). Grouping by majors seems efficacious because it allows departments to customize the release of information to students entering the specific academic major or program, and can even include the chance to meet with some departmental faculty (Flaga, 2006). The use of peer tutors is widely accepted as a strong component of orientation type programs (Austin, 1988).

Since there is a dearth of research on this type of program, it is difficult to know whether there are similar programs for transfer students in four-year colleges across the country. This program should be considered as a seminar for transfer students. Very little information exists on the University of Missouri website about the TRIG program. Students are referred to information contained in the admissions packet which is mailed to prospective students by request (University of Missouri, 2011), and they may receive an email invitation from a Transfer Interest Group (TRIG) co-facilitator who represents a particular department or program once they have been accepted.

Information disseminated to transfer students at the fall transfer student orientation at the university includes a solicitation with information about the TRIG and refers students to their academic advisor who can sign them up for the program. Despite its relative lack of publicity, the TRIG at the University of Missouri has been developed expressly to socialize and integrate interested transfer students. Faculty members representing various departments on campus (e.g.,

journalism, agriculture, and biology), facilitate the sections along with peer tutors who are former transfer students. The sections vary in duration and meet once or twice a week, but not necessarily for the entire semester (University of Missouri, 2012).

The lack of information available on the university's website regarding the TRIG program may be unfortunate for prospective transfer students in general, because besides telephone and email, information accessed on the internet is likely a transfer student's main source of contact with the college. If a student simply wants information and does not specifically request an admission's packet, there is no detailed information available about the program. Again, other than a visit to the Admission's Office, transfer students at the University of Missouri have no permanent office or face-to-face representative dedicated specifically to their support.

St. Louis University offers two distinct programs to assist transfer students make their adjustment. The first is SLU 101 Transfer Student Orientation, a one day program for transfer students that provides an opportunity to meet with a representative from the Dean's Office who will review college degree requirements and policies with the student. Transfer students can also meet individually with an academic advisor (St. Louis University, 2011b). The second support program at St. Louis University for transfer students is the TRANSFERmation program. This is a six week orientation program for transfer students entering during the fall semester and appears to be a short term seminar. The program is led by former transfer students who plan events, answer questions, and provide mentoring. St. Louis University provides a detailed schedule of events online that includes transition checklists for each level of transfer student by grade level, including first year, sophomore, junior, and senior or unique program (St. Louis University, 2011c). The use of peer mentors is similar to the way the University of Missouri presents its

TRIG classes by using peer tutors (St. Louis University, 2011c, University of Missouri, 2011).

It is common for schools to offer a summer welcome for newly enrolled students (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2011; Missouri State University, 2011; University of Missouri, 2011; St. Louis University, 2011a), but it may too impractical to do this at all schools, depending on the number of transfer students enrolling. Transfer students are generally invited to attend these events for freshman students.

### **Summary**

This chapter opened with a discussion of timing challenges for transfer students and examined the literature on transfer student adjustment in terms of psychological, academic, and campus climate factors. Although there is a dearth of literature on support programs for transfer students or community college transfer students, I examined existing literature on seminars, orientation programs, and discussed the importance of family involvement, as well as used the literature on freshman adjustment where appropriate. Moreover, I examined examples of transfer student support programs across the country and in the state of Missouri. In Chapter 3, I will discuss my qualitative research design and methodology.

### **Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methods**

In this chapter I will discuss my research design and methodology. I will begin with some background material on the research site, explore contextual material on the nature of qualitative research, refresh my discussion of social cognitive theory, discuss data sources, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and delimitations, and conclude with a brief discussion of transferability.

#### **Background**

The University of Missouri is a large land grant university with a high level of research intensity. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 established land grant institutions as a means to provide the public with a liberal and practical education (Washington State University, 2014). Today, this democratic role of the University of Missouri as a land grant institution is realized by a historical and intimate connection with the community colleges in Missouri. This relationship provides the means for community college transfer students to complete their baccalaureate education and allows broad access to higher education for all the citizens of the state.

The university has a compelling popular reputation and is buttressed by widespread local and national recognition. The undergraduate student body consists mainly of traditional age and full-time students, and the institution is the flagship for the state system, providing an extensive Greek experience as well as NCAA Division I athletics. The campus itself is physically daunting, extending well into the heart of the old downtown area of the local community, with tendrils of activity spreading far and wide, bounded by the bustling commuter highways of midMissouri, and requiring many students to park in common areas and rely on provided bus shuttles for transportation to and from campus.

## **Design and Methodology**

In the broadest sense, I conducted basic naturalistic research to add fundamental knowledge concerning the perceptions of community college transfer students regarding their adjustment during the transfer process to a large research extensive university. There is a dearth of literature on the adjustment of transfer students in general, but this research adds to our understanding of community college transfer student adjustment in particular, and also addresses Townsend's (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Townsend, 2008) call for investigating this topic from a fresh perspective focusing on the perceived needs of community college transfer students.

Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data that is not easily reduced to numbers. Consequently, among the beneficial qualities of using qualitative methods is that they allow inquiry into selected issues in great depth, with particular and careful attention to detail, context, and nuance (Patton, 2002). Ideally, the design of a qualitative study will be emergent and flexible (Merriam, 2009). As one prominent researcher remarks, "The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information" (Creswell, 2009, p. 176).

Patton (2002) tells us that data collection methodology need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories in qualitative research, so it seemed appropriate to modify existing broad categories in the literature on transfer student adjustment for the purposes of this research. I focused my attention on academic, social, and personal adjustment factors as an initial loose organizational framework. Because environmental context has a direct effect on individuals' adjustment, during the investigation process I evaluated contextual data about the efficacy and impact on community college transfer students' adjustment of the various

orientation and support programs that have been instituted at the University of Missouri to smooth the path for new transfer students.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework for my research is Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which asserts that individuals possess a self-regulatory system that helps them exercise some measure of control over their motivation, thoughts and feelings, and their actions (Pajares, 1996a; Pajares, 1996b). Social cognitive theory is based on the power of self-belief to alter individuals' behavior, to reflect on that decision and the outcome, and perhaps to plan an alternative course of action for a possible next time. The beliefs individuals have about their capabilities are powerful influences on their behavior, and self-perceptions shape what individuals actually do with their knowledge and skills (Bandura, 1986). Central to understanding social cognitive theory is the notion of triadic reciprocity. Triadic reciprocity is the interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors wherein individuals are both producers of their own environments, and products of their environments because their personal agency is always rooted in the social context (Pajares, 1996a).

Using social cognitive theory as a theoretical framework was advantageous because the theory deals with how people interpret their reality, and how people use their life and situational experience to guide and revise their behavior. Consequently, my inquiries provided the opportunity to identify the concerns and challenges of the community college transfer students in my study, and helped me to paint a perceptual portrait of their individual and collective adjustment during the process of becoming a student at a new college, that in most instances was quite different from their previous school.

I used the conceptual lenses of locus of control (LOC) and self-efficacy, which derive from social cognitive theory, as tools to provide additional perspective and to help shape my inquiry. As conceptual tools, LOC and self-efficacy provided avenues to reveal innate feelings about control of life events and self-held feelings about personal ability and the desire to succeed. Accordingly, both my theoretical framework and the conceptual lenses were very complimentary and proved to be entirely appropriate choices as the foundation and overall umbrella for my inquiry.

### **Data Sources**

**Unit of analysis.** The unit of analysis in this research is the adult community college transfer student 18 years of age and older. This is an appropriate choice for qualitative research. According to Patton (2002), individual people or students are often the unit of analysis in research. The focus of data collection should be on what is happening to individuals in a particular setting and how those individuals are affected by the setting (Patton, 2002), which aligns with my focus on the perception of community college transfer students about their adjustment to the new setting of a major research university.

**Inclusion criteria.** The criteria for inclusion in this research as a participant were broad. The main considerations were that the student was an adult community college transfer student 18 years of age or older who has been accepted into a degree-seeking program at the University of Missouri. Students who transferred from four-year schools or for other reasons, such as lifelong learning or non-degree seeking reasons, were excluded from consideration. The number of credits transferred was fairly broad as a factor in determining inclusion in the study. A minimum threshold of 12 credits transferred seemed reasonable because any less than that

suggested the transfer student was more akin to being a freshman. This discussion is fully visited in Chapter one, *definition of transfer student*.

**Participants.** Participants included in this research are a sub-population of the general transfer student population at the University of Missouri. The potential participants in this research included 1040 students. This specifically includes 456 former Missouri community college students who were new transfers to the University of Missouri in the fall semester of 2012, 356 former Missouri community college students who were new transfers in the fall semester of 2013, and 228 graduating seniors who were former community college transfer students and who applied for graduation in December, 2012, or May, 2013, at the University of Missouri. These data were provided to one of my dissertation committee members by the University of Missouri Enrollment Management Support Services in the form of three informational contact lists, one for each of the above-mentioned groups, and then disseminated to me. The demographic information on these contact lists of potential participants included only name and email address.

**Written data.** Written information sources for this research included two informational brochures and a written handout disseminated to transfer students. Additional textual information was available on the various web pages provided by the University of Missouri.

### **Participant Selection**

**Recruitment.** I used the community college transfer student contact lists to recruit transfer student participants in two ways. First, I recruited participants to complete a questionnaire of open-ended qualitative questions, the *Community College Transfer Student Adjustment* survey, which was accessed electronically by a link sent in a recruiting email. This recruitment request to take the survey was mass emailed to all students on the contact lists. The

Request to Take Survey is available as Appendix A.

The second use of the contact lists was through a mass email communication that requested a personal interview. The mass email request to transfer students for a personal interview contains the following elements: (a) a personal introduction and brief description of my research intent, (b) a request for participation (c) the nature of the requested participation, (d) a statement about confidentiality, and (e) contact information for me, my committee chair, and the Campus Institutional Research Board (CIRB) at the University of Missouri. The mass email communication Personal Interview Recruitment Request is available as Appendix B.

### **Data Collection**

Creswell (2009) tells us that in qualitative research the first step in the data collection process is to set the boundaries of activity for the research study. Accordingly, my research used specific qualitative data collection approaches: personal interviews, an open-ended questionnaire, and analysis of written and web-based information. All personal interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device and then transcribed for coding and analysis. The integration of data into my organizational framework was similar for both personal interviews and the survey responses from the online instrument.

**Field notes.** Field notes often take the form of self-memos and are considered data (Patton, 2002). I created 24 instances of field notes during the course of this research. Field notes were generally made immediately after a personal interview using a digital voice recorder transcribed verbatim, and then saved as an electronic file to supplement the interview and offer further insight. In some cases, I made field notes after listening to the recording of the interview a few days later. Field notes allowed me to articulate my impressions of the material covered in the personal interviews, and included thoughts on how that information fit into the emerging themes I noticed as the data collection process proceeded.

**Written information.** As noted in the earlier section on written data sources, written information for this research was very limited. I collected written information from the University of Missouri's numerous web pages. I visited the Office of New Student Programs and obtained orientation information that is disseminated directly to transfer students about Summer Welcome and Winter Welcome. Information about the Winter Welcome was a one page insert into the packet of the Summer Welcome information, which is what students transferring in the spring semester are given.

**Pilot test.** While working on the preliminary stages of this research, I was able to pilot test some potential questions for the survey instrument through the venue of a focus group. This focus group event was hosted by the Commission on Student Success—Transfer Students Work Group, which was facilitated by one of my dissertation committee members for the Provost's Office at the University of Missouri during the fall semester 2012. Anecdotal conversations with my advisor revealed this working committee was mandated in 2011 to review and identify impediments to transfer student success, and identify potential strategies and solutions to increase the rate of transfer student success with regard to retention and persistence to graduation. I submitted potential questions for the semi-structured interview guide that was used at the event by my dissertation committee member and a few of those questions were reflected in modified form in the final interview guide that was used. I used the intent and tone of the focus group interview guide and reworked some of the questions for use in my own survey instrument. The questions used in the Provost's Office Focus Group event are available as Appendix D.

**Survey instrument.** My online survey, *Community College Transfer Student Adjustment*, was hosted by the firm SurveyMonkey.com, and except for the initial qualifying questions, contained 34 open-ended questions. Using SurveyMonkey.com offered the

convenience of easy set-up of the survey instrument and the ability to obtain an up-to-date count of responses. I was able to download the completed surveys at any time as an Excel file, which matched my organizational structure. The survey instrument is prefaced by the Statement of Informed Consent and requires participants to check a box indicating they had read and understood the statement. The survey has initial questions to identify whether the student was an incoming community college transfer student or a graduating senior who was a former community college transfer student. Other questions ascertained whether the student met the other inclusion criteria for the study, such as the minimum 12 credit transfer threshold, as well as acceptance and enrollment in a degree-seeking program. The survey instrument, Community College Transfer Student Adjustment, is available as Appendix C.

I received the community college transfer student contact list of 456 new community college transfer students of the fall semester 2012, and the list of 228 graduating seniors who were former community college transfer students, in the last month of the spring semester 2013. This allowed me only a three and a half week window to petition students for personal interviews and to take the survey before the end of the semester. Additionally, students were becoming involved with finals and end of the semester commitments in their classes. I immediately sent a mass email request to take the survey to all students on both lists. Over the next two months, 73 participants took the survey. I received the contact list of 356 new fall community college transfer students for fall semester 2013 in the first week of September, 2013. I did a mass email two days later to request survey participants from that list and received 29 additional responses over the course of the semester. The total survey count from all solicitations was  $N = 102$ . Of this total, 88 were surveys with analyzable responses; 82 surveys were complete, and 6 surveys had partial, but useful information. The remaining 14 surveys were incomplete, with

respondents usually stopping after completing the qualifying questions. The time participants spent taking the survey ranged from one hour and 12 minutes to 16 minutes, with most respondents spending between 25 and 35 minutes.

**Personal interviews.** Qualitative inquiry is especially suited for researching perception through the use of in-depth personal interview (Merriam, 2009). Use of carefully crafted openended questions and intuitive follow-up probes and questions can provide fertile data for analysis. The personal in-depth interview becomes the vehicle to co-construct the meaning of research participants' experiences. This co-construction of meaning is inherent in the naturalistic process and among other factors, relies on the skill, intuition, and trustworthy methods of the researcher for an effective outcome.

I performed a mass email request for participants to interview on the same schedule I used for the survey requests, sending a personal request to all email addresses. I did the first mass email near the end of the spring semester 2013, immediately after receiving the contact lists for 456 new community college transfer students for fall semester 2012 and 228 graduating seniors. I was able to schedule and complete 22 personal interviews over the course of the next two months and three follow-up interviews for a total of 25 personal interviews from these requests. I did a similar mass email request two days after receiving the contact list for 356 new community college transfer for fall semester 2013 and was able to complete 16 additional personal interviews and eight follow-up interviews that included some participants from the previous semester, for a total of 24. The language of the request for the personal interview solicitation was approved for future interviews by the Institutional Research Board at the research site. The total of personal interviews conducted from all solicitations was  $N = 49$ .

**Interview guide.** The interview guide I used for interviewing community college transfer students was semi-structured. This approach allowed me to keep aware of the topics and major questions I needed to ask during the interviews, and also allowed for some flexibility by reminding me to use probes and follow-up queries which helped me to ask newly formulated questions ad hoc. A semi-structured interview guide can be as complex or as basic as the researcher requires (Patton, 2002). For the purposes of my individual style, the semi-structured interview guide I used was divided into the adjustment categories in the literature, for instance, academic, social, and personal adjustment. It contains numerous side notes and topical considerations that I used as the basis for probes and follow-up lines of questioning. These are generally in the form of short lists and were positioned to remind me to perform certain tasks, such as read the statement of informed consent and hand it out, and say thank-you at the conclusion of the interview. The semi-structured interview guide is available as Appendix E.

The intent or strategy of the data collection process in the personal interviews was not to ask the research subjects what they perceived their adjustment to be, but rather to discover it during the interview process and later iterations of data analysis and reflection. My intent in the personal interviews was always to prompt for stories about past events and to get some expression of self-held feelings from the participant. Establishing rapport in this fashion and asking questions that prompt the interviewee to open up and talk, and then guiding that discussion into profitable areas is a central strategy of good naturalistic inquiry (Patton, 2002).

My efficacy as the primary research tool in this research was in large part determined by my ability to quickly establish a friendly and approachable persona. I was as flexible as possible in setting appointments to meet with respondents to the request for personal interviews. I decided early on when preparing for data collection that the personal interviews would be

performed in public areas of the University of Missouri. Accordingly, all personal interviews were conducted at the StudentCenter, except for one that was done at the Ellis Library on campus.

I prefaced each interview with a sincere thank you, and asked for permission to use the digital voice recorder before reading and passing out the Statement of Informed Consent. I always asked a few quick questions to make sure the participant met the inclusion criteria for the study. The actual questioning in personal interviews varied by individual and depended on follow-up questions and probes to gain greater insight and guide the discussion. Depending on the narrative story of the respondent, the emphasis in the questioning varied among the thematic categories. My experience is that the most productive interviewing is as conversational and relaxed as possible. Since there was nothing particularly sensitive or controversial about my proposed lines of questioning, my personal interviews were informal. The majority of personal interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, with some that ran a little briefer and a few that went an hour or more. I ended each interview by thanking the participant, and asking for permission to follow-up at a later time with either an additional interview or some emailed questions.

**Inductive logic.** Qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration and discovery through the application of inductive logic (Patton, 2002). Data analysis should be an ongoing process that complements data collection, so I transcribed and then coded all interviews and field notes promptly. This allowed me to accomplish two things. First, I was able to maintain an ongoing research posture that was proactive and tended to immerse me in the data gathering process. This was significant for establishing dependability regarding the accuracy of the interpretation of the data, and in turn increased the overall credibility or trustworthiness of the research in the holistic sense. Second, an ongoing data analysis procedure supported a

naturalistic process that allows meaning to emerge, be analyzed, and interpreted over time. To aid in this process, I created six research memos during the course of the data collection procedure. The content of these memos contained reflections and insights about the aggregate data and helped me in the process of establishing thematic categories for the information. Similar to field notes, but broader in scope, these personal memos are also considered data (Patton, 2002).

**Types of relevant information.** For the purposes of this research, my interviewing required the research subjects to relate two general types of information. First, respondents were asked for *knowledge* answers that required them to remember previously learned information, for example, number of credits transferred. Second, research subjects were asked for *evaluation* answers. Evaluation answers require an individual to make or defend judgments based on some internal evidence or external criteria. The element of judgment, for instance, emerged in answers to questions asking respondents to describe an opinion or attitude toward a program or structured event, like the orientation they attended or their perception of the usefulness of participating in the Transfer Interest Group program at the University of Missouri (Bloom, 1971).

**Protection of human subjects.** This research is not controversial in any particular sense, used no deceptive practices, and had no issues of invasion of privacy. The study did not probe for or present any materials which subjects might conceivably have considered sensitive, offensive, threatening, or degrading. All participants were adults 18 years of age and older. I read the Statement of Informed Consent to every subject I interviewed and provided them with a copy. The contents of this statement included: (a) a brief description of the research intent, (b) the voluntary nature of participation and the rights of the research subject, (c) a disclaimer about the sensitivity and risk associated with my questioning, and (d) the specific measures planned to

ensure confidentiality. Additionally, (e) contact information for me, my advisor, and the CIRB were provided. The Statement of Informed Consent is available as Appendix C.

**Digital voice recordings.** I used a digital voice recorder for all personal interviews. I always asked permission for use of the device and subjects were informed they could have the recorder turned off or even discontinue the interview at any time. The audio recordings did not place subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, nor were they damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation in any way. I made a verbatim transcript of each personal interview from the digital recording using Dragon Naturally Speaking voice recognition software, and transcribed them in my private office so no one was able to overhear the remarks made by any given subject. I also used the digital recorder to create all instances of field notes and research memos. All recorded audio files exist as Mp3 files and the transcripts as MS Word documents. All files are stored on a portable flash drive with USB capability.

**Safeguarding collected data.** Confidentiality of personally identifiable information collected in this research was protected by specific measures to safeguard the data. I used Excel spreadsheet and MS Word software to create and save my documentation. I used generic references in my narrative, and used the assigned key identifiers in the narrative to cite personal communications. All collected data, whether in written or electronic form is currently stored in a locked file cabinet accessible only to me in my personal office. This includes the portable flash drive with Excel spreadsheets, MS Word files, and Mp3 files. Written information includes collected informational brochures, hard copies of transcripts, field notes, and memos used for line by line coding, and various analysis worksheets done in pencil through iterations of examining the accumulating data. These information sources form the basis of my audit trail, are accessible only to me, and will be made available only to members of my dissertation committee.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research is a calculated, analytical, and organized process. Although this might suggest a linear approach from bottom up, it is actually more interactive in practice. Creswell (2009) suggests that researchers should work from the specific to the general with the data and then use multiple levels of analysis. My initial analysis was guided by my framework of social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory asserts that individuals reflect over time on their life experiences and adjust their behavior along the way (Bandura, 1986). Regarding the conceptual tools of social cognitive theory, locus of control reflects individuals' innate worldview in terms of being controlled or being in control, and self-efficacy reflects individuals' deeply held opinions of their own ability to successfully complete challenges that arise in life. Using locus of control (LOC) and self-efficacy as conceptual lenses provided a meaningful basis to begin interpretation of the information I gathered and helped me to understand more fully the essence of my participants' narratives.

**Organizational framework.** Because of the vast amount of data collected, my organizational structure for this research needed to be flexible, as well as graphically efficacious. I decided to use a spreadsheet approach. I titled my spreadsheet for personal interviews Audit Trail. It allowed me to assign individual keys to interview participants, keys for field notes, research memos, follow-up communications for member checking, and all transcripts, as well as enter appropriate activity dates for reference and any future audit of this research. The various contact lists of potential participants were also all in the form of Excel spreadsheets. In these spreadsheets, I made appropriate entries to identify recruitment dates for the mass emails. The recruitment emails themselves have been collected into a folder and are also stored on the flash drive.

**Preparing the data.** The data analysis process began with assembling the raw data. This included transcripts of personal interviews, collected survey data downloaded from SurveyMonkey.com in the form of an Excel spreadsheet, the Audit Trail spreadsheet with its associated dates and identifier keys, and printed field notes and research memos. All audio recordings of personal interviews were transcribed verbatim and then printed for use as hard copies. Field notes were transcribed, printed, and then were paper-clipped to their corresponding transcript. Creswell (2009) remarks that the goal in preparing an analysis should be to obtain some general sense of the data and to do some reflection on the overall meaning of the information. In this respect, my analysis was ongoing and I performed numerous readings of data as they were gathered.

**Coding the data.** The iterative nature of the analysis process wherein data is coded, analyzed, reflected upon, and then re-analyzed in the light of some new insight or new data is one of the strengths of naturalistic inquiry. The level of engagement of the researcher thus forms a basis to increase the trustworthiness of the process by attention to nuance and detail, reflection, use of thick description, and total immersion in the data gathering and analysis process (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2009). All data were coded for themes, patterns, or topical categories. Margins were set on the hard copies of personal interview transcripts, field notes, and memos so that text only went halfway across the page, leaving ample room for my coding notations on the right half of the page. Page numbers and continuous line numbers were added to each. The relevant thematic categories emerged from the aggregate data over time. I organized and reflected on the collected data as soon as possible, rather than waiting until all the data were collected. All coding was done using the line by line method (Patton, 2003). The process was orderly, very labor intensive, and subject to numerous iterations over the course of the research.

While I read the various survey responses as they accumulated, I did not begin coding the information until I downloaded the data. I did two downloads of survey results, one after approximately two months of data collection near the end of the spring semester 2013, and again near the end of fall semester 2013. Preparing the survey data for analysis was time consuming and labor intensive. My approach was to create a new spreadsheet of downloaded results. Using Excel, I created a new workbook tab for each question in the survey, and cut and pasted all the relevant comments for each question into the relevant tabs. This allowed me to concentrate on the responses to each question without distraction and left ample room in the individual worksheet for analysis. Using the various columns adjacent to the response column, I identified potential quotations by using red colored boxes to identify the row. I then labeled the red box with the possible thematic category, because sometimes respondents would either not answer the question itself, but give a response to something else, or would answer the question with multiple answers, some of which pertained to other topics, or would make conflicting statements within the same answer.

Flagging the information in this manner made identification easier, and adding the descriptive labels made it easier to collate thematic data as the research proceeded. This led me to perform many iterations through the survey results over time, as I would tend to look through question responses that contained a variety of topical responses. For instance, one question on the survey asks for the student to relate the biggest challenge the student faced during the transfer process. Responses to this were incredibly diverse topically, and provided a mother lode of individual stories and a wealth of analyzable data that cut across the themes and sub-themes I had identified. I created many small tables to summarize the various types of responses to each question and to record whatever brief analysis I had begun. As the analysis proceeded and I

began to use specific material from the survey responses in my narrative, I colored the specific participant response green to show that I had used it as a quotation. As far as an audit trail goes, knowing the subject matter of the quote used leads easily to the particular question on the spreadsheet. A scan down the column of the green colored quotations quickly allows one to find the specific quote.

I conducted the coding process of personal interviews, field notes, and memos by writing notes, thoughts, and potential category labels in the margins of the hard copies, using the line and interview numbers for reference. Additionally, I identified potential quotations for use. My first inclination was to code the personal interviews and then enter the identified information into a spreadsheet by thematic category, using transcript and line numbers for follow-up. I soon realized how time consuming this process was, and that it had become an exercise in entering and maintaining the data, rather than one of analysis and reflection. Subsequently, I stopped making coded entries into the spreadsheet and decided to work from hard copies of the individual transcripts. I identified instances of emerging themes on the individual transcripts, and made numerous changes over time as the themes emerged and achieved meaning. The research memos during this early period contained my thoughts at the time about some of the trends I was noticing in the personal interviews.

As I used specific quotations from the personal interviews, I highlighted the information in green on the hard copy of the transcript. Any quotation from personal interviews can easily be referenced by using the key assigned to the citation and finding the appropriately green highlighted information in the corresponding hard copy of the interview. For ease of use, transfer student keys and transcript keys were organized for an easy audit. For instance, CC5 means community college transfer student number five, and T5 is the associated transcript for

that interview. A follow-up interview was assigned a key such as T5A to show that the interview was with CC5 and was the second interview.

**Constant comparative method.** The coding process used was the constant comparative method that uses inductive logic to compare the data to other known data sources. The intent of proceeding through the data line by line is to find the most descriptive wording and categorize it in some useful way (Merriam, 2009). The use of constant comparison in this research meant that data, for example, a personal interview broken down into its topical components, was compared with previous data from personal interviews and survey responses, as well as being considered on its own (Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

Constant comparison also enables the researcher to identify emerging or unanticipated themes within the research project (Anderson, 2010), and is widely used in all kinds of qualitative studies (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, the thematic categories ought to emerge from the data over time as the amount of data collected increased, which I found to be the case. These distinctions also transformed over time as categories were combined and rearranged to most accurately reflect the interrelationships in the data that directly addressed my central research question (Creswell, 2009).

It was necessary to code the data numerous times, particularly near the end of the process when I began to write the analysis. As Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009) suggest, iteration in this manner increases the dependability of the research over the length of the study. As I gathered the data, I reviewed how the information might fit into the thematic categories of community college transfer student adjustment I had chosen, and reflected anew on the appropriateness of the category labels.

Initially, I used personal, academic, and social factors as salient thematic categories because this approach reflected the general thrust of the open-ended online survey instrument, and anchored my personal interviews by targeting elements of adjustment well established in the literature. This turned out to be an efficacious process that worked well with my ongoing coding analysis, but I soon realized that although the elements I investigated were highly relevant to my inquiry about perception of adjustment, the themes that spoke to me possessed an appropriate feel of *rightness* about them and were coalescing into a different sort of taxonomy than those I had found in the literature. I will discuss the thematic categories in-depth in Chapter 4.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is judged by its trustworthiness. The notion of trustworthiness as a means for evaluating qualitative research can best be described in terms of balance, fairness, and completeness (Patton, 2002). I attempted to enrich trustworthiness by triangulating data sources, seeking a holistic perspective, performing numerous iterations of the accumulated data, providing a clear audit trail to ensure dependability, performing member checks, doing follow-up interviews, illuminating any discrepant information, acknowledging my reflexivity, and maintaining a stance of empathic neutrality.

**Substantive significance.** Since qualitative research does not rely on statistical significance, research findings are judged by their substantive significance (Patton, 2002). Substantive significance can be determined by the solidity, coherence, and consistency of the evidence that is presented. As well, substantive significance is a result of the extent and the ways the research findings increase and deepen understanding of the phenomenon involved, or to what extent the findings are useful for some intended purpose (Patton, 2002).

**Triangulation.** Triangulation of data will vary depending on the context of the research.

As Yin (2009) puts it, "For example, some studies have relied only on participant-observation but have not examined a single document; similarly, numerous studies have relied on archival records but have not involved a single interview" (Yin, 2009, p. 114). Certainly, this is not a justification that a research study not strive for triangulation, but rather a reflection on the nature of qualitative research that any qualitative inquiry is unique to its context and participants, as well as unique in the interpretations of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). My multiple sources for triangulation include: (a) personal interviews with new incoming community college transfer students, (b) personal interviews with graduating seniors who are former community college transfer students, (c) follow-up interviews, (d) data collected from open-ended survey questions, and, (e) information from written materials and web pages. Using multiple data sources in qualitative research also helps to create a holistic view. This means reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and developing the larger picture. In other words, the researcher must recognize and discuss supporting references across data sources (Creswell, 2009).

**Dependability.** The dependability of my research is strengthened by the creation of a clear *audit trail* that reflects the systematic collection, organization, and inter-connectedness of my information and various analyses (Merriam, 2009; Roberts, 2010). Another researcher should be able to follow in my footsteps by identifying my informational sources, easily locating the pertinent information in my safeguarded files, and then verifying the accuracy and authenticity of that information as well as the sources where I obtained the information.

As discussed earlier in the section *coding the data*, I created an audit trail by consciously linking distinct elements in my research to specific keys contained in Excel spreadsheet tables.

As Merriam (2009) puts it, an audit trail “in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). Anyone performing an audit of my research could quickly find, for example, the quote from any given interviewee in the narrative in the specific transcript used. The same process applies to identifying individual quotations from survey respondents. Knowing the contextual information of the quote, the specific response to the question can easily be located in the spreadsheet. As well, I have collected the various note sheets such as Appendix F Thematic Categories, hard copies with hand-written line by line coding, interview appointment notes, and so forth, into folders for storage.

**Illuminating contrary evidence.** Another way I developed trustworthiness in the present research was through a balanced approach to data collection and analysis. This meant searching for any evidence that seemed contrary to the emerging themes or understandings of the research data (Creswell, 2009). Patton (2002) says that qualitative researchers should actively search out alternative interpretations to the emerging meaning of their analyses. Presenting negative or discrepant information adds to credibility by giving an analysis a sense of authenticity or realism (Creswell, 2009). This also enhances trustworthiness by affirming the integrity of the researcher. Further, reporting failure to find alternative explanations also helps create confidence in the original explanation put forth by the researcher (Merriam, 2009). In either case, having adopted this posture speaks to the fairness and completeness that Patton (2002) stresses are vital components of insuring the overall trustworthiness of any qualitative study.

**Member checks.** Using member checks addresses the ethical issue in data analysis and interpretation that might arise from inappropriate conduct or intent during the research

process (Creswell, 2009). As Roberts (2010) remarks, what is paramount is the accuracy of the data and the adoption by the researcher of an ethical stance to be nonbiased, accurate, and honest. Member checking helps to create credibility and furthers trustworthiness by ensuring that interview data are accurate and that any tentative interpretations are plausible from the perspective of the people from whom they were derived (Roberts, 2010; Merriam, 2009). In other words, member checks are part of a proactive process to check with the research subject to see if the narrative has authenticity and *rings true* (Merriam, 2009).

I performed 22 member check inquiries by email, and received 11 responses. Five member checks were sent out to students I interviewed during the spring semester 2013 and I received three responses. The remaining member checks were performed during the fall semester 2013 and eight of the 18 interviewees responded. There exists no definitive standard to determine the number of member checks for any particular research study; however, according to Merriam (2009) some qualitative researchers feel member checks should be part of the ongoing data collection and analysis process, which is the posture I adopted for this research.

Accordingly, my member check requests were spread out over the data collection period.

Member checking does not necessarily mean submitting raw transcripts for review, but rather parts of the narrative work in progress that include elements like descriptions, quotes or paraphrases, or descriptions of themes and so forth (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). My approach was to send an email to students I had interviewed and ask for verification of something they had told me. For instance, I emailed one student for verification that she told me she looked young enough that most of her fellow students had no idea she was a couple of years older, and that she was more or less interested in the same sort of social activities that most

young people are interested in. She replied and verified the accuracy of the information and invited me to email her with any other questions that I had.

This situation caused me to realize that performing the member check would not only give me a way to verify the accuracy of my interpretation, but also provide an opportunity to obtain more information. In this case, I followed up with four open-ended multi-part questions derived from reviewing the interview transcript, the field notes I had created for that interview, and from the context of the current themes that I was exploring in my ongoing analysis. This was in alignment with my approval from the research site's Institutional Research Board for asking for follow-up interviews.

My research participant took the time to write detailed answers and returned the email to me within a week. Creswell (2009) tells us that member checking in this fashion can result in a follow-up interview for clarification, which can be done in person, but also by telephone or email. In this case it was efficacious to use email because I had already established a personal rapport with the research participant, and it was much more convenient for the student because of her busy schedule. I used this basic approach in all of my member checks, in other words, of asking for verification of information already obtained combined with a request for either another interview or being able to submit some additional questions for the student to answer.

**Researcher competencies.** Because the researcher is the primary research tool in naturalistic inquiry, the researcher must possess a number of specific competencies. These include taking a questioning stance with regard to the research material, as well as looking inward and examining one's own background and experiences that may contribute to researcher bias (Merriam, 2009). By bracketing my reflexivity and open acknowledgement of the praxis inherent in performing research in a natural setting (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009), as a

qualitative researcher I am also able to reinforce the trustworthiness of the present research study.

**Reflexivity.** My reflexivity includes that I am a middle-aged white male and middle class member of the dominant cultural group in our society. There is no doubt that my background and life experiences have shaped the attitudes I hold about people and society. This could have significance because some community college transfer students are members of various minority groups, may have low income, and might possess life perspectives with which I am unfamiliar. My role as the central research tool means I bring my individual bounded rationality with me in all the analyses and choices made during the research process. On the other hand, I have no particular agenda with regard to these transfer students or any of the sub-groups. If anything, I am sympathetic to them as a whole. I identify with community college transfer students in some respects because I have been one myself and also a transfer student several times during my academic career. I work with students on a daily basis in my role as a faculty member with advising responsibilities, and certainly this has broadened my horizons with regard to actual interaction with diverse types of students.

**Empathic neutrality.** The trustworthiness of any qualitative research effort must go beyond such bracketing by the researcher. The qualitative researcher is obligated to work towards a state of *empathic neutrality*. This notion describes a stance that strives to be nonjudgmental towards individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Patton, 2002). Being empathically neutral is especially important while interviewing.

The skilled interviewer is able to improve the accuracy, authenticity, and reliability of the interview process through intensive training (Patton, 2002). Certainly, the best way to gain experience in anything is by doing. I have gained the necessary experience for this research by

conducting numerous preliminary interviews, crafting and pilot testing potential interview questions, and designing interview protocols. I have interviewed numerous students for scholarship applications, internships, and coursework advising in my capacity as a professor in higher education and I have developed and taught a basic introductory course in qualitative research at the undergraduate level that immersed me in the procedures of naturalistic inquiry. I embraced empathic neutrality in this research effort because I knew it would strengthen the credibility of my narrative, and also simply because it is the right stance in general when dealing with people. I intended this final product to be richly descriptive, which is also an important competency required of the qualitative researcher that helps to establish credibility by creating depth (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2009).

**Depth vs. breadth.** While personal interviews provide depth for an investigation, breadth is also an important consideration (Patton, 2002). There are always trade-offs between depth and breadth when conducting qualitative research, and this is particularly significant when one examines the dependability, rigor, and trustworthiness of any qualitative study. The meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness and the observational or analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size (Patton, 2002). As Merriam (2009) says, “the best rule of thumb is that the data and emerging findings must feel saturated; that is, you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data: (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). This has been the case with this research effort. I found that the last few personal interviews were sounding very similar, and as well, the survey responses displayed numerous commonalities from beginning to end.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are simply to set the boundaries of the research and illuminate how the scope of the research has been focused (Roberts, 2010). In this case, I am bounded by time for datum collection to the spring semester 2013 and the fall semester 2013. I am also bounded to conduct research only at the University of Missouri and delimited by the choice to use only adult community college transfer students versus the entire transfer student population. This, however, allowed for sharper focus.

## **Transferability**

Transferability is concerned with the extent the findings of some given research can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 2009). The analyses and interpretations of the researcher need to convey as much of a feeling of authenticity as possible to those who read the study. In this sense, the researcher is obligated to provide high-quality input for the readers' reflection (Stake, 1995). This research depends on my ability to describe the results of my findings in a manner that evokes understanding. This means choosing the proper adjective that captures the intrinsic flavor of something, or using the appropriate verb to elicit a sense of action or process, or even the use of metaphorical language. In other words, transferability is facilitated by my use of rich narrative description that transports the reader to the setting and lends an air of shared experience to the telling.

As iterated in Chapter 1, the freshman experience is the foundation to understanding the many skeins of the transfer student adjustment experience. This information about the transfer student experience should be directly applicable to aiding ongoing support efforts at the University of Missouri, and at other colleges around the nation with similar institutional and transfer student population characteristics. This research should also be useful in interpreting the

level and type of services that are most effective in helping community college transfer students feel welcomed, and importantly, succeed.

As well, transferability benefits from the depth of triangulation I am able to achieve by using multiple data sources. In this case, the survey responses buttress the information from the personal interviews and the member checking. The overall results of my research ought to be useful to practitioners and scholars examining similar contexts with similar research populations, in other words, community college transfer students moving to a large research intensive university. An in-depth discussion of the usefulness or applicability of my research findings for practitioners will be conducted in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

This chapter covered the elements of my research design and methodology, including discussions of data sources, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, delimitations, and transferability. Chapter 4 will be a presentation of findings within the framework of the thematic categories of perceived adjustment that emerged during the course of the research.

## **Chapter 4 - Findings**

This chapter presents the findings of my qualitative research into community college transfer students' perception of adjustment and speaks directly to my research question: *How do community college transfer students perceive their adjustment experience at the University of Missouri?* As discussed in Chapter 3, my interpretation of data used an integrative approach and was an ongoing process. My analysis assumed a holistic stance and I make a clear distinction in the discussions between personal interview responses and responses from online survey participants.

Some demographic information is useful for establishing context. The participants in this research transferred from community colleges across the state of Missouri and all are adults 18 years of age or older pursuing bachelor's degrees or professional programs across a wide variety of disciplines. Many students I interviewed went directly from high school to the community college and later transferred, a few students attended two community colleges before transferring, two students transferred from out of state to a community college in Missouri, and two students went to four-year schools before moving to a community college and then transferring. Several of the interviewees and survey respondents were either in the National Guard or in the ROTC program in addition to their full-time student status.

A majority of the participants in this research, including interviewees and survey respondents, transferred from local community colleges closest to the University of Missouri. Table 3 reveals the widespread origins of the subjects in this research from two-year colleges across Missouri, the enrollment at those colleges, and an indication of whether any research participants in this study came from that specific two-year college.

Table 3

*Community College Origins of Research Participants*

| Two-year College               | Enrollment Fall 2009 | Participants (Y/N) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Crowder College                | 4780                 | Y                  |
| East Central College           | 4203                 | Y                  |
| Jefferson College              | 5788                 | N                  |
| Linn State Technical College   | 1142                 | Y                  |
| Metropolitan Community College |                      |                    |
| Blue River                     | 3124                 | Y                  |

|                                       |        |   |
|---------------------------------------|--------|---|
| Business & Technology Center          | 700    | N |
| Longview                              | 6165   | Y |
| Maple Woods                           | 4862   | Y |
| Penn Valley                           | 4638   | N |
| Mineral Area College                  | 3671   | Y |
| Missouri State University West Plains | 2150   | Y |
| Moberly Area Community College        | 4945   | Y |
| North Central Missouri College        | 1638   | Y |
| Ozarks Technical Community College    | 12,880 | Y |
| Saint Charles Community College       | 7814   | Y |
| Saint Louis Community College         |        |   |
| Florissant Valley                     | 7213   | Y |
| Forest Park                           | 8207   | Y |
| Meramec                               | 11,188 | Y |

Table 3

*Community College Origins of Research Participants*

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| Two-year College               | Enrollment Fall 2009 | Participants (Y/N) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| <hr/>                          |                      |                    |
| Saint Louis Community College  |                      |                    |
| Wildwood                       | 1401                 | Y                  |
| State Fair Community College   | 4263                 | Y                  |
| Three Rivers Community College | 3527                 | N                  |

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Enrollment information from Missouri Department of Higher Education (2014).

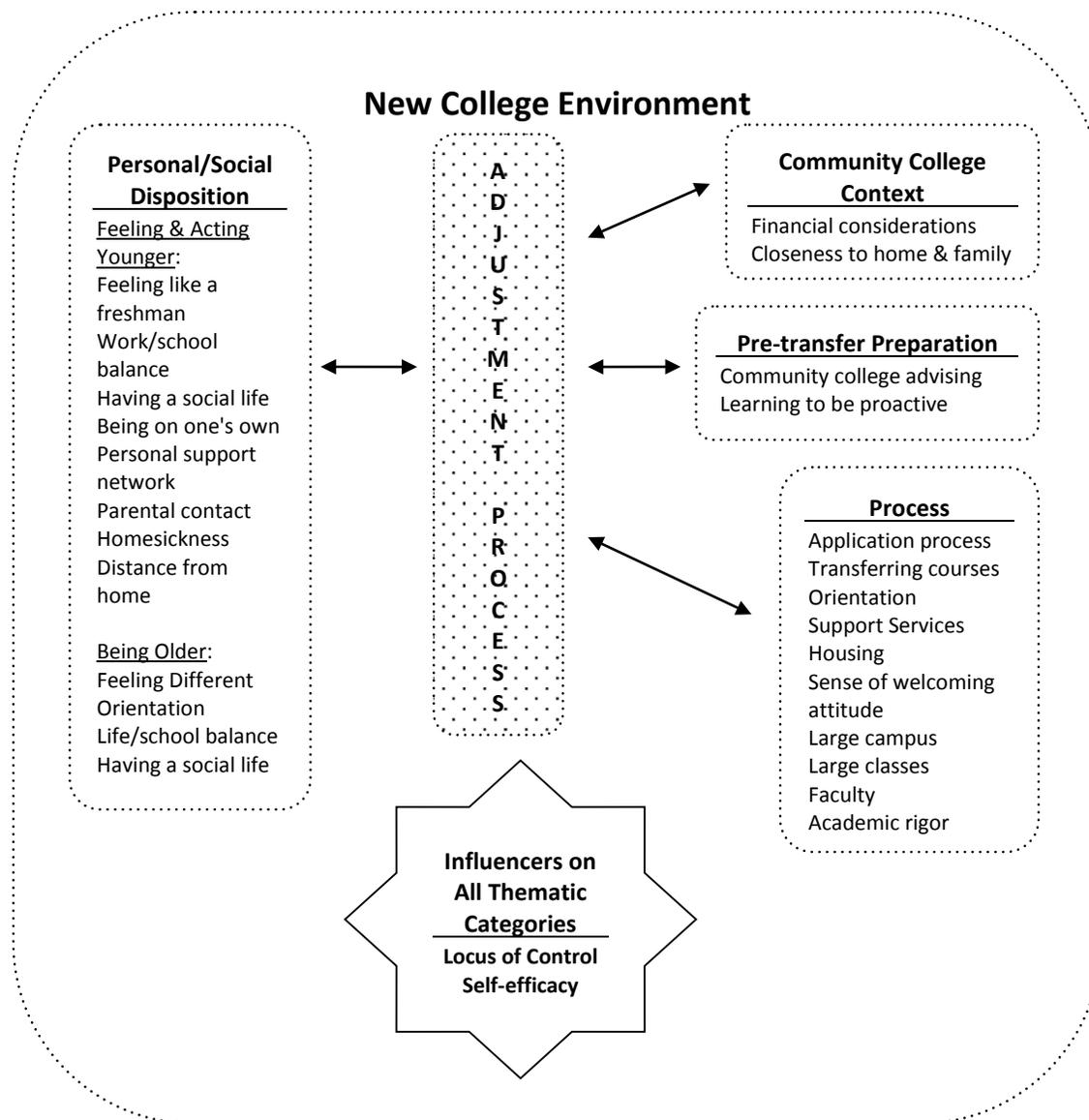
As Table 3 indicates, participants in this research came from the majority of two-year colleges in Missouri. As the enrollment figures indicate, however, thousands of students attend most of these community colleges, and total enrollment at Missouri community colleges in 2009 exceeded 100,000 students. As discussed earlier, I was able to obtain 49 personal interviews from community college transfer students and survey information from 88 students.

Subsequently, transferability of the findings from this research must include the caveat that while the majority of participants in this research came from community colleges closest to the University of Missouri, only a few students likely came from any specific school across the state and therefore the results and findings relating to any specific community college can be understood only in terms of the perceptions of the participants in this study and certainly are not applicable in a generalized sense to a particular community college or to community colleges in Missouri in general.

Research findings in this chapter are expressed in terms of the thematic categories of community college transfer student adjustment ultimately derived from the data: *community college context*, *pre-transfer preparation*, *personal/social disposition*, and *process*. The roadmap for the remainder of this chapter is to present findings within the framework of the thematic categories. *Figure 2* is a graphic representation of the interaction of the four thematic adjustment categories, including the relevant sub-themes, within the context of a new college environment.

*Figure 2*

The Adjustment Process



As *Figure 2* indicates, the adjustment process for community college transfer students at the four-year institution takes place within a new college environment. Similarly, adjustment interaction within the themes of *community college context* and *pre-transfer preparation* also happens in a new college environment, the community college environment, and takes place before the student transfers to the four-year institution. Moreover, as *Figure 2* depicts, adjustment to the elements within all of the themes are influenced by students' innate locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Thematic Categories**

The construction of the four thematic categories of community college transfer student adjustment developed over the course of this investigation and was accompanied by many changes, revisions, and reevaluations of the material during the course of numerous iterations of data analysis. A glimpse into the early creation process of these categories may somewhat be revealed by looking at one of my note sheets, which is available as Appendix F, Thematic Categories. These thematic categories are generally interrelated. Each theme is composed of sub-themes that in turn contain individual dimensions.

The sub-themes and dimensions within the thematic categories were particularly influenced by the locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs of the research participants. Depending on their unique individual circumstances and personal/social dispositions, and shaped somewhat by their individual self-efficacy and locus of control beliefs, community college transfer students engage in an ongoing process of adaptation to the new college environment at the University of Missouri. Accordingly, in the next section I will present findings relating to locus of control and self-efficacy.

### **Locus of Control**

Community college transfer students in this research overwhelmingly seemed to have an internal locus of control (LOC), which was revealed in a variety of statements. One student revealed an inner bias with this statement, saying, "Nothing is more satisfying to me than if I get a good grade on a test and I know that I really studied for it. That just proves that hard work pays off" (CC1). Another student also revealed an internal LOC when saying this about her strategy for dealing with large classes, "I couldn't get to the front row because I was always late. I usually had

Cs in that class. I just didn't feel very involved" (CC4). While discussing the academic rigor of her classes, one student said this, almost laying out a definition for internal locus of control:

So I got a C on a paper and it was because I did the paper in an hour and a half. I mean realistically if you're going to sit here and try and blame your failures on somebody else, I know that it was because I didn't do the work. It sucks when you fail and you are the blame, but it's great when you achieve as well (CC2).

### **Self-efficacy**

One way to understand self-efficacy beliefs is by examining an individual's level of determination. Transfer students in this research study reported overwhelmingly their high level of determination to finish with a bachelor's degree. One survey respondent said, "I will absolutely get my degree. I do not fail. Sometimes I stumble, but I will never give up." Another survey respondent said, "Determination is to the clouds and my confidence is just as high. I have no doubt in my mind that I will only keep improving in this new experience." Interviewees I spoke to similarly reported, "I would just say that I know I'm going to get my degree, there is no plan B. I give 100% to plan A. If you give 100% to plan A, you won't have any regrets," (CC5) and, "Oh my goodness, it's pretty crazy how determined I am and I know that my heart's in it" (CC31). In spite of some setbacks, another student related his high level of determination by saying:

I wanted to come here for my whole life and I applied my senior year in high school and I didn't get in. I had a fairly low ACT score and good grades so that caused some problems and then I went to [local 4-year college] and then transferred to [community college] and I applied again and I finally got in (CC7). Transfer students sometimes experience unexpected events that alter their academic plans and in some cases change one's life forever. How individuals respond to these events can indicate their resilience to challenges and

shed some light on their self-efficacy beliefs. One student I interviewed had such an unexpected event, a tragic car accident that left him in a coma for six weeks, and cost him an 18 month hiatus from school when he was only a year from graduation. This student had to reapply to the university to finish his senior year. He said, "Not finishing was never an option, I never would, I didn't want to drop out" (CC17). Another student I interviewed related how the health of his father had affected his grades, saying, "At first they weren't too good, I kind of went through a pretty rough time with my dad. He had cancer so bad he got sick and so my grades kind of flopped a little for a while. And then I retok a couple of courses and got back in shape" (CC30).

The following list of verbatim interview comments is representative of the majority of student remarks indicating a high level of self-efficacy:

1. "I think it's a lot of the way I push myself. I can't settle for a B or something like that. I am somebody who wants to do the best that I can. My studies come first and I kinda go a little extra on certain things to get my grade up" (CC16).
2. "I feel pretty confident in myself, I strive to be the best. It's just a matter of determination" (CC1).
3. "I was homeschooled, so I have always had to kind of teach myself things, and I personally attribute a lot of my success to that" (CC10).
4. "I'm definitely confident because I really want it. After all this work, I'm not going to drop out or anything" (CC7).
5. "I mean I know for sure that I'm going to finish this and get my degree in journalism" (CC6).

As the representative comments indicate, students related a strong determination to reach their academic goals, most expressing a 'no defeat' attitude.

**Strategies for success.** Formulating a strategy to succeed in a new and challenging situation is one reflection of individuals' self-efficacy. Some students reported their strategies for success, for instance, one interviewee said: "I think that what has made me successful is knowing what I could and could not do, and prioritizing that and sticking to it" (CC11). Another student said this about their strategy for success: "Pretty much my time management, just getting everything focused. I mean I knew exactly what I was going to do when I got here" (CC6). Many students attributed their success and determination to hard work, and some to the way their parents had raised them to value self-effort, in effect, teaching them to develop a strong personal sense of self-efficacy. Representative of a number of remarks in this area, one student reported, "I can tell you it was my own hard work and dedication to my studies, but that hard work and determination was primarily built up from my parents. They were the ones who instilled in me those values and made me become a better student" (CC8).

**Low self-efficacy.** Although nearly all of the students I interviewed presented a generally strong sense of self-efficacy, one student described her level of confidence by saying, "On a scale of 1 to 10 probably a 5, but this is because of my personal problems with my boyfriend and of not really being as close to my mom as I used to be" (CC12). One student's financial situation was an escalating source of stress and had become a serious personal issue. His level of determination to achieve his academic goals was apparent in this remark: It has been challenging returning to school as an adult with debt. I am accepting student loans, but I had to work full time while being a full time student to pay my monthly bills. It is not enough to support me, so I am having to file bankruptcy in order to be able to finish my degree.

A few survey participants also indicated lower levels of self-efficacy in terms of their determination. Some survey participants wrote:

1. My level of determination isn't nearly as high as it was when I first started here, but I still plan on doing what it takes to get my degree.
2. Right now it is very low. It is very difficult to motivate myself to concentrate on school.
3. I am not sure at this point. I realized that the major I am currently in is not what I want to do with my life. So I am in the process of changing things.

In sum, while the majority of research participants indicated a strong sense of self-efficacy, some students struggled to adjust due to differences in their individual personal/social dispositions and other factors affecting their personal lives. As these comments indicate, a few of the participants in this research struggled to remain determined or faced personal issues of motivation and inspiration.

### **Community College Context Theme**

Findings suggest that adjusting to the new environment at the community college has an adjustment impact on some transfer students that travels with them and partially shapes their adjustment experience at the receiving institution. *Community college context* emerged unexpectedly as a theme. I began to notice the powerful impact the community college experience had on many of the research participants and, in particular, how advising that was perceived as useful, and how productive information gathering, were absolutely vital for many transfer students in shaping their perception of the arduousness of transferring to a four-year institution.

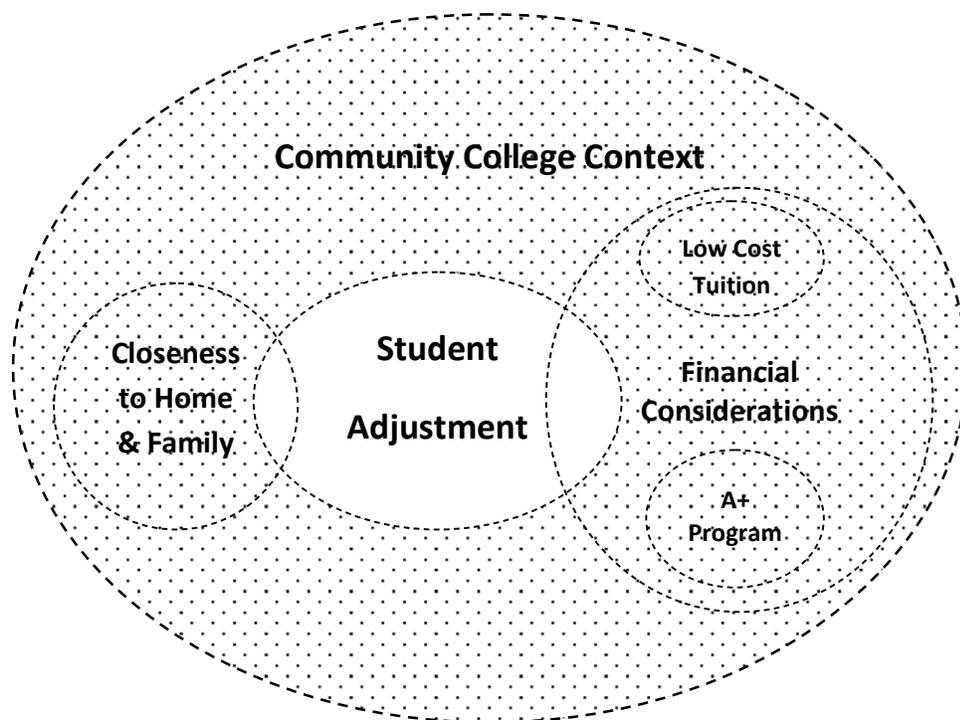
I observed a lot of emotion in my personal interviews when research participants related how upset they still were over events that had taken place during the transfer process. My

understanding of the overall data formed gradually while I engaged in personal interviews and iterations of reading survey responses. As I evaluated over time these early experiences of students within the community college context, my thinking coalesced into a perception that these early experiences were pivotal influences affecting the ongoing adjustment of community college transfer students. When I began to revise my organizational framework for the data from the traditional categories of personal, social, and academic factors to themes more relevant to this research, it became evident to me that *community college context* was the starting point for community college transfer student adjustment.

Findings from my research suggest that adjusting to the transfer process for community college students planning to transfer to a four-year college actually begins when the student commits to a plan of action regarding a bachelor's degree or a professional program beyond the community college. This was an unexpected finding because a starting point for community college transfer student adjustment has not been mentioned in the literature on transfer student adjustment. All of the interview subjects and the survey respondents in this research indicated they had enrolled at the community college with an expectation of transferring to a four-year college or into a professional program. This situation thus initiated the adjustment process of becoming a transfer student as students began to gather information, make plans, and structure coursework around the goal of bachelor's degree attainment. *Figure 3, Community College Context*, depicts the relationships of the sub-themes within the community college context theme.

*Figure 3*

Community College Context



As *Figure 3* indicates, two main sub-themes germane to establishing context at the community college that affect early student adjustment emerged from students' decision to choose the community college first instead of attending a four-year college as a freshman: *financial considerations* and *closeness to home and family*. In turn, the sub-theme financial considerations revealed two distinct dimensions: the *A+ Scholarship Program* and *low cost tuition*. I will first discuss findings for *financial considerations* and its dimensions, and follow with findings of *closeness to home and family*.

### **Financial Considerations**

**A+ Scholarship Program.** The cost of higher education is a significant factor for many students in their choice of community college or a four-year college. Many participants in this study chose to start their higher education career at the community college because of the A+ Scholarship Program in Missouri. This program allows high school students to take preparatory dual credit courses in arrangement with their local community college and provides free tuition

after matriculation (Missouri Department of Higher Education, 2014). Regarding their decision to use the A+ Scholarship Program, one student remarked:

In retrospect, it was a very good decision to go to community college. Maybe not necessarily education-wise, but income and financially it was great. I get [sic] the A+ scholarship program and so when I graduated from high school I wanted to be like many of my friends and go straight to MU. But my parents said it would be best if I took the two years free and that I would thank them later  
(CC8).

The financial appeal of programs like this to students and their parents, and the resulting impact on those students seems considerable. One student I talked to had been accepted at a historically black college in Georgia, but found the cost an "outrageous amount of money," (CC11) and made a practical change in course:

I had scholarships, but they got lost somehow in translation. It was just very unorganized with my money so I just decided to pull out of going there, and at the last minute I looked at it and said 'oh my goodness I have A+' so I ended up choosing the community college and going there and it was easily one of the best decisions I've made in my undergraduate career (CC11).

One student I interviewed said, "I used my A+ money at the two-year university, so I didn't have to pay for tuition" (CC31). Other interviewees reported similar attitudes, saying, "I'm paying for everything myself. I didn't have to pay at [community college] because I had A+, so I went there for free," (CC7) and, "I was in the A+ program, so it was free" (CC23). There were also other nuances of using the A+ Scholarship Program that suggested, for instance, that some participants had not yet made a decision about choosing community college instead of a four-year

college, as this interviewee indicated: "I decided to take advantage of the A+ and go to that community college to kind of test the waters and see what I wanted" (CC12). Another interviewee shared a similar perspective: "I really didn't have any idea of what I wanted to do, and education is a pretty big investment, so it was nice to have the two years free" (CC35). Showing the interrelatedness of the sub-themes within community college context, one interviewee linked the free tuition provided by the A+ Scholarship Program to the other subtheme in community college context, *closeness to home and family*: "it was two years for free, and it was close to home so I could still work" (CC23). I will discuss the closeness to home and family sub-theme following the findings in the next section in financial considerations, the dimension of *low cost tuition*.

**Low cost tuition.** Even without free tuition from the A+ Scholarship Program, the lower cost of the community college was an important consideration in the higher education choice. Some students I interviewed expressed a similar refrain as those who benefited from the A+ Scholarship Program, commenting: "I feel that the education I got was just as good for a lot less," (CC15) and, "I figured I better take a cheaper route, get all my general eds out of the way, and then go into my degree with a little bit of background of knowing what I've got to get done and how things work" (CC34). Another student said, "I really didn't see the huge point in paying as much to come here as I would've at a community college" (CC14). One student I interviewed used an analogy to describe how important the cost savings were at the community college:

I wouldn't want that debt. I remember this quote I read and it was so cool.

'Going to a four-year college is great, but it's kind of like having this really nice luxury car that has awful gas mileage. But going to community college is like having a really nice car that's kinda ugly and not so beautiful, but you get great

gas mileage on it' (CC20).

### **Closeness to Home and Family**

Besides financial considerations, the major sub-theme that emerged in the community college context theme about students' community college enrollment decision was closeness to home and family. For instance, when asked about the decision to attend community college first, one student said, "to be closer to home, closer to family and friends and stuff" (CC30). Other students said, "I really enjoyed it...yeah, it was like ten minutes from where I lived," (CC16) and, "I went to the Wildwood campus because it opened the year I graduated from high school and I grew up in Chesterfield. So it's like 15 minutes, not even 10 minutes [away]" (CC22). One student was quite clear about the influence of this factor, saying, "Well, I was accepted to Missouri State University in Springfield, but then I decided I'd like to stay closer to home and my family, so that was a big part of it" (CC9). When asked if being close to home and family was more important than financial considerations the same student replied, "Not so much. I mean maybe a little bit for my parents, but I like being closer to home" (CC9).

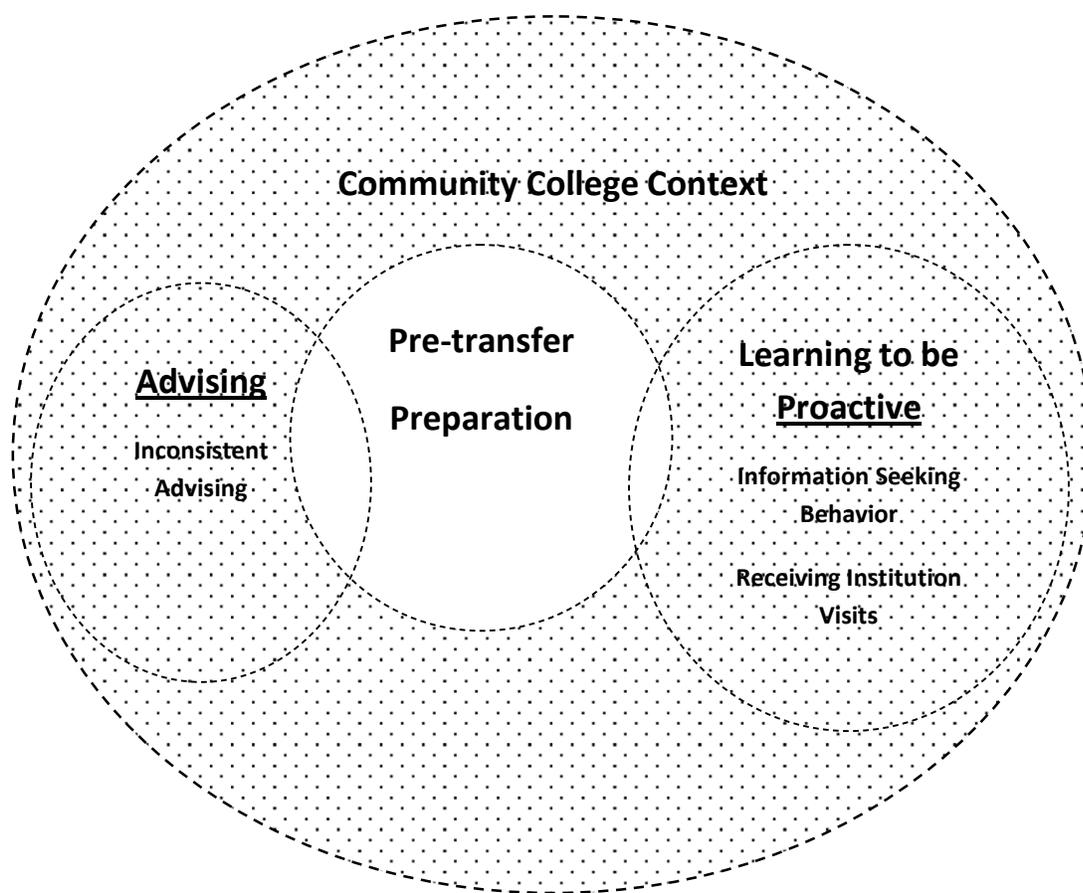
Other students said: "I didn't want to transfer to a big college and kinda get separated from my family right at the start," (CC31) and, "Yeah, I live close. I really liked it. It was smaller, less buildings. You could get like more personal with the staff. I liked it there" (CC19). As the comments indicate, the community college context theme reveals the importance of cost savings and closeness to home in the higher education choice. It is in the community college context that students begin to adjust to the preparatory tasks they must accomplish to navigate a successful transfer to a four-year college. I will discuss findings from this pre-transfer theme in the next section.

### **Pre-transfer Preparation Theme**

The significance of *pre-transfer preparation* emerged as a theme in itself from the theme of *community college context* as I began to realize that the root of many adjustment problems for the transfer students I interviewed, and for the survey respondents, were in events that had transpired before the student actually transferred; in other words, well before arriving on the new campus. In many cases, this unresolved baggage or knot of frustration travelled with the transfer students to their new collegiate environment. As discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, this is the type of element that results in stress for transfer students, and as the findings suggest, this stress has traveled with the students to the new college environment and subsequently affects individuals' personal/social dispositions as they deal with new ways of doing and thinking. *Pre-transfer preparation* developed as one of the primary community college transfer student adjustment themes over the course of my collection of data and evolved from my lines of questioning about support programs and advising at the community college to help prospective transfer students matriculate at their new school. *Figure 4*, Pre-transfer Preparation, shows the relationships among the sub-themes.

*Figure 4*

Pre-transfer Preparation Theme



As *Figure 4*, Pre-transfer Preparation, indicates, the sub-theme of *learning to be proactive* contains the dimensions of *receiving institution visits* and *information seeking behavior*. Similarly, *inconsistent advising* is a dimension of *advising*, all within the community college context. The next section will present findings in the advising sub-theme of pre-transfer preparation, beginning with the dimension *inconsistent advising*.

**Advising at the community college.** Findings for the advising sub-theme reveal that participants in this research perceived they received inconsistent advising at the community college and that the majority of research participants also reported dissatisfaction with not having a regularly assigned advisor. Most community college transfer students in this study had little or no advising, although many students who used advising services reported a positive advising experience. Some students also reported that the institutional focus of the advising was aligned

more with urging students to complete an associate's degree rather than helping students transfer at a time chosen by the students and not by the community college.

**Inconsistent advising.** Students in this research study reported they were not assigned a permanent advisor at the community college. This situation was the same for all students, whether they were planning on transferring to a four-year college, or simply pursuing education for other reasons. Students received advising from whoever was in the office when the students arrived to request services. Therefore, much inconsistency occurred for those students in the specific personnel they encountered when using the advising support services. One survey participant wrote: "I really didn't receive any advising, I felt that the advising department at my community college only saw me as another number." I think what is noteworthy in this quote is the use of *department* instead of *my advisor*, or naming a specific advisor.

Dissatisfaction with this facet of community college advising was widespread among research participants. One student I interviewed reported, "No, they didn't help at all, but I had multiple advisors and I would email one and they would email me back so I would have to go in there and it would always be a new one every time" (CC28). Another interviewee said, "other than getting my transcript from them they did not do a whole lot for me" (CC10). Similarly, other students I talked to had like experiences, reporting: "I had an advisor, but it changed every time I went in there to register for classes which was just really confusing because I didn't have one specific person I could go to with questions," (CC9) and, "it wasn't like the best advising because I was assigned a different advisor every time I went in there" (CC7).

This inconsistency in the advising experience sometimes resulted in students receiving misinformation that affected their progress. One student said:

I tried to go in there and find out what I was really looking for and in one case was misinformed about the number of credits I needed to get my AA. My last semester ended up taking 21 credit hours just so I could graduate on time. Everybody was giving me different information so it wasn't really that helpful (CC29).

Many survey respondents' remarks about receiving misinformation had a common lityany. Generally, students reported they received incorrect information about course equivalencies for transfer, or the advising they received caused them some setback in time or energy, or they simply felt they had to do the advising process completely on their own. Survey comments included:

1. They [advisor] only gave me information about how my credits would transfer over, which ultimately turned out to be incorrect.
2. The advising I did receive hindered my transfer process.
3. I didn't receive much preparation, therefore I ran into a few setbacks (i.e., I was never told about having to do 'pre-journalism' which takes an extra year of schooling).
4. Both me [sic] and my older sisters ran into trouble due to a lack of information provided (i.e., classes we thought would transfer didn't or required another class to be taken for it to apply).
5. I did not take some follow-up classes (like English 102) that I had to later take at Mizzou instead.

One of the challenges of interpreting a list of remarks like these is the general nature of the comments. Additionally, there is no context to evaluate the trustworthiness or the relevance. For example, it is impossible to know if students are using the survey simply as a forum to voice

dissatisfaction with their individual experiences, if the needed or disseminated information was readily available, and how much effort the student actually contributed to the information gathering process.

Table 4, *Selected Advising Responses*, reveals apparent dissatisfaction with community college advising by many participants in this study, and contains verbatim comments from both interviewees and survey respondents.

Table 4

*Selected Advising Responses*

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Verbatim responses from the survey

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Very little advising

Did on my own

Very little help received from the community college

There was none, I had to figure out what to do on my own

I received very little help from [community college]

I received little to no advising regarding the transfer process from the community college

I didn't really receive any preparation

I honestly did not receive much assistance in planning at [community college]

Table 4

*Selected Advising Responses*

---

Verbatim responses from interviews

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I didn't see anybody (CC18)

The advising was not up to par (CC34)

If zero means non-existent I would rate it that (CC10)

I pretty much advised myself and I knew more than they probably did (CC17)

Honestly, it was pretty crappy (CC6)

---

Because the numbers of community college transfer students originating from any particular college are so small in this study, it is impossible to make a meaningful statement about the quality or extent of advising at community colleges in Missouri. However, the findings do suggest that some of the colleges from which participants came had advising systems that were not as effective as others for transfer students.

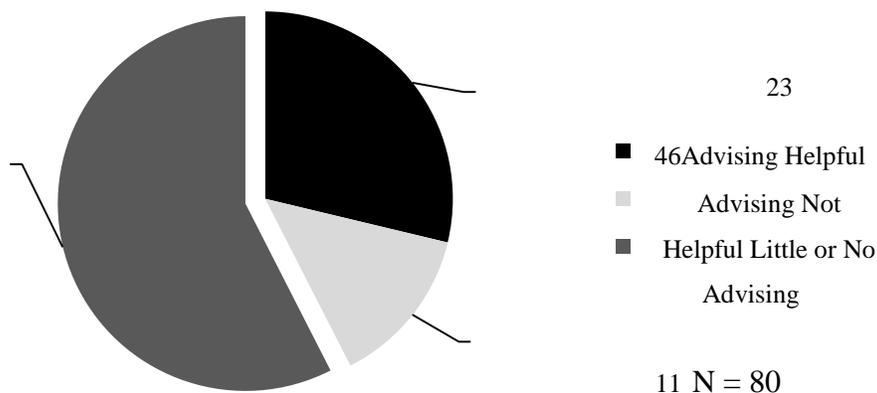
One student I interviewed showed some insight into the advising situation at her community college, saying: "I feel like the staff helps you as much as best they can, they just can't hold your hand through the process. It's just a matter of walking in there and saying 'I'm going to do this', and sticking out your jaw and doing this" (CC2). Based upon personal interviews and survey responses, however, most participants received little or no advising and also had a generally negative perception of the advising services at their community college. For instance, while laughing at the question about his perception of the usefulness of his advising, one student said, "I spoke to one or two advisors, but I thought that compared to here [University of Missouri] it was pretty bad. I thought the advisors that they hired there didn't know what they were talking about at all" (CC6).

*Figure 5, Survey Respondents' Perception of Community College Advising*, is a graphic comparison of responses from survey participants who reported they had little or no advising,

those who had advising and found it useful, and those who had advising and did not find it useful.

*Figure 5*

Survey Respondents' Perception of Community College Advising



As *Figure 5*, Survey Respondents' Perception of Community College Advising, indicates, a majority of survey participants reported they received little or no advising at their community college. Those students who reported using advising services at the community college indicated by about two-to-one that the advising was helpful to their transfer experience, while the remainder indicated their advising experience was not helpful.

Some survey respondents who indicated the advising was not helpful gave some details about their advising experience, saying (a) "I received emails and paperwork. No they didn't really help me," (b) "I basically did everything on my own. This hindered my experience because it was very stressful," (c) "I did not receive any advising. I had no idea of what I was doing when I transferred," and, (d) "Honestly, I did not feel prepared after leaving there. It made me feel nervous for Mizzou." One survey respondent summed up what many students seemed to imply:

Don't trust advisors. I learned that in community college that advisors don't know what they are doing. Do your own work on finding out what you need to graduate. And be proactive in figuring out what to do for college. This helped me.

**Positive advising experiences.** Many interviewees and survey participants who used advising services reported an advising experience that was positive and useful. Survey respondent narratives included (a) "I received good advising," (b) "I talked to my counselors a couple times a year and they were helpful. I was right on track and had no problems transferring," and, (c) "It definitely helped me be prepared and make sure all my classes transferred." Similarly, one student I interviewed also reported a positive advising experience at the community college:

Well, I was really pleased with the advising that I had at [community college]. They knew what I wanted to do as soon as I walked in the door and so my advisor helped set up the plan for me to get some gen eds out of the way before I came to Mizzou (CC1).

One survey respondent wrote about their advising experience: "They were very helpful. They made sure certain classes transferred and counseled me in what they thought would be the best program for me." Another student reported on the survey, "I had an advisor from the Student Success Services who made sure the classes I was taking would transfer. This advisor also made sure I was meeting all the deadlines on time." Similarly, students I interviewed said, "The advising program was pretty amazing at [community college]," (CC27) and, "I had a monthly meeting with her [advisor] and she made sure I was on track and making sure the

courses I took actually transferred as classes here. So that's why a lot of my credits transferred" (CC19).

Another student had a similar experience, saying: "I was in the honor's program. We met once a semester and just sat down and talked about the classes still needed and kinda just did a checklist of what I needed" (CC31). One student I talked to was able to find a receptive faculty member to ask for advising help, reporting: "I actually utilized my business teacher who was head of the business department and he definitely got me situated with my credits to know what would actually transfer" (CC23). These positive comments reflect that many community college students were engaged with their advising opportunities and were successful in taking the right classes and preparing for the transfer to the four-year college.

**Perception of institutional focus.** Research findings suggest that the institutional focus of advising and the subsequent level of support at the community college offered to students planning for transferring to four-year colleges are perceived negatively by some prospective transfer students. One student I interviewed said:

...the complaint that I have, which I kind of understand, is that they were more looking out for the school's interest, as opposed to getting me a degree. Like they wanted me to complete my program there, which I didn't necessarily have to do. I probably shouldn't have done it (CC30).

Another student I spoke to remarked, "I think that the community college students just stop there and get their whatever. I don't think they [the school] really looks for you getting to the next stage" (CC11). Similarly, one survey participant reported, "They did help me to complete an AA. Otherwise, I only had a lot of credits that did not get me anything." Another survey participant reported a like perception, writing: "My community college did not support my

transfer. I had to do everything on my own because they did not want me to transfer early."

These comments reflect some students' perception that the community college emphasizes students obtaining an associate's degree versus students being encouraged to pursue personal academic plans that may involve transfer without necessarily obtaining the degree. In the following section, I will present findings from *learning to be proactive*, the next sub-theme of pre-transfer preparation, including the dimensions of *information seeking behavior* and *receiving institution visits*. **Learning to be Proactive**

Findings suggest that community college students are forced by necessity to become proactive in seeking out information about prospective program requirements they may need to fulfill to help make a smooth transition into their major or program at the receiving institution. This also pertains to information about which courses meet the equivalency requirements to qualify for transfer credit. One interviewee said, "I made sure that all my classes would transfer. I took that upon myself," (CC5) and another, "I did most of my planning stuff for myself because it was like they hired a bunch of old ladies there who had no idea what they were doing" (CC6). One transfer student said, "I pretty much did everything on my own to make sure that everything transferred correctly," (CC11) and another student I interviewed, who expressed frustration with not having an assigned advisor said, "I just knew I had to be the most efficient I could" (CC9). Similarly, one survey participant reported:

For the most part I depended on myself to schedule my own classes and make sure my degree was on track. I used their [community college] course catalog and a copy of the degree assessment form they gave me each semester to schedule classes for the following semester. I feel by not depending on anyone else I got my

AA faster than most students I knew at [community college] because I never took a class that didn't go toward my degree.

As the comments indicate, many students realized they needed to take charge of their education personally and make sure they were taking the appropriate courses.

**Information seeking behavior.** The most proactive students at the community college were those who sought out information at the University of Missouri by contacting either advisors or someone in their specific department or program of interest. One survey respondent reported:

I visited advisors many times, and it helped me a little bit, but I had to figure out a lot of things on my own because the [community college] advisors didn't seem to know much. However, I visited with Mizzou advisors before transferring as well and they were a big help.

Similarly, one student I spoke to described his proactive strategy, "I made sure that every class I took transferred over. I kinda had an idea of what classes I wanted to take and I made sure they told us about the lists of classes to look at. And then, I did it on my own and went and looked through and checked to make sure everything transferred" (CC16). Another student said, "I'm incredibly organized. I have a three-ring binder that I keep literally every paper that I've ever received in order, and I write names on sheet protectors, you know, everything" (CC33). Two interviewees reported like experiences, "I'm kind of proactive anyway. I like to get stuff done quickly and soon and plan ahead. It was better when I did it myself than talking to them [advisors]," (CC30) and:

I tend to be more of a planned out spreadsheet kind of person. So I kept track of my degree, I scheduled my own classes, always came in with the

teacher and the class that I wanted. Having that control was nice because of that I got out of there in a timely fashion (CC2).

One student I interviewed said his initial advising at the community college orientation session was good but that, "...in subsequent semesters there wasn't a whole lot. It was pretty much on the student side to get any help you might need" (CC8). Another student expressed a similar experience, telling me, "Ultimately, it was left up to me to find what I needed to do to transfer here" (CC31). In a follow-up interview, I asked one student to describe her proactive behavior: The transfer process can be daunting, so I attribute a lot of my success to effectively prioritizing tasks, and essentially taking the overall goal and breaking it down into smaller monthly, then semester oriented goals. I like the analogy that it's easier to digest big things when you take little bites (CC32).

Other students were specifically told by advisors to learn to be proactive and look up information themselves on the University of Missouri's various websites. For example, one student reported: "My guy basically told me to go to Mizzou, go to their website" (CC5). This was similar to what some survey participants reported:

1. They told me right away that I would have to help myself in regards to choosing the classes I would need that enable me to transfer. I learned to be more self sufficient in regards to picking my own classes
2. All of them directed me to a Mizzou sponsored website about classes that transfer. This was the most helpful tool for me.
3. I had to look up what classes would transfer and what they would be equivalent to on Mizzou's transfer credit website.

4. I went online and researched everything myself.
5. I had to figure out what to do on my own.
6. I found a lot of the stuff on my own.

These comments show a common refrain of needing to learn to find pertinent information on one's own. In some instances, staff at the community college advised students to adopt this posture.

One transfer student I interviewed revealed his parents became deeply involved in the advising process preparing him for transfer, reporting, "I had an appointment set up with my potential advisor and there were certain individuals I wanted to speak with, my parents suggested I speak with. We had those appointments set up prior to coming down here" (CC8).

Many survey respondents reported proactive information seeking behavior in their survey responses. The refrain of these responses was similar:

1. I only met with my advisors at the community college to enroll in classes. This had no effect on my transfer process, as I talked with my MU advisor a lot.
2. I had met with a department professor at MU about the degree I was seeking, before I applied to MU.
3. I directly talked to MU about the whole process.
4. I received little or no advising regarding the transfer process from the community college. All necessary information or advisement regarding this was provided by MU.
5. There was no advising from my community college to help me transfer. I basically set up all of my appointments to meet with the University on my own.

As the comments indicate, students were successful in getting the advising and program information they needed when they directly engaged with faculty or staff at the University of

Missouri rather than relying on the community college to provide them with that information.

One student I interviewed who lived in Iowa had always planned to transfer to the University of Missouri and was proactive enough to seek out pertinent course transfer information using online sources. She said, "I was going to go to Des Moines Area Community College and then I did some research, and I think the AA from [community college in Missouri] transfers over more clean [sic] than the DMACC AA...community college is one of those places where if you don't take control you might end up not exactly getting the AA in the time that you want to" (CC 2). Another interviewee said this about the process of learning to be proactive and seeking out needed information:

I felt like they just told everybody the same thing, it was like they didn't really know how to cater to everybody's individual needs. But if I hadn't not [sic] gone to the journalism school, where they told me: oh you don't have to get your associate's degree, I would have wasted a lot of time, maybe at least another semester or two (CC6).

Another student I interviewed described a similar experience, "before I was even accepted at Mizzou I went over and talked to [advisor] at the AG engineer building and she told me that if you have your Associate's Arts degree you're in. And she pretty much took care of me, got me lined up, told me what I needed to do" (CC34). Similarly, one student had already made connections with his prospective department and notified them he had a work conflict with attending the Summer Welcome, saying, "I called my department. They said 'we'll get you signed up'. That was it, I was very happy I didn't go to Summer Welcome" (CC21). One student put it this way, "the faculty will help you and set up what you need to do, but ultimately it's up to you to do it" (CC28).

One interviewee made connections to the receiving institution on her own through her participation in TRiO CATS, a federally funded program at the University of Missouri that provides a variety of student support services (University of Missouri, 2014). As the student explained:

They [TRiO CATS] actually set it up and helped me tour Mizzou and helped me get in touch with the School of Health Professions which I'm in here and I got to find out who was in charge here and what they needed me to do and helped me get my schedule and stuff (CC35).

In highly competitive programs, students are compelled by necessity to be proactive in their information seeking. In a follow-up interview, one interviewee told me: Yes, I consider myself proactive in seeking out applicable information for my degree. The Professional Coordinated Dietetics program through MU is highly competitive, as they only take 15 students annually, and the requirements change every year so you have to actively keep informed and updated to stay competitive in the program (CC32).

One student told me this about seeking out needed information: "I kinda had to search it out. I was lucky enough that I had a few friends who went to Mizzou from freshman year on, so I was able to ask them about stuff. They were able to point me in the right direction" (CC20).

Similarly, another student I talked to related a similar story, saying, "I had several friends, older friends especially, that kinda went through the same process here so I kinda just contacted them" (CC14).

A survey participant had a like experience, reporting, "a family friend that worked at [community college] as an admissions counselor found me information on my transfer to MU."

This section has presented the findings for the *learning to be proactive* sub-theme within the large thematic category of community college context, including the subset themes of receiving

institution visits and information seeking behavior. Findings indicate that students are compelled to learn to be proactive in their information seeking behavior about which courses to take and what program of study to pursue to make their eventual transfer to the four-year school a smooth process. As the comments indicate, some students exhibited more proactive information seeking behavior by personally contacting advisors, faculty, or staff at the University of Missouri. The next section presents findings for the *personal/social disposition* thematic category and the relevant sub-themes.

### **Personal/Social Disposition Theme**

*Personal/social disposition* emerged as theme later in the analytical process and came to fruition by revising and combining some earlier classifications according to some shared commonalities. I began to compare individual data from transfer students who self-identified as being older and other transfer students who indicated they were interested in the things that freshman students were doing. I came to realize over time that some students who were only a couple of years older than a freshman student self-identified themselves as being older, while other transfer students of the same age self-identified themselves as feeling like a freshman student. This indicated that feeling younger or older was clearly a state of mind for some transfer students, although some research participants were certainly non-traditional in the age sense. The perceived adjustment of some transfer students to any given situation, person, or event varied depending on where on the age continuum they placed themselves. In other words, perception of adjustment for some participants in this research was shaped by individual social dispositions that influenced some students to feel and act older, and others to feel and act younger. This section presents findings in the two main sub-themes of the social/personal disposition thematic category, *feeling and acting younger*, and *being or feeling older*, both of

which are presented through interaction with various adjustment elements and by personal tendencies of locus of control and self-efficacy when transferring to a new and different four-year institution.

### **Feeling and Acting Younger**

Considering that the traditional age range for college students is 18 to 24 years, many students who transfer from the community college are two years or less older than the incoming freshman student at the four-year school. Table 5 lists the adjustment elements for this subtheme that are affected by community college transfer students' personal/social disposition.

Table 5

#### *Feeling and Acting Younger*

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| Sub-theme elements                  |
|-------------------------------------|
| Feeling like a freshman             |
| Work and school balance             |
| Having a social life                |
| Being on one's own                  |
| Personal support network            |
| Frequency of parental contact       |
| Homesickness and distance from home |

---

**Feeling like a freshman.** Research findings suggest that some community college transfer students still feel like a freshman, sharing a similar general level of maturity and social interests. I asked one student who transferred after one year of coursework if he still felt like a freshman and if he was trying to make up for some lost time. His response was: I definitely

am. I have a second round interview next week to be a career specialist at the Career Center. I turned in my application to be an ambassador. I am rushing to [unintelligible], so hopefully I will be active next semester, which makes me feel better that a lot of people in my pledge class are also sophomores, so that part of it has been really good. I'm not the only one (CC33).

This student's last statement about not being the only one speaks to how important fitting in as a self-identified younger person was to this individual. One student said, "I'm 21 now and I still feel like an 18 year old kind of with all the freshmen that are here....you can walk down on campus and meet someone, here there's a lot more going on" (CC28). Another interviewee who had already spent two years completing an associate's degree at the community college told me she was wishing that she had a more traditional first-year experience. Her voice sounded excited when she told how happy she was about finding campus housing that had somewhat of a firstyear campus life experience:

I actually got into Christian Campus House and it's just off campus. But it's also a student organization on campus and they have about 100 students. There's 50 girls and 50 guys and all the girls live in one big house and so just moving into that has been incredible. A sorority feel, but there's no sorority.

It's not Greek. It's just the perfect environment (CC31).

One student recounted a similar experience, "I actually wanted the experience of living in a dorm, which I'm sure you know as a junior most people don't. But I just wanted to see what it was like to just do it so I ended up in a four person suite" (CC16). When I asked her about the experience she said, "Most of the people that were in my dorm were like freshman. The other people kinda had their own thing going on, so I really didn't interact. But I like the fact that it

was on campus because it was so much easier just to walk to everything. It was a good experience and I'm glad I did it" (CC16).

The comments in this section show that students act according to their personal/social dispositions when it comes to age. Feeling younger is a state of mind for some students and being a few years older makes little difference when it comes to having a social life. Many of the research participants in this study worked while attending school full time, causing them to juggle their priorities while striving for some balance in their lives. The next section presents findings for *work and school balance*.

**Work and school balance.** Achieving a work and school balance is about students' seeking some equilibrium between working and completing college goals. This dimension of feeling and acting younger has the sub-dimension of *importance of time management skills*. One self-identified younger student I asked about the challenge of balancing school and work commitments said this:

It's pretty difficult because when I came here I still wanted to have fun. I still want to go out and do things. I'm not a huge partier so that cuts out half of what people do here. It's definitely been interesting trying to do it, just the stress of moving has made it hard to focus in school (CC23).

This is another example of how interrelated the themes and sub-themes are in this research. For this student, the pressure of moving and trying to work and be a student was a source of ongoing stress that affected her adjustment. Similarly, one interviewee mentioned that probably her biggest challenge was balancing her work schedule and being a full-time student, saying, "This semester's been especially hard for me because I quit my old job and I worked a month at Taco Bell, which was awful because they wanted me to work overnights and stuff" (CC20). Feeling

that the school in general did not appreciate her situation, the same student said: I got a job on campus, but even then it was like there was no way to convey to my teachers 'I promise my grades are kind of crappy right now, but I'm trying really hard. I'm just working like 30 hours a

week' (CC20).

***Importance of time management skills.*** For many community college transfer students who identified as feeling young, a dimension of work and school balance was learning to manage one's time. One interviewee explained his strategy for dealing with a full course load and a busy work schedule, saying, "It's really all about time management. I have a planner that's covered in black and blue for last month because I have every second planned out. I mean if I want to take a 20 minute nap in my day I have to add that in there because I just don't have the time" (CC25). One survey respondent wrote something similar about the time aspect of working and maintaining a full academic schedule: "Working and going to school is challenging. You have to be good at time management or you are doomed to fail." An interviewee described his balancing act of working full-time and maintaining a full course load:

I work in the mornings and whenever I can I go home to work on homework.

I always work on the weekends and then the middle of the week is all class so

I work four days a week and then class three days a week. It's like I'm always stuck in this permanent catch-up (CC10).

In a follow-up interview towards the end of the semester, I asked this same student how things were going with balancing his work and school life. He said, "Recently it's swung in favor of school, mostly because my work schedule has changed for reasons beyond my control, giving me [sic] less hours" (CC10). The same student also said, "I think my number one stressor has been

finding the time for all my classes. It seems inevitable that there's one or two that consume so much of my energy that one class gets blown off, which is a frustrating experience" (CC10).

Another student who worked 30 hours a week through community college and maintained that pace after transferring had this to say about the experience of balancing work and school:

That almost drove me insane. It's been definitely challenging and hard to find a balance between them, because you don't want to give up anything.

You want to do it all, go to school, get good grades, and go to work and be good at your job, and also have this odd social life in between. So, being a student does have its challenges (CC2).

About two thirds of survey respondents indicated they had some sort of challenge balancing their work commitments and their school career. The following list includes representative verbatim comments in this area from my online survey:

1. Very difficult to maintain a work/life balance. End up sacrificing some of the life.
2. It has been somewhat difficult working while being enrolled in 15+ hours of classes each semester. I needed to work to be able to pay for my housing/utilities/gas/etc.
3. I wish I had more time to dedicate to school instead of work.
4. I have money troubles because I have to work and go to school and I am trying to keep my loans low so the balance is difficult.
5. It has been very challenging to balance a heavy coursework load with work. This has prohibited me from becoming involved in campus activities and organizations.
6. I now have a job and work about 18 hours a week. It has made it harder to keep up on school work.

7. I have two part time jobs and am a full time student. I have a hard time finding time to study, which has affected my grades.
8. I've been working full time and taking a full schedule. My main challenge has been motivation. It's hard to find the drive to do your homework after a long day. At the minimum, these comments indicate that students who have to work while maintaining their full-time student status experience ongoing stress that causes them to react by marshalling their time and energy resources. This seems to be an ongoing and significant adjustment challenge for many of the research participants in this study.

The remaining third of survey respondents were about evenly split between those who did not work and were able to devote all of their time to being a student, and those who felt they had achieved a good balance between working and going to college. Table 6 provides a representation of verbatim comments from the online survey relating to both of these nuances.

Table 6

*Comments from Nonworking and Working Transfer Students*

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Nonworking transfer students

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My wonderful parents are opposed to me working while I'm in school.

It's been hard not having a source of income, but it allows me to spend more time focusing on my studies.

Table 6

*Comments from Nonworking and Working Transfer Students*

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Nonworking transfer students

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I did not work while at Mizzou, but I still had many other life obligations which sometimes made school work challenging.

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#### Working transfer students

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No real challenges. I work part-time and still managed to get the grades I expected.

It was hard at first, but I got used to it. I had a bit of a rough patch in terms of balancing work and studies, but I managed.

This was not a big challenge since everything revolved around my school work.

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The comments in Table 6 show that some individuals have access to enough financial resources and do not have to work to support themselves, while others find working and going to school at the same time a challenge, but a surmountable one. Because of individual personal/social dispositions, self-held beliefs of locus of control and self-efficacy, and environmental circumstances, students will react differently to challenging situations. These are reasonable findings that contribute to the holistic qualities of this research.

One student reported she worked a full-time job during her entire time at the community college and was trying a different approach by becoming an independent distributor for 31 Gifts, a company similar to Avon, and also by selling her own hand-made bracelets. "I don't want a full-time job like I worked as a server before," she said, "I worked at the serving job for three years, so when I came here I'm [sic] still trying to settle in to get my classes figured out and focus on my grades" (CC23).

Feeling like a freshman and achieving a work and school balance are reflections of self-identified younger students' personal/social disposition. The next section presents findings in

the personal/social disposition theme relating to how having a social life is related to feeling and acting younger for some community college transfer students.

**Having a social life.** Most students I interviewed said that having a social life was important to them, but secondary to their school commitments. Some interviewees were too busy with work to pursue a social life, one saying, "I'm much too busy, I go to school, have to hurry home, study as much as I can, and then I go to work all night so it really doesn't fit into my plans" (CC12). Another student told me, "I've taken 15 hours here at Mizzou and worked fulltime, and then this semester I have 18 hours, so I mean my schedule is pretty busy" (CC8). Similarly, other working students said, "I'm kind of booked full with my schedule and working full-time to go and join a whole bunch of clubs or do government stuff, just seems like unnecessary icing on the cake," (CC10) and, "With me, I just basically just focus on school, like I really don't have too much of a social life, but I'm fine with it" (CC5). Other students said: "I don't have a huge social life here because I am mostly focused on school," (CC6) and, "I mean I have friends I hang out with and stuff. I just don't do like party culture or anything" (CC20).

One interviewee was frustrated by having to work, but seemed resigned to do what he needed to, saying, "I don't do a lot here on campus. I have to work every home football weekend and stuff like that" (CC34). Similarly, some survey participants reported, "I haven't done anything with that and I don't have the time," and, "I have not been involved in anything because I haven't had time with work and school." One student who was taking a 20 credit load had this to say about the importance of having a social life: "Yeah, I mean it's a big deal, I'm taking a lot of credits and so there's kinda not a ton of time to socialize. But, it's important when I do have the time" (CC25). Besides his busy school schedule, this student made time for a girlfriend, was

involved in a shooting club, and attended bible talks twice a week in the evening, all the while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

***Making friends.*** Making friends was an important dimension of having a social life for many younger students because having even an occasional social life often centered on making or having friends. One student told me, "I'm becoming friends with people so it's better. It just takes time" (CC19). Another student said, "I definitely think it's important to have some friends in your major, they can relate to you about the school work, and also you're going the same direction or area of life and you can relate that way" (CC9).

***Joining clubs and organizations.*** Similar to *making friends*, joining clubs and organizations was also an important dimension of having a social life for younger students. Some students join various campus organizations as a vehicle to meet people, and make connections. One interviewee who lived locally reported she had been accepted late, missed the orientation, and missed a lot of deadlines for various club organizations. On meeting new people, she said, "It's been hard. I'm involved in one club, and I find myself struggling to keep up with it with all the school work on top of that, so it's been a hard process" (CC7). One survey participant reported a similar perception, writing: "I work. I haven't had the time to be in clubs. I tried participating in a few, but have only been able to go to a couple meetings this whole semester." Another survey respondent said this about participating in clubs: I didn't work this year because I wanted to concentrate on my studies for the first few semesters. I started attending clubs and campus events half way into my first semester. I took all morning and early afternoon classes because I wanted my evenings to be free for homework, study, and campus events and club meetings. It has worked out very well so far, although I have had to miss a few events for classes.

One interviewee also involved in campus organizations, said, "I'm in [unintelligible], it's a psychology club. This year I've been the service chair and so I plan all the service events and everything. I'm also in the honor society for the same club. And I'm involved in Pi Kappa Psi which is another organization...but I haven't been able to make any service events or anything. It's been conflicting with my schedule" (CC16). According to the Greek Life website, Pi Kappa Psi is a Greek fraternity chartered in 1869 (University of Missouri, 2014a). One survey participant reported this perception of the value of participating in clubs: I was involved in three clubs on campus. I feel that these clubs are nice in that it gives me the opportunity to meet other students with the same interests. For the most part, these clubs have enhanced my experience

at Mizzou.

One self-identified younger transfer student told me that it was stressful trying to balance her social life with her school obligations. She said:

I guess I have a hard time balancing school work and social life. I tend to lean to one extreme or the other. Last year I never did anything fun a day in my life, studied literally twenty-four-seven, did all nighters before every exam. This semester I am trying to incorporate some social things. I'm rushing a fraternity right now which is like a lot of group activities, parties, things along those lines. I am just trying not to let that take over (CC33).

One transfer student I interviewed laughed when I asked him about the importance of his social life, saying, "I'm on the Quidditch team," (CC1) based on the game in the Harry Potter novels and movies. Evidently, this involves an informal intramural competition on campus and with other colleges. The student said, "I've been able to make friends that way. I feel like the

easiest way to make friends on a campus like Mizzou is to get involved with anything, work, fraternity, club sports, just do something" (CC1).

While having a social life for students who feel younger is largely about having or creating interpersonal relationships, the next section will present findings on being on one's own, which concerns the process of becoming an adult and recognizing certain facets of personal growth.

**Being on one's own.** The sub-theme of *being on one's own* is reflected in a variety of student comments about how students perceived the maturation process that comes for many with age and experience. One student said this about his biggest challenge, "For now it's just being away from home and accounting for myself" (CC1). One transfer student who came from a small community college with a close-knit culture said, "I was used to being sheltered and then suddenly there were all these available fun things that I did. It's a different culture going from that fraternal-type culture to 32,000 people and this giant school" (CC4). Survey participants reported this about being on one's own: "I have really enjoyed being more independent and think it has helped me become more confident too," and, "it helped me realize that I am a homebody." Reflecting a new-found sense of independence, one survey respondent reported: "I miss more classes because I don't have my parents giving me the look when I say I just didn't feel like going today."

**Becoming mature.** A dimension of being on one's own is *becoming mature*. Realizing that one has gained maturity over time as a result of some experience often happens in retrospect. When asked to reflect on his success at being on his own, one student said:  
I honestly think a lot of it's just maturity. I didn't do very well early on in my teens. I realized I really needed to get through school and do it. I now look at school

as an investment. Now I'm just object oriented [sic], I guess I want to get in there and get it (CC30).

The same student went on to explain:

Being able to see what I have to do in order to get my degree has really helped me realize this is a big deal. The education, it's not just the college degree, it's a thing that's going to have a major impact on your life and that sort of opened up my mind and made me more self-aware of what impact it would have on my life after I graduate (CC30).

In a similar light, one survey participant revealed this insight into how adjusting to the transfer process has affected his own maturity:

After transferring to MU [University of Missouri], I had to get used to not getting a whole lot of sleep being that when I wasn't in school I was either working or studying. In retrospect, I can see that I have grown because of it. In other words, transferring to MU has ultimately helped me grow into adulthood, which has affected my transfer experience insofar as it has made me appreciate my transferring to MU and everything that has entailed.

Similarly, interviewees remarked: "I think college helps you grow up a bit. I really do," (CC14) and, "community college gave me a couple years to mature and grow because now I can come here and I can just focus on my studies and focus on my career" (CC31). I asked one student in a follow-up interview if he would change something about his college career and he described his maturation process during school:

I think the only thing I could've changed for the better was my immature mind-state that I had when I began my college career. I feel like I began

college and didn't give it my all. I just didn't take it seriously. As a transfer student that's one of my biggest regrets. I can't say that if I would've waited to go to college until I was 20 or so that it would've been better, but maybe if I would've been in a more mature mind-state when I started I would probably be a lot closer to graduating than I am now (CC30).

The comments in this section indicate how uniquely different community college transfer students are in their personal/social dispositions when it comes to understanding one's own maturation process. Maturing is about adjusting to life changes and certainly this will happen differently depending on the individual. Understanding that maturation affects adjustment is significant because it affects how long some students will take to complete their courses of study and at what level of engagement.

So far in the *feeling and acting younger* sub-theme of the *personal/social disposition* theme I have explored *feeling like a freshman*, the challenge of *work and school balance*, the importance of *having a social life*, and *being on one's own*. The next section will present findings relating to how having a *personal support network* is an integral part of younger students' college transfer experience.

**Personal support network.** Most of the younger community college transfer students I talked to said that their parents and family were their personal support network when they were stressed out or just needed someone to listen and be sympathetic. One student said, "Actually my mom is definitely one of my best friends all my life, and my dad is the financially stable person in the group, so he's been helping me a whole lot. So my mom's always been like the emotional stability, and my father's been the financial" (CC23). Another interviewee said her

personal support network was "my immediate family, so my parents and my younger sister who's a freshman in college this year. And also my best friend, she transferred here this year as well" (CC33). One interviewee explained how his personal support network consisted of two sets of parents, saying, "My parents are very big on supporting me, and my roommate's parents. I mean the roommate I came up here with, both are very supportive of us going to school" (CC27).

One interviewee who lives locally described her personal support network, saying, "It's definitely nice to have my mom so I can talk to her about things that I am either struggling with here or I'm successful with. My sister goes here as well, so we can talk about school and meet up on campus together a lot" (CC7). Similarly, one interviewee said this about her family support network, "I've got my parents and then I've got my sister and two older brothers, so I'm coming from a big family" (CC31).

A local student affirmed his parents were his support network, saying, "they helped me quite a bit and actually ponied up the cash for the first couple of semesters" (CC10). Similarly, another student said, "Well, I have good parents and they send me some money. I mean every single month. I'd say if I didn't have that support I wouldn't be able to do it as I'm doing now, I'd probably have to work a lot harder" (CC6).

One student's parents moved to Florida, so although she was able to call them whenever she needed, she developed a support network among her roommates, saying, "It's like my one roommate is my best friend and the other one is my boyfriend. They're pretty good at listening to me talk about this [college]" (CC20). Another student who was in the National Guard had a similar story about her personal support network, saying, "My family is great, but they're in Tennessee. My unit is my second family for sure" (CC4). One student I interviewed who had been out on her own for some time said about her personal support network, "I'm not

really one to go back home very frequently. I have mentors, my family and friends and colleagues who are also going through the process here" (CC11).

As the comments indicate, for many students, parents are naturally a main bulwark of their personal support networks. The next section will present findings related to the frequency of contact that students report with their families.

**Frequency of parental contact.** Regardless of gender, most young community college transfer students I interviewed reported a high rate of contact with their parents. Students used a variety of media to keep in touch, including telephone calls, texting, and social media like Facebook. For instance, students reported: "I see them [family] at least every other week," and, "texting, definitely, yes every day. I call my mom every day too" (CC23). Other interviewees said: "I talked to my parents at least three or four times a week," (CC19) and, "I talked to my mom all the time on the phone" (CC16). Similarly, survey respondents reported: "I live about three hours away from home, but I talk to my parents frequently," and, "I'm close to my family and being away from home was very difficult for me. My parents are still very involved. They check in on my grades regularly and I talk with them every day."

One transfer student similarly said, "I talked to my parents on the phone, each probably at least twice a day. I text my mom usually once a day, but I don't text my dad, he's not very tech savvy" (CC33). One interviewee told a like story, saying, "I talked to my mom a lot. I check in with them [parents] twice, sometimes three times a day to let them know how things are going. I think it's important not only to me to know what's going on, that it's also important to them" (CC29). One survey respondent reported, "My parents are my best friends. I talk to them both multiple times a day, which is especially helpful on bad days." One interviewee told a like story:

"My mom likes to text me every day. If I have any questions or anything I know my mom likes it whenever I call her so I do that, and I send them pictures" (CC27).

In a follow-up interview, one transfer student reported some personal details of the frequency of her family contact and the importance of her personal support network:

I email and text the eldest of my younger sisters. I call my mother normally about every other week, and if I forget, she's always quick to call me. We all have our Facebook. I would say we text a lot, but sometimes I do get homesick or my mom really misses me, so we schedule a weekend together and I drive up to Iowa (CC2).

Another community college transfer student I interviewed also painted a portrait of frequent contact with his family support network:

I always went to my parents for support. Our communication was almost exclusively through phone calls and texting. We occasionally emailed, but that was reserved for more in-depth things like bills. I talked with my parents at least once a day, usually sometime at night. We spoke more about my progress when I went home, but we did talk a little each night about how my day went, etc." (CC1).

Other interviewees reported a like variety of contact media and frequent interaction with their personal support networks: "I talked to my mom every day pretty much and she texts me. I keep in touch using social media as well," (CC28) and, "I talked to my mom several times a day almost every day" (CC35). The following interviewee's story is representative of what many interviewees and survey participants reported:

I text my mom every day and talk to her and my dad every couple of days and

I've only been home twice. And I haven't been able to come home because I've been working on the weekends. It really limits how much time I can spend with them, but I keep in contact with them as much as I can (CC31).

One student whose parents live in Utah maintained frequent contact with his parents by texting frequently. He said, "I talk to my mom and dad every single day. They probably come out once a semester to see me, and then I go home for Christmas, and then when spring comes around they come out once or twice" (CC25).

This section presented findings about the high frequency of parental contact and the variety of media used to maintain relationships with younger students' parental support networks. The next section presents findings relating to homesickness and distance from home.

**Homesickness and distance from home.** Being a long distance from home results in homesickness for some community college transfer students. What *long distance* from home specifically means for students varies, but my sense is that it is generally measured in driving time, a few hours or more. One survey respondent reported, "I do go home almost every weekend because my family lives an hour and a half away." Some survey respondents reported being away from family and being away from home as their most serious adjustment challenges. Survey participant responses to the sub-theme of *homesickness and distance from home* were plentiful. The following list includes typical verbatim survey participant responses:

1. Being away from home and being on my own has been very difficult.
2. I have experienced a lot of homesickness.
3. It has made it more difficult because I am very close to my mom whom I live with [sic] so it was hard being away from her.

4. I have experienced a good amount of homesickness. Being a transfer student means living off campus.
5. Being away from my family has also been very difficult, but I've since learned to adapt. It's been very hard because I am very homesick. My parents help me as much as they can.

As the comments indicate, many students participating in this research reported homesickness as a result of being away from home. This is supportive of the findings regarding the high frequency of contact younger students have with their personal support networks, often composed of their parents and family.

In a follow-up interview, I asked one student about the things that caused him the most stress during the transfer process. Besides his heavy course load due to having a double-major, he said, "I think living so far away from school stresses me out more" (CC30). A complication for many students involved their busy schedules. Another student told me: This is my first semester and I knew it might've been a little bit of hard adjustment for me, so I try to go home...and if there's something going on I'll go home. But I bought season tickets to the home football games, so I stayed here a lot and did stuff like that (CC35). I asked this same student in a follow-up interview to reflect back on the semester and tell me if he had gotten home to visit enough, and describe how this affected his level of frustration. The response was, "I have been able to visit as much as I would like. I'm lucky enough to have my parents visit too. The longest I have gone without seeing my family is a month, so I have been very fortunate" (CC35). One student who lived about three hours away said, "When I was on campus last semester I didn't have a car. I did get to go home once a month, but that was because they [parents] came up and got me and brought me back" (CC16).

One interviewee said this about feeling homesick after spending a whirlwind week moving in and getting familiar with the campus, "...but classes started, and work picked up, it was a lot of rush, rush, rush through everything and then it really, really made me homesick" (CC31). Another interviewee said her biggest challenge since transferring was homesickness, "at first, but not anymore now, I'm fine" (CC29). Even though this student said everything was fine, I could tell from the quaver in her voice that this was a real issue for her. She confirmed for me that she was on the phone talking to her mother just as I arrived for the interview saying, "Even though I'm 20, being away from my parents is hard. I've been living with them the last 19 1/2 years, and so it's not seeing them every day I guess" (CC29).

Another student related a similar experience: "I think the first six months I was pretty homesick, and it kind of affected my schoolwork a little bit because I was always wanting to go back home. So I went back home for quite a few of the weekends" (CC6). Homesickness seemed to lessen over time for one student who said, "This semester I haven't gone home as much just because I'm trying like to get more studying in, more involved in campus. But I haven't been so homesick either" (CC19).

***Strategies for homesickness.*** Student strategies for dealing with homesickness also varied. One student told me:

My level of homesickness has been low to moderate. When I get homesick I just try to keep myself busy or do something outside like visit Rockbridge or Big Tree. Since I come from an extremely rural area it's very important for me to routinely get out of the concrete jungle and back to my roots (CC35).

For some students, the strategy to deal with homesickness is simply to drive home whenever the right opportunity arises. A student who works on the weekend and lived about three and a half

hours from home said, "a lot of time [I] just keep pushing through and I know I get to go home whenever I can," and, "it's rough because whenever I do get to go home, it's not very long" (CC31). Another student said, "Yeah, I definitely have been trying to escape to home. Especially my first and second week. On Wednesday I've got a class and I looked around and said 'I need to go home'. I got in my car and drove back. So, homesickness has been huge for me" (CC23).

As the comments indicate, homesickness was a source of stress for many students after transferring. This section presented findings related to the sub-theme of *feeling and acting younger* and the various related dimensions of the sub-theme viewed through the influence of students' personal/social dispositions. Certainly, students' locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs are reflected in their determination to overcome challenges such as homesickness and being away from family. An individual's *personal/social disposition* may also influence some students within the traditional age range of students (e.g., 18 to 24) to feel older. The next section presents findings relating to *being or acting older*.

### **Being or Acting Older**

Findings suggest that older transfer students have adjustment issues in more or less the same thematic categories as traditional age students, and also that older students have developed a perspective on life and school that demonstrates some differences in their outlook. Table 7 shows the elements that emerged in this sub-theme of personal/social disposition.

Table 7

#### *Being or Acting Older*

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Sub-Themes

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Feeling different

Orientation and older students

Life and school balance

Having a social life

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I will cover each subset of *being or acting older* beginning with *feeling different*.

**Feeling different.** Some older students acknowledge their age, but other students feel or act older depending on their individual personal/social dispositions. In either case, findings suggest that older transfer students tend to feel that they stand out in their classes and have a hard time relating to their student peers. One interviewee, for example, said, "I was uncomfortable at first, I mean I used to stick out like a sore thumb at school because it's not a melting pot" (CC13). Another transfer student remarked in a follow-up interview that being older was the number one thing that stressed her out, saying, "Honestly, I just feel older than most people in my interest area classes. So, finding people to call my friends is kind of difficult" (CC4). Many older students find that adjusting to the various challenges of being a transfer student is complex. For instance, one interviewee said:

It's just hard to make connections generally. There are not as many people to socialize with. I want to build social skills. Most people in the professional world build connections while they're at school. So that's important to me and I'm kinda struggling with that right now because I just feel like the old person in the room like every class pretty much (CC24).

Similarly, a survey respondent wrote: "It's intimidation. The size of the campus, the number of students and how many of them are younger, brighter, quicker than me." Another

survey participant reported, "I would try to get more active in clubs and organizations. You just feel so old as a transfer student." One interviewee said about being an older student, "You know I was like, let's see, I was like five years older in almost every class I was in" (CC15). One survey respondent wrote:

I am the type of student that participates in class. I ask questions if I have them. I do not like classes in lecture halls with 300 students. I am paying to come to learn, not to be stuck surrounded by children who play on Facebook, text, or talk to each other during class. It mostly happens in lecture halls and is super distracting.

Another interviewee, a veteran, told a similar experience:

I hear conversations in my econ class. It just drives me up the wall. Like somebody's talking about this over here, and this one's on Facebook, and that one, it's like, oh my God, what's going on at that Kappa-Pi meeting tonight? I'm like, can you guys shut up for an hour, I paid for this, and I want to be here (CC18).

Explaining his level of frustration, this transfer student continued, "I don't mind that they're blowing their own money. You're not trying to learn, I don't care about that. Now, you're messing with my learning, and I pay for that" (CC18).

One self-identified older transfer student I interviewed said something similar, "I'm sitting up front and I'm talking to the instructor, and I'm like here to learn, and one nice thing is the fact that I'm 30 years old. I'm not necessarily like a freshman. I'm like here to learn, and I'm really focused on what I'm doing, so I pay attention" (CC24). Another interviewee revealed a more light hearted perspective on being older: "I mean it is a little awkward sometimes when

you're in a sociology class and I'm pretty sure I'm the oldest person in there. You just let it go. The great thing about it is that I happened to look like a 15 year old so nobody knows, they think that I'm one of them" (CC2).

**Orientation and older students.** Findings show the vast majority of transfer students in this study who self-identified as being older perceived the orientation event as less than compelling. One transfer student who had a positive orientation experience said this, "I did the summer orientation. It was pretty good. My best experience was the advisor. She really gave me the lowdown and filled me in on everything, let me know all the programs and different opportunities and classes they had" (CC24). Transfer students expect to receive useful information at orientation, but for many older transfer students the experience lacks practicality. For instance, one older transfer student I interviewed said:

I thought it was kind of useless, but I had one. This is going to sound really awful, I kinda feel like it was just a way to get our money. I know how to click on a class to register for it, and if I need to talk to an advisor I can email an advisor and talk to them (CC20).

This student followed up by saying, "I remember one distinct moment where one transfer student was like 'what about housing, I haven't heard about dorms or anything?', and she's like, 'oh, dorms are filled up, you're going to have to research housing around town'. And that was her answer" (CC20). One interviewee reported, "I did the group orientation. Actually, that was kind of awkward for me because they were all 18. I just definitely felt like I was the oldest person there" (CC2).

In a similar vein, another older transfer student said this about his orientation experience: "It was more geared to like people, like parents that are going to be paying for their kids. It was

geared toward them and they have a lot of that stuff there" (CC18). He also reported, "You could've done me in about an hour and half, maybe two hours. My *college* is good. I don't have to worry about this or that" (CC18). This student went on to say that even though they had been divided into groups that were comprised of transfer students, the focus was still on the freshman experience. For example, "I was there all day, going from: here's the cafeteria, you guys are going to get this. Oh, by the way you don't live in the dorm, so this doesn't apply to you" (CC18).

Another interviewee said this about the focus of the orientation for transfer students, "I do not want to play games. I want you to take me and show me how to use the library tools or something I could use" (CC15). The same student offered a recipe for what should be in the orientation for transfer students, saying she would be willing to pay for a two hour personal tour guide instead of the orientation:

I would've wanted them to introduce me to the front desk person at the office [department] and say 'this is where you need to go'. Hey, that's the advisor, you know you're going to be talking to her. I would've had them show me where the microwaves are. It took me a year to find out there was [sic] microwaves here. I like these places [Student Commons], but I'm not gonna pay this for lunch, I'm on a budget (CC15).

Similarly, another student said, "It was geared towards 18 year-olds. We were required to play games and do things. I felt like I was kind of way too old or mature for it, and the thing was I was forced to do it at my age" (CC13). One survey respondent had a similar experience, writing, "I was 33 when I transferred to MU, so many of the Summer Welcome activities were a bit too

juvenile for me. I would have rather had a real tour of the entire campus." Another survey respondent similarly reported:

Honestly, this was a waste of time for me. I felt that this was geared more for first time college students. They gave us lots of information on how to 'do college', so to speak. I think most college transfer students would agree that a summer welcome type program for transfer students would be more beneficial.

So far, I have presented findings related to how students who are older or who perceive themselves to be older because of their personal/social dispositions feel different in their classes, and how older students perceive transfer student orientation at the University of Missouri. Indeed, the comments reflect high levels of self-efficacy in older students' determination to pursue and complete their academic goals. As well, an internal locus of control is revealed by older students' willingness to take charge of their individual destinies in an effort to shape the consequences of their academic careers rather than be accepting of fate or some external force. In the next section, I will present findings of how older students perceive achieving a *life and school balance*, and follow with findings regarding *having a social life*.

**Life and school balance.** Older transfer students have complications that freshman students and most other transfer students do not have. Housing concerns cuts across categories, but older students also may have more life commitments. For instance, one survey respondent wrote:

It was super difficult to move to Columbia as an older adult. I have enough stuff to furnish a house, and I have 2 dogs. After driving from St. Louis many times to search for a house I found one, but it required me to find roommates.

I am still having problems finding quality roommates. I have been using Craigslist. I wish that there was a campus service that I could post for roommates. If there is this service, I don't know about it.

In a similar light, one self-identified older interviewee said, "I bought a house here because it was cheaper than renting. I thought I would rent, and then I saw what you get for rent and I looked at the cost of houses, and thought I can use it as a write-off. It was a much better option to buy a house" (CC13). One student said she needed to be proactive to balance her life and school commitments, saying: "I have a very good planner. I don't skip classes, that's a really strong point for me. I'm paying for these classes and skipping classes is not going to be beneficial. I go to class everyday, but it's just time management" (CC31).

**Having a social life.** I asked one self-identified older transfer student who worked 25 hours a week how he balanced his work and school commitments, and if it was important that he have a social life. He said, "I have friends I hang out with. I just don't do party culture or anything. I think maybe if I was younger I would be, but it might sound stupid, but I'm 22 now. I'm just kinda an older student. I'm not interested in partying, I got all of that out of the way when I was like 17, 18" (CC20). Similarly, one 21 year old student who considered himself older said, "I went to a community college and I had fun partying and stuff like that, but now I'm here and I don't really care to do all of that anymore" (CC28). Another transfer student I interviewed was even more focused, saying, "I'm not really here to socialize. I'm here to get my education, and go to class, and then go home. I would just try to get here and get it done" (CC15).

When asked about the social side of school, one interviewee said, "It matters because you have to get out and talk to people. There is another student here that is my age I have made

friends with, and other than that I'm swamped between work, school, and family" (CC13). She added that, "When I came here I just wanted to get my class work done and my kids, I wanted to spend time with them. And I didn't want to put extra hours into something extracurricular like that" (CC13). One self-identified older interviewee I talked to tried to strike a balance as best as she could between having a social life and a successful student experience, saying:

You definitely have your stress-out moments. I guess that when you have those that's usually when you need to go out for a night on the town. All students have those procrastination moments where they actually say, 'oh, holy crap, I have all this work to do and I haven't done it yet'. And sometimes it's necessary to force yourself to procrastinate and go out and have fun (CC2). This section presented findings in the *personal/social disposition* thematic category through the sub-theme of *feeling and acting younger* and the related dimensions of *feeling like a freshman, work and school balance, having a social life, being on one's own, personal support network, frequency of parental contact, and homesickness and distance from home*. Additionally, I presented findings in the sub-theme of *being or acting older*, and the related dimensions of *feeling different, orientation and older students, life and school balance, and having a social life*. Throughout the *personal/social disposition* thematic category, findings indicated the significant influence of younger and older students' self held beliefs of locus of control and self-efficacy as influencers on individuals' *personal/social* dispositions and in students' responses to adjustment. The next section presents findings for the *process* thematic category.

### **Process Theme**

*Process* emerged as the main thematic category over the course of collecting data. It occurred to me as I was going through iterations of the transcripts that I needed to find an

organizational structure that captured the flavor of the process of becoming a student at a new college. I came to realize that doing so would cut across typical adjustment categories (e.g., academic, personal, and social), and instead allow me to better understand what transfer students were experiencing and perceiving. Subsequently, *process* became about the variety of challenges faced by transfer students as they negotiated the transfer process.

The *process* thematic category is about the multitude of situations and challenges facing a community college transfer student as they adjust to being a new student at a different institution and engage with their new college. Table 8 lists the sub-themes in this thematic category:

Table 8

*Process Theme*

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| Sub-themes          |
|---------------------|
| Application process |
| Orientation         |
| Support Services    |
| Housing             |
| Welcoming attitude  |
| Large campus        |

*Process Theme*

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| Sub-themes    |
|---------------|
| Large classes |

Faculty

Academic rigor

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In the next section, I will present findings in the *application process* sub-theme.

*Application process* includes the dimension of *transferring courses* and the sub-dimensions of *negative coursework transfer experiences*, *transferring writing intensive courses*, and *having an associate's degree*.

### **Application Process**

Students had a lot to say about the application process, both in interviews and in responses to questions on the online survey. One student said this about the application process: I think the biggest challenge is just in the initial transfer period when I had my first semester here. I mean just getting all the paperwork, you know, everything filled out correctly, and then they say 'all right, done', and then you come back a week later and then they say you have to submit this form.

I mean, come on, it's kind of stressful the first couple of months (CC8).

When asked what bothered them the most about their transfer experience, one student said this, "Just going through the whole application process, because of the advising and not having anybody to talk to and having to do it all yourself" (CC9).

One interviewee said this about the application process, "The biggest hassle of being a transfer student is understanding which courses will be accepted toward what degree programs and continually being asked to supply official transcripts from previous institutions" (CC32).

Another interviewee said, "I just feel like the school [University of Missouri] is not trying to help me get to where I need to be. They were like, oh yeah, the credits are here we just didn't put them in yet. And I was like, you still don't have them from summer orientation? I gave it to

them three months ahead of time. I actually had to walk to Jesse Hall and hand them my transcript" (CC23).

Another student told a similar story saying, "I had to send them my transcripts like three or four different times. I don't know what was going on. They seem to get lost. That was a negative experience for me as far as that goes" (CC25). One student described their frustration with the application process by saying:

It just seemed like there wasn't a set list of deadlines anywhere that I can find, and then always of a sudden something would pop up on MyZou, and it would say this is due in three weeks and it was just kinda crazy trying to get whatever it is in. And it wasn't easy either because you had to get forms from different organizations (CC19).

Another interviewee reported, "The process was so difficult. Even now, trying to get into my major school they still haven't allowed me in because I had to take credits here first before I can [sic] actually transfer in. So I have two semesters added to my school" (CC23).

**Transferring courses.** The majority of research participants had few or no problems transferring their coursework. Comments from survey respondents and interviewees in this dimension of the *application process* sub-theme were fairly homogeneous. Table 9 provides representative verbatim survey and interview comments in the *transferring courses* dimension.

Table 9

*Transferring Courses*

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Survey comments

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Coursework was transferred easier than I thought.

All of my coursework was accepted.

I had no problems transferring my coursework.

I did not have any problems.

#### Interview comments

"Everything transferred over really well" (CC24).

"The vocational stuff didn't transfer, but other than that it all seemed to be okay" (CC10).

As the representative comments in Table 9 indicate, a majority of both survey participants and interviewees were generally satisfied with how their coursework transferred.

***Negative coursework transfer experiences.*** For some students, having a negative experience when transferring courses emerged as a sub-dimension of the *transferring courses* dimension. For example, one interviewee said, "Transferring the credits was tough. I had to go and fight for like half of my credits because they didn't want to accept them. I had to write a few appeals and that was not fun" (CC25). Some survey respondents reported similar challenges: "There were many upper level classes that did not transfer which has caused me to re-take classes I have already taken," and, "I only had 27 credits transfer so I was considered a freshman for my first semester when really it was my second year of college. I had taken 18 credit hours both semesters at [community college]." Other survey participants reported similar experiences: "Yes, a couple of my courses didn't transfer. Which sucks because I will have to take them over," and, "Yes, many credits did not transfer. I had to go another year at Mizzou because of this." One survey participant reported:

I was told by contacts at both MU and my community college that if I had my AA my General Education requirements would automatically be considered completed. This wasn't the case, and I've ended up having to take several Gen-Ed classes at MU.

***Transferring writing intensive courses.*** Another sub-dimension of the *transferring courses* dimension was the inability of some community college transfer students to successfully transfer their writing intensive courses. One survey participant said, "I have taken many writing intensive classes before coming to Mizzou, but Mizzou refused to acknowledge them, forcing me to take more writing intensive classes." Another survey respondent related a similar story, "The writing intensive class I took at community college transferred, but did not count as a writing intensive credit which I find a little bit ridiculous. Now I have to plan on taking another writing intensive course." One interviewee told a like story when asked if getting the AA degree made the transfer of courses smoother, saying:

That's the thing, not at Mizzou. All other colleges in Missouri would've accepted it and they would've took [sic] all my credits as is, but at Mizzou I had to redo all my writing intensive classes and a couple other electives that were part of the associate's degree did not transfer (CC22).

The same student went on to say that the general education courses he had to retake at the University of Missouri "were a lot harder than the classes at [community college]" (CC22). As the comments indicate, not being able to transfer writing intensive courses was clearly a source of stress for some students and seems to have caught them by surprise.

***Having an associate's degree.*** Another sub-dimension of *transferring courses* was having an associate's degree. Many research participants said having an associate's degree made

a positive difference in their courses transferring. When asked if they had any difficulties transferring courses, many transfer student comments in this area were generally similar. Table 10 contains verbatim comments from both online survey participants and interviewees about whether they had any difficulty transferring coursework.

Table 10

*Having an Associate's Degree*

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Survey comments

Transferring was simple due to having an associate's degree.

Nope, because I have an associate's of arts.

I decided to get an AA because it would transfer cleaner. I didn't really have any problems.

No, because I had an AA degree from an accredited community college.

I did not, as I received my associate's degree. This allowed for all of my coursework to be transferred.

Interview comments

"I got my Associate's of Arts degree and transferred here. It worked fine, they [credits] all transferred in" (CC28).

"I graduated with my associate in arts and general studies. I didn't have to worry about how my classes transferred. I think it made it a lot easier to get my degree" (CC31).

"It was pretty easy, I graduated with my AA" (CC2).

"I think I had one class that wouldn't transfer over, but everything else, they transferred the entire degree" (CC15).

Table 10

### *Having an Associate's Degree*

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#### Interview comments

"Because I had my degree, the transfer went pretty smoothly" (CC35).

"The AA made it fairly easy to transfer here" (CC11).

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As the representative verbatim comments in Table 10 indicate, having an associate's degree made a significant difference for many community college transfer students in transferring their coursework. Other students related some negative experiences with transferring coursework, and a number of research participants mentioned being surprised by the University of Missouri not accepting their writing intensive courses.

So far in this section, I have presented findings related to the *application process* subtheme, the related dimension of *transferring coursework*, and the sub-dimensions of *negative coursework transfer experiences*, *transferring writing intensive courses*, and *having an associate's degree*. The following section will present findings in the *orientation* sub-theme of the *process* thematic category.

#### **Orientation**

The University of Missouri provides new student orientation for all students. This is achieved through seasonal programs like the Summer Welcome and Winter Welcome. Depending on the semester they matriculate, community college transfer students can attend one of several dates available for the Summer Welcome, or attend the Winter Welcome. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of community college transfer students in this research attended one of the Summer Welcome dates, which are meant for students transferring in the fall semester.

Other survey participants reported their experience in terms of the Transfer Student Registration Orientation (TSRO). Survey respondents reported, for instance, (a) "I participated in the Transfer Student Orientation. I liked how it gave me the basic knowledge about Mizzou and I felt I was able to transition here easily," (b) "it helped inform me on what I was walking into and I was able to get questions I had answered," and, (c) "It was very helpful. I got a feel of the campus layout from the tour and was given lots of pamphlets to look over at home." I think some confusion exists among transfer students with the terminology here, as the orientation the students are referring to is actually the Summer Welcome. I will discuss this issue fully in Chapter 5. Table 11, *Orientation Dimensions*, lists the dimensions within *orientation*, a subtheme of the overarching *process* thematic category.

Table 11

*Orientation Dimensions*

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Positive orientation experiences

Using information resources

Winter Welcome

Negative orientation experiences

Usefulness of orientation

Parental engagement with orientation

Transfer Interest Group (TRIG)

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The next sections will provide findings in the dimensions of orientation depicted in Table 11 beginning with *positive orientation experiences*.

**Positive orientation experiences.** Most participants I interviewed expressed a positive and useful view of their orientation experience. The following verbatim list of comments represents the general refrain of many student interviewees about participating in orientation:

1. "The Summer Welcome was pretty cool. They separated us into groups and walked us around campus. It really gave me a good feel for what the campus was" (CC7).
2. "It was very informative and really structured. It was also very helpful to sit down with someone from my program and discuss the things I've taken so far and say these are my future goals" (CC35).
3. "It was really good and very informative. I got to take a closer look at the buildings here and the classrooms" (CC29).

As the comments reveal, these students liked the informational aspects of the orientation.

**Using information resources.** One interviewee said this about the orientation and tour: "It was very brief, we did a partial tour. We did like the basic buildings around here and even on the first day I was completely lost if it wasn't for that GoMizzou app" (CC23). The GoMizzou app and also the *Tiger Survival Guide* were mentioned by some interviewees and a few survey respondents as being helpful in learning to navigate the campus. The GoMizzou app is a free downloadable app for mobile devices and the Tiger Survival Guide is an informational brochure provided by the Office of New Student Programs at the University of Missouri.

**Winter Welcome.** Only a few of the participants in this research attended the Winter Welcome. One student who had attended told me that she felt she did not need much support and thought she could handle the process of integrating into the new school on her own, even though she was transferring during the spring semester. She said she had been completely self-assured and confident, and did not want to attend Winter Welcome. She said her initial

reaction to attending the mandatory event was "mild annoyance" (CC32). However, she also said that once she was at the Winter Welcome she realized there were so many tasks to accomplish in the process of becoming a new student, she was grateful for the support and personal attention she received during the event. Because she had been so busy with other obligations, she spent very little time beforehand actually reviewing what the transfer process was about and was amazed at the number of items she needed to finalize.

Further demonstrating how daunting the orientation process can be for a new community college transfer student, this same student remarked:

I wish I had planned to arrive earlier. I knew parking might be an issue, but I had no idea how hard it might be to find a spot close to campus where I needed to be. I ended up in one of the last tour groups and I felt like I was rushing around all day. There was some technical problem with my student

ID log-in that took 45 minutes to fix. I don't know how I would have gotten through it without help. I was a little stressed out (CC32).

Another interviewee reported her perception of attending the Winter Welcome, saying, "As far as getting the transition from community college to MU, I don't really feel like it was that helpful. Honestly, I don't feel like it did anything for me" (CC8). One survey respondent was very succinct: "Winter Welcome. It was a complete waste of time".

**Negative orientation experiences.** Students I interviewed related a variety of perceptions of why the Summer Welcome orientation was not useful to them. This dimension of orientation sub-theme presents findings similar to the experiences related by older students about their orientation experiences and is an example of the interrelatedness of the themes and subthemes. One interviewee said: "The tour seemed really rushed and everything just seemed so

fast paced. I thought it would be really different. Some of our guides just seemed like they just wanted to get it over with" (CC19). Besides the hurried nature of orientation tours similarly reported by many research participants, negative perceptions of orientation included the subdimensions of *lack of relevancy*, *negative registration experiences*, and *differences in treatment*, which will be covered in the next sub-sections.

***Lack of relevancy.*** The common refrain of a negative orientation experience for many transfer students I interviewed on this topic was perception of a lack of relevancy in all parts of the orientation. For instance, one transfer student said, "Honestly, it was like I was there for five hours and four of them I could of been asleep. It was just go to class, do your homework. It was a very standard rigmarole, and some maps and some talking about the university" (CC10). Another transfer student said, "It was not the best experience. I didn't really expect that because I thought it was going to be pretty structured" (CC25). One interviewee reported, "I signed up for the general Summer Welcome, but there was nothing to help me, it was just like I was tossed to the lions. It was just like a freshman orientation, I was never given any prior knowledge that there was anything in particular for transfer students" (CC11).

***Negative registration experiences.*** Representative of a number of interviewee comments about the orientation experience was their inability to register for the classes they needed. One transfer student said:

I registered for my classes and I have to say it was a little overwhelming. And, just the fact that when we went in for advising they basically said that there were no classes available anymore because everything's already been picked. So, I was a little bit upset. Just the whole advising and them picking the classes was a little stressful (CC16).

Another interviewee reported this about registering for classes, "I didn't get anything, and like freshmen got first pick of classes over transfer students, so all the classes were taken up in what I wanted" (CC23). As the comment indicates, some transfer students displayed resentment over receiving a lower registration priority than a freshman student. The next sub-section looks at perceived differences in treatment.

*Differences in treatment.* Some research participants shared their perception of the orientation experience they saw freshman students receiving. One interviewee said, "Actually the freshman got a way bigger production made out of it. The transfer students got like half a day" (CC23). One transfer student I interviewed expressed this perception of support for freshman compared to support for transfer students: "I don't know why they're [research site] not open to transfer students. They don't let you live on campus if you're not a freshman, which is kinda strange. They're pretty much centered on freshmen, I guess" (CC25). Similarly, another transfer student reported his perception to me:

The thing I noticed is that freshman are treated really well coming in and their Summer Welcome, they had two days, and they had a lot because they are coming from high school. They do need that, but I think coming in as a transfer student here you kinda like get shoved in. The transfer students have a really watered-down version of what the freshman students were doing, and that was kind of unfortunate because I felt like

I was just not important enough (CC31).

These comments are interesting because they point to paradoxes in what various research participants are reporting. For example, many students say the orientation sessions are too long and the campus tours too brief and not relevant. On the other hand, some students compare their

orientation experience to what they perceive freshman students receiving, a much longer event that clearly focuses on freshman topics of interest. As well, findings also indicate that most community college transfer students do not like the low registration priority they receive in relation to the registration priority freshman students receive.

**Usefulness of orientation.** Findings show survey respondents' perception of the usefulness of their orientation experience was mixed. Reported perceptions were about equally divided between those survey respondents who felt the orientation was useful and those students who felt the orientation was clearly not useful.

*Favorable perceptions of usefulness.* The following list includes comments indicating a favorable impression from survey respondents about their perception of the orientation event:

1. I liked being able to ask questions.
2. It was useful just to get an idea of where everything was.
3. It helped me find my way about campus.
4. I learned a lot during Summer Welcome and I think I would've been very unknowledgeable if it wasn't for going.
5. I think it was a great help and I love that I got to schedule my classes that day with a personal advisor.
6. I thought it was very useful to gather information, ask questions, and speak to my advisor.

As the comments indicate, positive reports centered on receiving useful information, meeting with an advisor, and being able to get registered. The next sub-section will cover negative perceptions of transfer student orientation.

*Unfavorable perceptions of usefulness.* Many survey respondents reported their orientation experience was not especially helpful. Reports varied on how this was perceived. The following list presents common complaints from the online survey about the usefulness of orientation:

1. Too much of the talks were aimed at parents. I thought it would be assumed transfer students would be fairly independent.
2. I went to Summer Welcome because I had to. It was helpful to speak with my actual advisor, but the students or young people who work in the offices were basically useless.
3. I went to Summer Welcome because I had to go to sign up for classes. I personally thought it was tedious.
4. I attended Summer Welcome. Pretty much a waste of time except for the part where I got to meet with an advisor and actually go over classes.
5. I'm not sure I learned all that much. There was a lot of harping on getting involved, but I didn't particularly take that to heart.
6. I participated in the Summer Welcome. My opinion of it was quite low to be honest. I realized it was aimed towards freshman [sic], and it was simply 'study and got to class' repeated half a dozen ways.
7. I did attend the program, but it wasn't very beneficial. I often felt as though transfer students were the "forgotten students" at MU. We were not given much guidance in terms of: campus life, locating classes, navigating Columbia, adjusting to a VERY LARGE SCHOOL!

As the comments indicate, many students felt isolated as a result of the orientation activities.

Findings included a perceived focus on freshman students and their parents, an emphasis on how

to be a good student, and a lack of coverage on more practical topics of interest to transfer students. So far in the *orientation* sub-theme of the process thematic category, I have presented findings related to the perception of community college transfer students of the usefulness of orientation, providing both negative and positive examples. The next sub-section of orientation presents findings of parental engagement in orientation activities.

**Parental engagement with orientation.** Research findings in this dimension of *orientation* confirm the discussion in the Chapter 2 literature review about the involvement of the parents of transfer students in orientation activities. Although not specifically mentioned in the literature, I believe this mainly applies to younger community college transfer students and not necessarily to those students who are older. Moreover, I did not obtain data in this research about the engagement of parents of older students in orientation activities, so the findings presented are applicable to younger community college transfer students.

Some research participants reported their parents attended or were engaged with their orientation. One survey participant who attended orientation with his father reported this: I went to Summer Welcome. My dad and I both thought it was a huge waste of time by the end. It was attended generally by freshman. I did speak to my advisor that day, probably the most productive part of the visit. I didn't get any notices about a transfer student orientation.

Findings suggest that transfer students and parents both perceived an orientation focus completely on freshman students. Similar to findings discussed earlier in the sub-section on positive orientation experiences, the most beneficial aspect of orientation perceived by transfer students was being able to register for classes.

One interviewee told me that they stayed in a hotel when her mother and sister came up the night before with her for the Summer Welcome. "The orientation helped a lot. That took away the stress of getting it done" (CC31). In a follow-up interview, one transfer student said, "My mom attended the initial visit to Mizzou and the summer orientation, which had a lot of information for parents. My dad was unable to attend due to the fact that he works a lot" (CC29).

Other transfer students had like stories. One reported, "My mom came with me. She liked it a lot, she had never been to Mizzou and so she got a tour of the campus with me. It was nice for her to get to see where I was going and what I would be doing" (CC35). When I asked her for more information about the impact of the orientation on her mother, the student said the experience had made her mom feel more at ease about her going to Mizzou. One transfer student I interviewed told a similar story, saying, "Yeah, my mom came. She loved it and she likes Mizzou and the attitude" (CC34). For some interviewees, the orientation day activities assumed the aspect of a family outing. One interviewee said this about attending the Summer Welcome, for instance:

Oh yeah, everything was great. We just did the one day thing and my sister had already attended Mizzou four years ago so we were pretty familiar with the campus. It wasn't like we really needed it, but it was helpful as far as where to go eat, where to get your maps around campus (CC34).

Findings in this section suggest that many parents of community college transfer students value involvement with orientation activities and sometimes treat the latter as a family event. This is not to suggest that the activities are taken lightly, because as some comments suggest, parents are paying attention to what is provided for students during these events and whether the information

is useful or relevant. This is further indication of the significant role today's parents play in the academic lives of their children. The next sub-section will present findings about the Transfer Student Interest Group (TRIG), a transfer student support program at the University of Missouri.

**Transfer Interest Group.** The Transfer Interest Group is a dimension of orientation.

Findings indicate many transfer students had either no knowledge of the Transfer Interest Group (TRIG) program at the University of Missouri, or only a vague notion of what it might be. When asked if they remembered receiving any information relating to the TRIG, one student said, "I knew it was available because of a generic blurb in the welcome [literature]. I was thinking I didn't really need another commitment right now" (CC9). Another student had a similar time concern, saying, "I did get an email about that towards the start of school. I wound up not going it because I was thinking my classes will suck up most of my time, so I didn't put it on my schedule" (CC1).

One student said, "I guess I just felt like I had more important obligations than to cut out time to go to some little meeting and talk about how hard it was to transfer" (CC4). Referring to their orientation experience, one interviewee said, "I think I remember them saying something about it. I don't remember a lot being said other than maybe that it was offered" (CC35). One interviewee offered this insight, "I probably thought I didn't need it. And maybe that's what a lot of transfer students think when they overlook it, that they don't need it because a lot of transfer students have already been through some type of schooling" (CC6). This is an interesting comment because it reinforces some of my discussion in Chapter 1 about the prevailing attitude of many individuals regarding transfer students (i.e., they do not need any particular transfer assistance because they are already experienced students). In this case though, the attitude is expressed by a student and not a practitioner. Also, this student is not taking into consideration that one of the primary activities of the transfer interest group is to provide useful program or major information in addition to the socialization activities.

Another interviewee initially said he had not heard of the TRIG program when asked about it, but after hearing it described said, "Yeah, I remember them explain something like that, but I didn't pay attention to it too much because I knew I wasn't going to use it" (CC34). One student had a brief Transfer Interest Group (TRIG) experience, but felt the rewards were not enough to invest the time, saying, "I was enrolled in TRIG and I chose to withdraw myself from it. I felt like it was a waste of time. To be completely honest, I study a lot. I am not one of those people that [sic] can just take a test without studying. I just work harder than the next person" (CC33). One interviewee said, "I got something about the TRIG program in an email. I don't know why I didn't decide to do it, but I didn't" (CC29).

Some transfer students reported participating in the TRIG. One interviewee said, "I actually did a TRIG class. I think it was useful. It was about 10 or 11 students. I got sent emails, but also the advisors for Summer Welcome explained it to everybody. I like getting out. Sometimes our classes would go out to places" (CC19). Another student reported similarly, "I was really glad they offered that. It was tailored to our degrees, and we got our resumes checked, and prepared us for Career Fair" (CC31). One interviewee said this about their experience in the classes for the TRIG program developed for science education majors: "Classes are great. They had people in our profession actually come to class to say what it's like and to answer questions. We all get to share opinions. There's a lot of discussion that goes on in class and we all get to share what we think about going into the profession. That's been great" (CC24).

These findings indicate that the TRIG provides useful information for transfer students and suggests the program can be a useful platform to help students plan their future careers after college. In the next sub-sections, I will discuss findings about *support services* and follow with

findings about *housing*.

### **Support Services**

Most research participants reported they had not used the support services available at the University of Missouri such as the writing and math centers, tutoring, and career development services. All students who had used the support services reported positive experiences. One transfer student said, "I'm taking a genetics class right now. There's a tutor over there [learning center] who does a review, so I go to them [sic]" (CC19). Another transfer student reported this about his experience at the writing center: "I did go there for help with a research paper that I had to write and I ended up getting a 100% on the paper" (CC16). Another student related a similar positive experience, saying, "I used the learning center during my first semester when I was taking statistics and I also used the writing center twice" (CC11). One student said, "I've been using the Student Success Center since they mentioned that in the tour. I've been using the French tutor" (CC4). While findings about the quality and use of support services is positive for the community college transfer students in this research, concerns relating to *housing* was a more pressing concern most many students.

### **Housing**

Transfer students expressed both positive and negative experiences with their housing arrangements at their new school. One transfer student said this, "It was more the hassle of the worry of am I going to have to live with strangers because all my friends either live at home or in the dorm" (CC9). One student said while laughing, "I'm at the Grove and absolutely hate it. And before that I lived in a series of little rundown apartments. I pay for my own rent so I don't get the opportunity to go look for a ritzy place, so I go for a little crappy apartment" (CC2). One survey respondent reported this experience:

Well, my parents are paying my rent because the letter explaining that transfers won't be able to live on campus came nearly three months after applying. That could be explained much earlier so that transfers do not have such a late start in finding housing.

This student report is actually supportive of findings discussed earlier in the sub-section on the application *process*. In effect, information about living on campus arrived too late to be of value and probably caused the student additional stress during the transition time of moving to University of Missouri.

One survey respondent reported this perception of the housing market in the local area, saying: "Housing is very expensive here. I feel like off campus housing landlords know that they can charge more for subpar housing because they think parents will just pay for it. If you are 100% independent this can be hard." Another survey respondent said, "I just wish MU would help you find cheaper housing rather than constantly being bombarded with upper middle class housing options."

**Housing assistance from friends.** Some transfer students had a positive housing experience because they had friends or personal connections that helped them arrange suitable living arrangements. One student reported, for example, "The main reason I decided to go to Mizzou was because some friends had decided to come here. We found the Lodge and it was awesome, so that's what we decided on" (CC27). Another student reported, "fortunately my best friend was already going here and she had a house, so getting a place to live didn't become much of an issue" (CC11). One survey participant had a like experience, saying, "I already had a large group of friends that live in Columbia to assist me."

One interviewee also reported a similar story of using personal connections to solve his housing arrangements, saying, "I had some buddies who lived here already on the north side of town and the rent is fairly cheap. They needed a roommate so I moved down here in May" (CC28). Other students realized they needed to apply the same proactive strategy to housing as they did for information seeking. One student said, "I moved here with my girlfriend and she transferred at the same time I did. It was a really big challenge to get here and both find a job and find an apartment and get coordinated together. We just searched until we found a good one" (CC6).

As the students' comments indicate, arranging suitable housing was more of a challenge for some students than others, with some students being able to overcome housing challenges by having personal connections or finding roommates. The next sub-section will discuss findings about a sense of welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri as perceived by community college transfer students.

### **Welcoming Attitude**

Findings regarding a sense of welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri exhibited by faculty, staff, and other students were mixed, with students indicating either a positive or negative perception, and a few reporting a campus focus on freshman students. All of the transfer students I interviewed for this research expressed positive perceptions of a welcoming attitude, while survey participants were split in their perceptions of a welcoming attitude. The majority of survey participants expressed a positive view of a welcoming attitude, and fewer reported mixed or negative perceptions. As an element of welcoming attitude, both interviewees and survey participants expressed negative perceptions of the financial aid department. Additionally, a couple of students expressed perceptions of a welcoming attitude in terms of the

racial climate at the University of Missouri. The roadmap for this section on welcoming attitude is to present findings of *positive perceptions*, *negative perceptions*, and mixed perceptions of a welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri expressed in the sub-dimensions of *an emphasis on freshman students*, *the financial aid department*, and *racial climate*.

**Positive perceptions.** The following verbatim comments from students I interviewed are representative of positive statements about a sense of a welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri:

1. "It's pretty good. I mean for as big as the college is, better than I expected" (CC30).
2. "Everybody has been really friendly and I feel like all my professors and my academic advisor have been very good and very helpful" (CC29).
3. "The staff is wonderful, and I don't expect them to treat me differently because I am a transfer student" (CC27).
4. "I feel welcome, nobody really cares that you are a transfer student" (CC5).
5. "I felt like it is pretty good here, the students, the faculty, everybody is pretty willing to talk to you, and give you help and advice. And a lot of people are just willing to help out for no reason" (CC6).
6. "Coming here to Mizzou has made me very satisfied with my decision to further my education. It's very easy going here, it's not like you're part of a machine. I feel like the university really does care about the learning and your goals for your education" (CC8).
7. "It was a pretty welcome atmosphere. Whenever I went to join an organization, they were all very welcoming. They were not like 'oh no, you have to prove yourself'. Everybody said, 'okay, here's [sic] the ropes, here is how it's done', that allows you to make friends" (CC1).

These comments from interviewees indicate community college transfer students perceive a sense of welcoming attitude on the part of staff members representing various organizations across the campus, faculty, and other students and strangers who are willing to help out and give advice when asked. Additionally, I heard no mention of an unwelcoming atmosphere from interviewees. The following list similarly contains a representative sample of verbatim positive comments from online survey participants about perception of a sense of welcome at the University of Missouri:

1. Extremely welcoming. I have been invited to a luncheon this month for community college transfers with presidents from our previous schools.
2. Friendly and helpful. Everyone goes out of their way to say or do something for me.
3. Everyone is extremely helpful and willing to get you where you need to go.
4. I found the staff and faculty to be quite helpful.

As the comments indicate, positive reports from survey participants generally support those of interviewees in tone and substance. The following sub-section discusses negative findings of perception of a welcoming attitude as related by only survey respondents.

**Negative perceptions.** Although students I interviewed indicated universally a positive sense of a welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri, some online survey participants expressed a negative perception of a welcoming attitude among faculty, staff, and students.

Representative verbatim reports from survey participants include:

1. They put on a happy face during orientation, but after that you're treated as a number and no one says hello or talks to one another.
2. I would say they totally cared less.

3. It is really hard to get to know the other students because they have already developed their groups of friends.
4. There is no 'welcoming attitude' for new transfer students at the University of Missouri. No one went out of their way to make me fit in, or make my transfer easier.
5. What welcoming attitude?
6. I wasn't all that impressed.

Fewer instances of an unwelcoming attitude were found in surveys, but I speculate that one explanation is that the sources of these reactions could in part simply be accounted for by the differences in personal/social dispositions that one often sees exhibited in normal daily life when many people interact in a variety of social and bureaucratic situations. Obviously, people do not always get along, and sometimes they may react to and perceive the same situation in completely different ways. The next sub-section will discuss findings from *a focus on freshman students*.

**A focus on freshman students.** Most comments from the survey about a welcoming attitude left few or no specific details. Because of this, it is impossible to know the extent of perception among transfer students that the University of Missouri puts a greater emphasis on freshman students than on transfer students. A couple of survey participants, however, did express their perception of a welcoming attitude in terms of an emphasis on freshman students. One survey participant said this: "I didn't experience a welcome, but not exactly a 'lack of welcome'. I truly feel like there's more focus on freshman, and not so much on transfer students." Another survey respondent similarly reported, "I wasn't aware Mizzou had a 'welcome attitude'. It seemed if you didn't start here as a freshman, then best of luck to you connecting with the people in your grade." The next sub-section will discuss transfer student perceptions of the financial aid department at the University of Missouri.

**Financial aid department.** A number of community college transfer students, in interviews and in survey responses, reported particular difficulties dealing with financial aid representatives. One student said, "Sometimes when I call they don't seem very friendly. I mean they probably deal with the same kind of people every day. I guess that job takes a lot of patience" (CC19). Another student had this to say about her perception of dealing with the financial aid department:

I think it would've been easier if my financial aid advisor could have done it over the phone. It was just a lot of emailing, and that's not very direct so I had to go back and forth a lot. It was just not a very good process (CC9). When later asked what situation or event had bothered him the most about his transfer experience, the same student said, "It was especially the financial aid. I had to go several times to my dad. They wanted financial records, and it was stressful. It was very straightforward and direct, to give you the facts. There you go, we're done, move along" (CC9). Another student said this about dealing with the financial aid department, "It was really discouraging to go through all that, you just kind feel like you want to give up because nothing is working. They made me feel kinda disconnected" (CC31).

Findings indicate that dealing with the financial aid department was stressful for both interviewees and survey respondents in this research. Dealing with the financial aid department was listed by a number of survey respondents, in particular, as the most challenging part of the application and transfer adjustment process and was not mentioned by any research participant as a positive aspect of a sense of welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri. The next subsections deal with racial climate, large campus size, and large class size.

**Racial climate.** For at least two transfer students I interviewed, sense of a welcoming attitude was tied up in their perception of the racial climate at the University of Missouri. One student said, for instance, "Well, there have been different racial experiences, and there have been some crimes around campus where things were written in the halls, and then there were the cotton swabs found at the Black Center" (CC11). She went on to explain, "It makes you feel unsafe in an environment when you should feel embraced, and I know that it's just something that's already happened. But you carry that with yourself, and it's every day you have to look out for that kind of thing" (CC11). This is supportive of Bennett and Okinaka (1990), as discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, who found that minority students experience heightened feelings of not belonging and stress that tend to interfere with their ability to adjust, but this the only evidence of racial climate collected during this research from a minority student.

Another transfer student I interviewed reported how an incident in the surrounding community affected her sense of a welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri: "It's just the lack of diversity because my boyfriend is black. We've never had a real issue when we went to community college. Then we came here and we were actually walking down the street and some white people in a car came by and called me a B word. It was very shocking to me (CC23).

In this section, I presented positive and negative findings of a welcoming attitude, as well as other student perceptions of a campus focus on freshman students, negative perceptions of the financial aid department, and racial climate. The next section will present findings regarding student adjustment to the University of Missouri's large campus.

## **Large Campus**

Local transfer students reported little or no difficulty with the large campus size of the University of Missouri. Most other transfer students took some time to adjust. Some transfer students reported the large campus was one of their biggest challenges. One said, "I guess it just took me a while to figure out where everything was," (CC16), and another student said, "This is a very large campus and even with a map it's hard to know just where are things [sic]. It's very difficult when you transfer. When people would say meet me at the Student Center I would always think I have no idea where that is. I was never told where these things are" (CC11). One student said, "One of my friends said I should use the MU Survivor's Guide...anyway, I carried that thing around like a Bible for the first couple of months" (CC2). Another interviewee said, "The community college was very small and so having so many buildings, I was overwhelmed" (CC23).

Some students said that the impact of campus size seemed to lessen over time. One student said, for instance, "After like two weeks it just doesn't seem that big. I know where most of the stuff is" (CC27). Another student similarly reported, "It was a little tough when I first got here. You look at it and go: 'this place is really huge'. After a month or so I had it down" (CC7). Expressing a perception held by only a couple of research participants, one transfer student said about the large size of the campus, "I grew up in a pretty big high school, so it's nothing" (CC9). As comments indicate, most students were impressed by the large size of the university campus, and for some this challenge lessened over time. The next section discusses findings for the *large classes* sub-theme. **Large Classes**

Nearly all research participants reported they did not enjoy the large size of some classes. Classes with huge numbers of students are usually held in various amphitheater type rooms on

campus. These can be intimidating and look like movie theatres, often with descending seating and aisles separating a central section with narrow rows. One interviewee said, "I had a class last semester that had probably over 200 people. At the community college I had at the most 50" (CC19). Some other transfer students had similar stories, saying, "In high school they graduated about 75 kids per class. The community college classes were pretty small, then coming here and going immediately to class with 300 students my first semester, I'm just overwhelmed," (CC14) and, "In my psychology class I have more kids in that one than I had in my entire high school" (CC28). One student said this about large class size: "It's a lot different. I feel kind of marginalized. You feel further marginalization when there are 100 people in your class or 500 people. You might want to raise your hand to ask a question, but you know it's not going to work out very well" (CC11). The same student went on to say this about the teaching pedagogy in a large class:

It can make you feel awful about yourself because you realize that you're an intelligent person and you are capable of understanding the material, but the teaching strategies are not strategies that appeal to you, it's very teacher-centered when you have a large class like that (CC11).

These comments indicate that attending large classes was an ongoing challenge for many students. Some students reported feelings of marginalization and being overwhelmed in a setting that was indeed much different than that of their previous college. This is supportive of Townsend (2008) who suggested that differences in institutional size and class size are adjustment challenges for many transfer students. The next sub-section discusses student strategies for dealing with large classes.

**Strategies.** Most respondents who had an active strategy for adjusting to the large class size reported a similar stratagem. Interviewees reported, "I usually sit closer to the front. A few people are in front of me and most of the rest of the people are behind me. It's easier to see," (CC19) and, "In the larger classes I just sit in the front, that way I can pretend that the other 350 people aren't there. It's turning me into a chronic front-sitter, and a little bit anti-social" (CC4). Another student said, "I sit in one of the far wings, usually an empty row near the front" (CC10). One student said his strategy for large classes was to make himself known to the teacher, saying, "I'm always in at office hours asking questions, getting help. It's the only way I do good [sic]" (CC16). Another student reported a similar strategy, "I make myself sit in the first five rows just because it automatically connects you with the teacher and it's because they can be looking at you more and making eye contact with you, and helps you engage in the classroom" (CC31). While the majority of research respondents were not enamored with the large classes, a few research participants said they did not mind the larger classes, reporting: "I like the big class setting, the classes are easier than the other classes I'm taking so it's not that big a deal," (CC27) and, "I had expected it, you know" (CC7). The next section discusses findings about perception of faculty at the University of Missouri.

## **Faculty**

Students in this research overwhelmingly reported their professors at the University of Missouri were approachable and available for consultation. One student said, "I know that I could go to any of my professors in the program and say, 'this is an issue for me', and I would get some help" (CC9). Asked about his perception of the quality of the faculty at the University of Missouri, one student said, "It's really high quality. There are distinguished faculty here that are definitely qualified to do the job that they do and they also seem interested in student learning" (CC1).

Typical of student comparisons of faculty at the community college and at the research site, one student said this, "I think the ratio of really outstanding to really mediocre professors was the same. There are some differences in that the average professor here [University of Missouri] might be a little better, but I mean there's no real difference" (CC10).

Other students saw differences between the faculty at the University of Missouri and their community college. Representative of comments in this area, students said, "There is definitely a difference. I have more PhD professors here [University of Missouri], whereas at the other it was they are either working towards their PhD, or they didn't have one," (CC9) and, "compared to the community college the faculty here are far above, better. I think here at the university it's partly because the professors are mainly doctors and the community college professors are mainly masters" (CC8). Similarly, one student reported their perception of faculty, "The ones here [University of Missouri] are more qualified, a lot of them have their doctorate. I really liked my teachers for the most part at [community college], but I think that the teachers here have more higher degrees" (CC7). One student compared his professors at the community college and the University of Missouri:

The teaching styles are completely different. I feel like the professors that we get at [community college] are just individuals who are starting off in the field. I think they were all in their teaching more oriented to older type individuals that have abandoned school for a while. I really think it was dumbed down because of that (CC5).

As the comments in this section reveal, students generally approved of faculty at the University of Missouri, finding them accessible. Further, students generally felt that the credentials of faculty at the university were better than those of faculty at the community college. The next section discusses findings related to *academic rigor*.

## Academic Rigor

Most research participants I interviewed said they experienced a tougher academic rigor at the University of Missouri as compared to their community college. Representative of the stories of many interviewees, one reported, "In terms of intellectual stimulation, the courses really get you thinking and actually engaged with the material. Not only that, but the course load itself is quite a bit heavier" (CC8). The same student went on to explain:

I have one class and it was three hours. It required you to write three papers in the semester, and read three or four books, whereas the same class at my community college may require me to write a term paper and just read the general textbook over the semester (CC8).

One student described his strategy for dealing with the academic rigor of his classes, "I just had to learn for myself. If you sit in class and pay attention and don't get it, it's on you to figure out how to understand what you need to understand better to get a good grade" (CC5). Another interviewee reported about the academic level of his classes, "It was a lot harder than I expected, and I'm still adjusting even at the end of the school year" (CC7). I asked one student to describe the academic rigor of his classes and he responded with this analogy: Here at Mizzou the best way to illustrate it would be like: Here's a bus, and the bus is traveling, and you're either on the bus, or you're off the bus and trying to catch up with the bus. So, I would say my first semester I was really trying to catch up, but now I feel that I'm on it, and hopefully just going the right way (CC5).

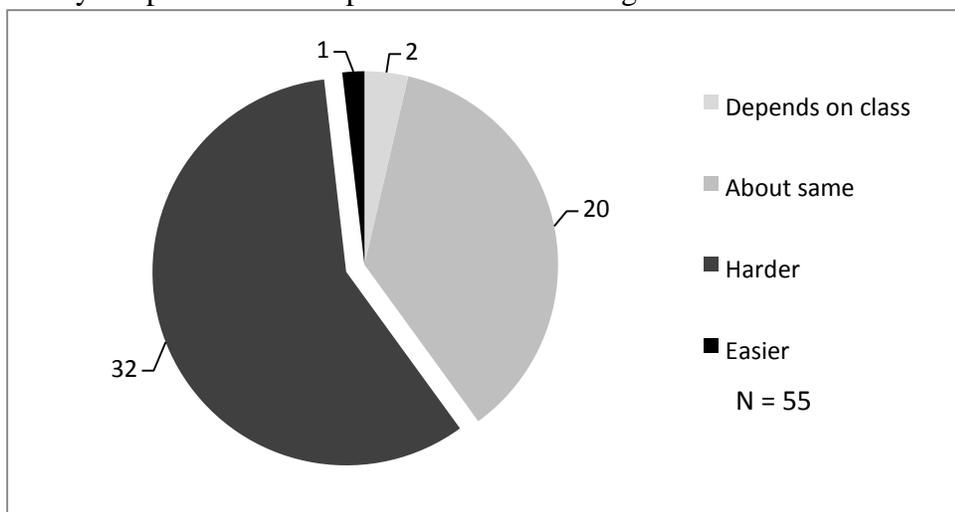
One interviewee summed up his perception of the academic rigor at the University of Missouri by saying, "It's a little more hectic, a little more stressful because I think the stage is

bigger" (CC1). Another interviewee said, "It's mainly just the amount of work involved. You get a little lazy going to a community college. I didn't really have to work that hard for the grades, now I find myself working a lot harder. Which I enjoy because I feel that I am learning a lot more here" (CC2).

These comments from interviewees suggest that most of the latter felt the academic rigor was more challenging in quantity and substance than what they were used to at the community college. Survey respondents were more split in their perceptions of academic rigor at the University of Missouri. *Figure 6* shows the general trends of comments reported in the survey.

*Figure 6*

Survey Respondents' Perception of Academic Rigor



As the *Figure 6* indicates, perception of the academic rigor at the University of Missouri lies along a continuum, with a majority of survey participants indicating the rigor was harder, and one student indicating the academic rigor was easier. A sizeable portion of the survey respondents indicated the academic rigor was about the same as what they experienced at their community college.

Representative verbatim comments from survey respondents who perceived the academic rigor was about the same included: (a) "Mizzou moves a lot faster with the material, but the academic difficulty is the same," (b) "There are more assignments but not any harder," (c) "I had more homework there than I do here. The work difficulty is about the same," and (d), "The class work and assignments are really about the same in my opinion." These comments suggest that for those students who found the academic rigor about the same at the university and at the community college, the difference was generally found to be in the greater amount of work required in courses at the university.

Representative verbatim reports from survey participants who felt the academic rigor was more difficult at the University of Missouri were: (a) "MU is definitely harder, but that was something I knew would happen," (b) "classes are definitely more difficult," (c) "I feel more challenged at MU than I ever did at [community college]," and (d), "The class work and assignments are significantly more difficult at Mizzou." One survey respondent took the time to report this about his perception of academic rigor:

The assignments and class work here at MU are much more in depth and rigorous than any of my assignments at my community college. The course work here at MU really requires students to be studious and to dedicate themselves to the material if they want to pass the class.

The majority of survey respondents indicated the academic rigor at the University of Missouri was more rigorous than what they had experienced at their community colleges. As the comments indicate, this perception was expressed in terms of the difficulty of the coursework and in the amount of time and effort required for a student to be successful. The following section summarizes the findings of this chapter.

## Summary

This chapter presented findings in the four thematic categories, *community college context*, *pre-transfer preparation*, *personal/social disposition*, and *process*, and the variety of related sub-themes and dimensions. Locus of control and self-efficacy were influencers of individual students' personal/social dispositions and thus affected students' adjustment. The themes of community college context and pre-transfer preparation reflect the early adjustment period for community college transfer students. Personal/social disposition theme findings suggest that age is a continuum that students place themselves on and that transfer students may feel and act younger or older, regardless of chronological age, and that perception of adjustment subsequently may vary with age. Process theme findings are about adjustment to the many tasks and activities and situations community college transfer students encounter at their new college. Next, Chapter 5 will summarize findings and discuss conclusions in terms of my research question, discuss limitations affecting this research, and explore some implications for research and practitioners.

## **Chapter 5 - Summary of Findings, Limitations, and Implications for Practice**

Adjustment is really about responding to change and making an appropriate adaptation. According to social cognitive theory, changing one's behavior, in effect adjusting, is about adapting and responding to the social environment as we consider our own past behavior and experiences (Bandura, 1986). Consequently, the process of adjusting to a new academic environment is going to differ with the context and the perceptions of individual community college transfer students. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the limitations of this research, discuss how the findings of the four thematic categories and the various sub-themes that emerged during the course of this research answer my research question, enumerate some specific conclusions from the research, discuss implications for research and for practice, offer some recommendations for practitioners, and conclude with a brief summary.

### **Limitations to Research**

Limitations to research are generally considered beyond the control of the researcher (Roberts, 2010), but have to be acknowledged. Limitations for this research mainly include appointments for personal interviews that were cancelled; in this case, I had well over double the number of personal interviews scheduled for appointments than I was actually able to complete. The vast majority of interviewees did not show up for their appointments and did not respond to a follow-up email. It was also impossible due to my personal work schedule to establish appointments with transfer students in the mornings, so there were some instances in which I had willing participants, but could not fit into their schedule. Although I offered, not one participant was interested in an interview on the weekend or after hours during the week.

Although I feel comparison contributes useful insight under the current circumstances, it must be acknowledged that "...the transfer student's orientation process does not fit the mold of the general assumptions and the studies done with freshman orientation students" (Jacobs,

Busby, & Leath, 1992, p. 97). As Jacobs, Busby, and Leath (1992) put it:

Assumptions cannot be made from institution to institution, from freshman to transfer students within the same institution, nor from one group of transfer students to another, and orientation directors have to be aware of the makeup of the transfer student population before they can adequately meet the needs of incoming transfer students (p. 97).

I have made a strong case for the inclusion of literature and discussions related to the freshman experience in this research, but have also tried to avoid making broad assumptions, instead using the material to point out discrepancies in focus and support between what institutions generally do for freshman students and transfer students.

In some cases, as I worked through iterations of the survey results and the interview transcripts, I found comments that were nearly identical in tone, wording, or circumstance. I did identify a few instances where I could reasonably say that the survey respondent was the same student I had also interviewed. For clarity, some of the research participants I interviewed also completed the *Community College Transfer Student Adjustment Survey* online. Since qualitative research does not necessarily tally results, this probably had little or no effect on the trends that I identified in my analyses, and I was careful not to duplicate quotations or to speak in other than generalities about the numerical balance of positive, negative, or neutral comments discussed in any particular section of the findings. This was an efficacious process, because it caused me to expend an additional level of analysis and engagement with the data.

### **Research Question**

My research question for this study is: *How do community college transfer students perceive their adjustment experience at the University of Missouri?* The findings of this research

apply to this question, and answer it across a broad spectrum of thematic categories. The thematic categories in this research were constructed upon levels of sub-themes, which in turn often provided additional dimensions that identified particular nuances of perception of adjustment within the sub-themes. As well, the findings of this research emerged from specific data that helped to support my broader conclusions in a holistic sense, which is a hallmark of qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2009).

### **Discussion of Findings**

This discussion of findings will move through the thematic categories of *community college context*, *pre-transfer preparation*, *personal/social disposition*, and *process*.

#### **Community College Context**

The community college context theme contributed to answering my research question by establishing the beginning point of transfer student adjustment for community college transfer students. What is especially exciting about this new finding is that it opens a wealth of fresh avenues for inquiry into student perception of adjustment and demonstrates that this research topic is wide open for further investigation. I will discuss a number of specific examples of research opportunities related to the community college context theme later in my section *implications for research*.

The findings of this research cause me to speculate that early decision making discussions between students and parents about the student's future higher education path are taking place for many students while they are still in high school. The implications certainly include that parental influence on students' academic decisions is early, ongoing, and significant.

I think this is a reasonable assumption, given the findings presented in Chapter 4 about the high level of parental contact many transfer students maintain after they have transferred to the University of Missouri. I will discuss the significance of the frequency of parental contact in greater depth later in the section of findings for the *personal/social disposition* theme.

Understanding the decision to choose community college is significant for understanding student adjustment because it commences the adjustment process for students planning to transfer to a four-year college. What is interesting about this finding is that in all of the studies I have been able to find in the literature on transfer student adjustment, little or no attention has been accorded to the impact of adjustment challenges that occur *before* the transfer student arrives at the four-year school. As discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, for instance, Flaga's (2006) recent study of transition effects on transfer student adjustment focused on changes in students' adjustment during the first and second semesters at the new college after transferring.

As explained in Chapter 1, social cognitive theory tells us that adjustment is an *ongoing* process wherein individuals interact with the environment during the process of triadic reciprocity. In other words, students are always reflecting on their past behavior, evaluating those experiences in light of a new environment, and making behavioral adjustments along the way (Bandura, 1986). From this perspective, I speculate that one way to view transfer student adjustment is as a continuum of adaptive behavior beginning with the decision to become a community college student who plans to transfer to a four-year college, and continuing until the student reaches the baccalaureate goal.

Many transfer students chose to attend community college in Missouri because of the free tuition offered by the A+ Scholarship Program, and because the program offered a means to take

dual credit college courses that would be guaranteed transferable to a student's local community college (Missouri Department of Higher Education, 2014). Other students said the low cost of tuition at the community college influenced their decision to enroll there instead of at a four-year college. Additionally, being close to home and family was also a critical consideration in the choice of community college enrollment over being a freshman at a four-year institution. As the findings in Chapter 4 indicate, having free tuition and being able to live at home were powerful incentives that influenced many students' higher education starting point choice. Some students acknowledged they lacked the maturity to attend a four-year school right out of high school, or they simply wanted time to develop plans for the future.

In summary, these new findings in the field of transfer student perception of adjustment suggest that adjustment for community college transfer students begins with reacting to and adapting to planned future change once the student makes the decision to become a community college student who will later transfer to a four-year college with the goal of baccalaureate attainment. Additionally, research into transfer student adjustment has not previously examined the possibility that adjustment for transfer students actually begins before transferring to a new college. This means a student could actually begin the adjustment period in high school, which some students do when they begin planning ahead with their parents. This is also an exciting new finding in transfer student adjustment that pushes back the beginning of the adjustment process for some students even earlier than the community college environment. In the next section, I will discuss findings for the pre-transfer preparation theme.

### **Pre-transfer Preparation**

Pre-transfer preparation contributed to answering my research question on student adjustment by revealing the importance of early planning and access to pertinent information

about transfer while at the community college. As discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, adjustment takes place in the bureaucratic, academic, and social realms (Bean & Eaton, 2001). While most students have some life experience in the social realm, the time spent in pre-transfer preparation may be the first encounter for many community college students with dealing with the bureaucratic and academic realms as an individual without parents in close proximity. Consequently, for many students, dealing with bureaucratic entities like the advising department at the community college might be the student's first experience doing something like that as an individual.

A majority of community college transfer students in this study reported they had little or no advising at their community colleges and the perception of those transfer students who did receive advising was approximately balanced between positive and negative views. Some strong examples were provided of positive outcomes and successful experiences for transfer students who did receive advising at community colleges in Missouri.

Students in interviews and on the survey generally reported they did not have a regularly assigned advisor at their community college. This speaks to an organizational structure at some community colleges that is undoubtedly responding to the financial and human resources challenges in its environment. However, although research participants transferred to the University of Missouri from across the state, because of the small numbers of the research participants in this study and the large enrollment in community colleges across Missouri, this research is incapable of making any actual generalizations about the nature of advising at all community colleges. Community colleges have to respond to budgetary pressures like any organization. It is a likely scenario that some of these colleges simply cannot afford to add the infrastructure and support staff that would be necessary to provide regularly assigned advisors to

all students, and that this is one of the trade-offs of low tuition. This should not imply that students are not offered and do not receive good advising at the community colleges in Missouri. Students, however, only see the effects of the advising policy on their advising experience, and probably in most cases have little regard for the financial and organizational challenges facing the community college. Many community college students simply want an advising experience that has predictable hand-holding continuity. Adjustment for community college transfer students thus is affected by the adaptation necessary to fill the support and information void that exists by having little or no advising.

Negotiating the transfer process successfully from the two-year college to the four-year college requires access to pertinent and timely information, but findings suggest that the lack of information and support infrastructure at the community college often hindered the ability of students to create the solid strategies they needed to make transferring to the four-year institution a smooth transition. This is important because as Laanan (2001) remarks, advising influences both cognitive and affective outcomes for students at the receiving institution, and having an awareness of the expectations of the four-year school facilitate transfer students' successful transition and ultimate success in the completion of a bachelor's degree.

The lack of advising at Missouri community colleges reported by the participants in this research speaks directly to the level of useful information provided to those transfer students, and thus affects transfer students' adjustment by creating a stressful situation. The effect of stress on transfer students was explored in the literature review in Chapter 2; for example, Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) found that being faced with new ways of doing things in new situations creates stress for students. Findings also reveal that a lack of information and advising caused some transfer students to take more classes than needed, or to take classes that did not

count as transfer credit for general education requirements at the receiving institution, or even to neglect to take required prerequisites for the program that they were interested in pursuing.

The widespread negative perception of transfer support at the community college level expressed by many transfer students was also influenced by some students' perception of a community college focus emphasizing the necessity of obtaining an associate's degree before they left, and not necessarily on helping them move forward as a transfer student to another school.

Additionally, learning to be proactive about identifying which classes will transfer as equivalencies at the receiving institution, and what courses of study should be pursued for preparation for admittance to a specific program or department, was a necessity for most community college transfer students in this research.

Some transfer students were advised to learn to be proactive about information seeking to have the best result. The most proactive transfer students were those who exhibited more advanced information seeking behavior by seeking out advisors, faculty, and departmental information at the receiving institution that was relevant to their specific program interest.

### **Personal/Social Disposition**

The personal/social disposition theme contributed to answering my research question on how community college transfer students perceive their adjustment in several ways. Where students positioned themselves on the age continuum, for instance, reflected the results of adjusting and learning to fit in with new groups and situations. Some individuals who are close to the age of incoming freshmen found it natural to blend in with younger students, as is shown in the discussions and student comments about having a social life, living on campus, and joining campus organizations. These students simply felt younger and a couple of years were

inconsequential to them in their peer relationships, in effect, in some ways they still felt like a first-year student.

Other participants in this research self-identified themselves as being older, both in personal interviews and in the survey responses, and placed themselves differently on the conceptual age continuum than students who felt younger. Similar to a student feeling younger due to their personal/social disposition, being older was not always about chronological age as much as it was about a state of mind, as examples of 20 and 22 year-old transfer students saying they considered themselves to be older indicate. The quote from the student who said she was older but still looked 15 years old in the *feeling different* section speaks volumes about individual differences in perception, in other words, being a part of the group while at the same time feeling different and apart. This is an important answer to my research question about students' perception of adjustment: how a student will perceive and adjust to the transfer process depends somewhat on their self-held feelings of being younger or older.

Balancing life and school commitments can be complicated for older transfer students who have no ambiguity on where to place themselves on the age continuum. Additionally, adjustment for older students focuses somewhat on matters different from those concerning younger students or even freshman students. Freshman students generally do not arrive in the community with a houseful of furnishings and a couple of pet dogs, for instance. Because of a variety of time constraints, older transfer students also seemed less inclined to pursue an active social life than younger students, especially if they had a family of their own. Older students generally indicated a more practical perspective on managing their time. This is in accordance with the findings of Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000) who suggest that when adult students have limited interactions with the college environment, their practical life

experiences give them the ability to adapt to the time management and study needs required for a full-time student to be successful.

Being older for some community college transfer students meant that they stood out in a crowd and felt too different from everyone else. Older students reported this made it difficult to make friends in their classes. This is supportive of Donaldson and Graham's (1999) research that suggests adult students self-evaluate themselves across a number of psychological dimensions, including the notion of feeling too old. Often, older transfer students also felt frustrated by the distracting behavior of many their younger peers, who were seemingly disconnected and apathetic in class, while they themselves felt motivated and focused on learning. This is also supportive of what Donaldson and Graham (1999) suggest in their literature review of research about the impact of collegiate and life experiences on adult students and how those experiences influence learning in adult students. Some research suggests that adult students use the classroom as a stage to intensify their learning and this enhances their ability to connect with their instructor and peers (Donaldson & Graham, 1999).

Older students also wanted more functional information about the campus and its resources that cannot always be discovered on the school's website, for instance, more information about using the library or the location of the microwaves in the Student Center. When it came to orientation, older students were often frustrated by the focus on seemingly irrelevant activities like playing games and listening to information aimed at freshman students and their parents. Older transfer students did not want coaching on how to be a college student, as they reported they often received at orientation, but rather they wanted relevant, actionable, and specific information related to their individual program needs.

These findings generally support what Donaldson and Townsend (2007) suggest in their review of higher education journals' discourse about adult undergraduate students. Those researchers created a four-tier taxonomy of scholarly discourse about adult undergraduate students that includes research suggesting, in part, that some institutions of higher education expect adult (i.e., older or nontraditional students in the context of the article) students to adapt to institutional practices which are oriented toward traditional age students, and that in some instances, adult students are considered problematic. I did not find evidence to support the notion that older students are considered problematic in their needs at the University of Missouri; however, there was some evidence that supports another entry in Donaldson and Townsend's (2007) classification, the notion that the experiences of traditional age students are treated as *universal*, in a sense treating older students as if they were invisible. This is apparent in the findings about older students' attitudes toward the orientation activities at the University of Missouri, for instance.

Although some transfer students were able to achieve a work and school balance, the vast majority perceived working, whether full-time or part-time, a source of stress and a challenge. Strategies for coping with work and school balance generally reflected good time management skills that made individual situations workable. Students who had enough parental and financial aid support so that they did not have to work generally expressed genuine relief at their situations. These were younger students, because I collected no evidence of any older students who reported they did not have to work. Findings indicate that having a social life was important for transfer students, but secondary to their academic responsibilities. My sense of the data is that this was especially true for older students, who all seemed to have a very sharp focus on personal academic goals.

How a student feels about having friends and being able to make friendships falls within the social realm of personal adjustment (Bean & Eaton, 2001). Some transfer students were able to make new friends by joining campus organizations or clubs centered on their major. These were generally younger students, although some older students indicated they joined clubs or groups centered on their program or departmental interests. The vast majority of participants cited time constraints as the reason for not having or reducing their social commitments. Some participants reported that being on one's own at college helped to increase their maturity. I received this information in response to questions in interviews asking students to reflect on what they might change about the way they handled their transfer experience, and also from survey responses from students responding to the question asking about the biggest challenge of being a transfer student. As reflected in comments reported by students in Chapter 4 about becoming more mature, some students realized they might have gotten more academically from their college experience if they had been less immature.

The vast majority of community college transfer students reported their personal support networks were composed of their parents and family. Other transfer students whose parents were farther away or even out of state formed personal support networks of friends and school peers. Older transfer students generally indicated their support networks consisted of significant others, immediate family members, and close friends. This is in accordance with Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000), who suggest that support from family and friends has a powerful impact on the campus experiences of adult students. Findings in this research that personal support networks are highly important to transfer students are also in accordance with Chartrand's (1992) findings that family and friends have a significant influence on students' psychological state. Although Chartrand's research dealt with nontraditional students, I think

there is some applicability here because depending on the research, older students are usually considered nontraditional. Chartrand (2007), for example, considered students older than 24 years as nontraditional.

The frequency of contact with parents was high for many younger transfer students, for example, several contacts a day, with most students using some form of social media like texting or Facebook to communicate with their parents along with telephone calls. This finding is in accordance with behavioral information about parents who take an active involvement in their student's academic and personal lives, in effect, acting like helicopter parents (Lipka, 2007). Further, as discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, findings generally support Agliata and Renk (2008) that frequent communication with parents provides a way for transfer students to deal with adjustment challenges and that parental influence on college students' adjustment is frequently underestimated. Older students, whose personal support networks were generally composed of their spouse or a significant other, did not report this high level of communication with parents.

Many younger students also experienced various levels of homesickness, and tried to alleviate it with frequent parental contact, while others tried to keep busy. Students who lived within a few hours driving distance visited home as often as possible, usually more frequently early in the semester. The adjustments students made to accommodate the various challenges of keeping in touch with personal support networks also contributed to answering my central research question by establishing the importance of the parent/student relationship and how students adapted to being away from home and family.

## Process

What emerged during the collection of data, whether it was a personal interview or an additional survey response, was the sense that transfer student adjustment for research participants was more about the *process* of coming to grips with a new place at a new time in their lives, rather than a series of unconnected or unrelated experiences. How that process was perceived by transfer students really depended on individuals' interpretation of their own unique realities. Students' locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs helped to shape the perception students had of the transfer process and their approach to adaptation.

The self-efficacy of the transfer students in this research was extremely high. It is important to understand the self-efficacy of transfer students because their level of effort and determination, and their confidence in their ability to secure their academic goal of a bachelor's degree, bears directly on how they adjust individually to being a new student at a new place. The transfer students in this study were strongly determined to accomplish their individual academic goals. Even the student who experienced a catastrophic car accident and resulting coma, for instance, was still determined to make a comeback after missing 18 months of school. In his case, he sat in on a couple of classes for a semester after being reaccepted to reacquaint himself with the material in his field, and to make sure he was ready.

Locus of control was internal for the research participants in this study. This information is useful in the sense that it allows a glimpse into the personal reality of the research participants. Students had a predilection for taking credit individually for successes as well as failures, which is a clear indication of an internal locus of control (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004). In Chapter 1, in the section on *A trend toward externalism*, I briefly discussed research by Twenge, Zhang, and Im (2004) that suggested that students' locus of control was becoming increasingly external.

Because of this, I was particularly looking for indications during the data collection that would indicate such externality, but I found no evidence of this during personal interviews or in the survey responses.

Transfer students in this research study attributed their academic success to many factors, including hard work, the way their parents had raised and supported them, support from their personal support network, and also to good time management skills, and actively prioritizing activities. Findings in this research are in agreement with Flaga (2006), who suggests that as transfer students begin to amass the vital information they need to negotiate the environment, that managing one's time and prioritizing becomes easier as time passes. Consequently, students become increasingly more familiar and comfortable with the new college environment (Flaga, 2006), which is what many students in this research reported.

During the adjustment process, transfer students interacted with various touch-points in the environment. For some students, adjustment was a response to complicated and stressful interactions in the bureaucratic realm, for instance, dealing with the financial aid department or the admissions office. The application process itself was considered the biggest challenge and most stress inducing situation by the greater majority of survey respondents and interviewees in this research study. Repeated requests for submissions of paperwork and coursework transcripts, receiving confusing and sometimes contradictory information, as well as many frustrating human errors in processing, including slowness in updating of student information were the main complaints. In addition, students reported difficulty finding deadline information and were often surprised by sudden announcements requiring additional documents for their application. Although the majority of transfer students had few or no problems transferring their coursework, the consequences of courses not transferring or of having taken the wrong courses, meant some students were required to retake courses or take additional ones. This added more expense to the

cost of their education and caused them to experience delays in graduation time. Many students reported the beneficial effect of having an associate's degree in the transfer process, but because of the prerequisite requirements of some particular programs of study, some students found they still had to take more courses just to be considered for admission into their chosen program of study. A number of participants in this research, both in interviews and in survey responses, reported writing intensive courses, in particular, did not transfer from their community college, so this seems to be a standard policy in the enrollment department that is not publicized.

Almost all survey participants and interviewees attended a formal transfer student orientation at the University of Missouri, either the Summer Welcome for fall transfer or Winter Welcome for spring transfer. Of those participants who did not attend orientation, a few were accepted too late for orientation, and a few others skipped orientation and were able to register by meeting with their departmental advisors. The vast majority of research participants attended the Summer Welcome, while only a few research participants reported they attended the Winter Welcome. Those students attending Winter Welcome fall into the category of mid-year transfer students, but there were no particular findings and not enough evidence to conclude that the students encountered significant adjustment problems as suggested by Britt and Hirt (1999) and discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review on mid-year transfer.

Research participants were split in their perceptions of whether the orientation experience was helpful in some way, with about equal numbers having either a positive or a negative view. The most important reasons research participants reported a positive perception of the benefits of orientation were that they were pleased with being able to get information, and they were able to familiarize themselves with the campus. Similar numbers of students reported various inadequacies with the orientation process. These inadequacies include deficiencies in the

campus tours, which were restricted to some main buildings and often covered areas of interest mainly to freshman students like the dorms, the perception among some transfer students that the tour guides were apathetic and condescending, presentations that were aimed at how to be a college student and at students' parents, and registration that was frustrating and often resulted in students not getting the classes they wanted or needed. Some transfer students found the orientation rushed. For other transfer students, parents and family were integral parts of their orientation experience.

It is interesting that the findings of older transfer students' perception of orientation (e.g., lack of relevancy, rushed tours, and a freshman emphasis) were similar to the complaints from students in general who reported a negative perception of the University of Missouri's orientation activities. I think this indicates a larger overall problem with the execution and content of the orientation activities at the University of Missouri, especially in light of findings that indicate at least half of transfer students attending orientation at the University of Missouri are somewhat dissatisfied with the experience.

My sense of the data concerning orientation for transfer students is that some confusion also exists in the minds of many transfer students about exactly what orientation they attended. For instance, many interviewees I talked to indicated they were unsure of which orientation they had attended, and about a third of respondents to the online survey indicated they had attended the Transfer Student Registration Orientation (TSRO), which is not an orientation, but the title of an informational handbook that is disseminated to transfer students sometime during the application process.

This handbook is nine pages of information focusing on the process for picking a date to attend the Summer Welcome. The Summer Welcome brochure does not contain all of the

information directed specifically to transfer students contained in this TSRO guidebook, so those students who do not receive the latter are not getting some information. Specifically, there is about a page of information on the Transfer Interest Group (TRIG) program at the University of Missouri that is not contained in the Summer Welcome handout packet, but is available in the TSRO guide. Winter Welcome information for transfer students is handled by a one page insert into the same Summer Welcome packet that is used for incoming students during the summer for the previous fall semester. The one page insert contains updated deadline information and a schedule of events.

The Summer Welcome is clearly targeted at freshman students, but transfer students are accommodated by being grouped together, preferably by major. This may be a possible explanation as for why so many transfer students attending the Summer Welcome felt like the focus was too much on the freshman experience. The student tour guides give both freshman and transfer student groups generally the same presentation and tour. For instance, even the groupings composed exclusively of transfer students were still given a tour of the dorms on campus and dining areas used by students with meal tickets.

It is interesting to note from an organizational perspective, that the administration of support programs for incoming students at the University of Missouri is generally under the direction of the Office of New Student Programs, for instance, the Summer Welcome and Winter Welcome. The Transfer Interest Group seminar program, however, has a director who is in no way associated with the Office of New Student Programs. This duality in the governance of information dissemination for incoming students means that some transfer students are going to receive information about the Transfer Interest Group (TRIG) and some will not. Findings suggest that whether or not any particular transfer student is contacted with an email invitation or

learns about the TRIG from their advisor on orientation day likely depends on their choice of major or program.

The vast majority of research participants had not received any information about the TRIG program during their application process. Some students recalled that information about the TRIG was available as a small entry in a brochure they had received, and others learned about the program from their advisor when they registered for classes. Because transfer students in the individual TRIGs are grouped by major, a few students who had a very specific or unique major found that the TRIG that was unable to focus on their specific needs and so those students dropped the seminar from their schedule. Majors or programs of study like those in the journalism, education, and business departments that attract a high number of transfer students appear to form the basis of the TRIG program. Students who had participated in the TRIG program generally perceived the program in a positive light and as being useful in helping them make the transfer transition. Those students who received information about the TRIG and chose not to participate generally did not want to commit the time needed, or as indicated in the findings in Chapter 4, simply felt it would not be useful.

The overwhelming majority of participants in this research reported a positive perception of the quality, availability, and usefulness of the support services for students at the University of Missouri, including the writing and math centers, the learning and career centers, and tutoring in a variety of disciplines. Although perception of these support services was positive, the majority of research participants had not used them. As discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, this finding supports an observation from a recent NSSE (2009) that transfer students tend to use fewer support students than native students. Students who had used the support services provided many positive examples of their experiences. A number of transfer students I

interviewed, as well as survey respondents, indicated they had used the support services as a direct response to the level of academic rigor they perceived at the University of Missouri.

In general, the University of Missouri does not provide housing for transfer students. Flaga (2006) says the unavailability of housing for transfer students at many four-year universities is an exclusionary practice that should be closely examined because it may put transfer students at a disadvantage. Findings of this research indicate that the availability, the expense, and the necessity to seek out information on one's own about housing in the campus area were perceived as sources of stress for some students. Other transfer students were able to find housing through friends or had family connections, and consequently had few or no difficulties finding appropriate accommodations.

The University of Missouri provides no direct information on the availability of housing in the local area and the majority of interviewees reported they were referred by staff to look up information on their own regarding housing in the local economy. Transfer students often have to have roommates to share the housing expense, and this complicates the process for many students and adds a level of uncertainty to their transfer experience. In about even numbers, transfer students found their adjustment experience at their new school complicated by their housing experience, and others seem to find a way to make it work without too much stress.

Transfer students' perception of a sense of a welcoming attitude at the University of Missouri among students, staff, and faculty was split. The majority of transfer students perceived and related a strong sense of welcome, but many other transfer students also reported they perceived a focus on freshman students and did not feel welcome. Students who did not feel welcome perceived a sense of apathy about transfer students and reported difficulty in

making friends. This finding generally supports information reported in the Chapter 2 literature review from the NSSE (2009) report that many transfer students feel disconnected and overlooked on their new campuses. Many transfer students I interviewed and many survey participants perceived the financial aid department and the financial aid representatives as particularly unfriendly and aloof. Perception of a negatively charged racial climate at the University of Missouri was reported by two transfer students.

While local transfer students had few difficulties navigating the large campus of the University of Missouri, most transfer students in this study reported that campus size was indeed an ongoing challenge. For some students, large campus size was alleviated by survival guides distributed at orientation, (e.g., *Tiger Survival Guide*, and GoMizzou a mobile device application which greatly aided students in locating their classes and traversing the campus). Some transfer students I interviewed reported they did not know about the survival guide or the mobile app until they saw other students using them or another student showed them what they needed. This indicates another area where information dissemination to transfer students is inconsistent. Some transfer students reported the impact of campus size lessened over time, which was also in accordance with Flaga's (2006) findings about how familiarity over time lessens the challenge of new situations for transfer students.

The overwhelming majority of transfer students reported they did not enjoy their large classes. Findings indicate that many students devised strategies for dealing with the large number of students and resulting distractions by sitting in the front rows or with friends, or by initiating contact with their professors. These strategies were aimed at establishing a connection with faculty and also provided an opportunity to establish relationships with other like-minded students who were pursuing a similar strategy. Students overwhelmingly reported positive

perceptions of faculty at the University of Missouri, and generally perceived that their teachers held superior credentials in their field compared to the faculty at their community colleges. Findings also indicate that most research participants perceived the academic rigor of their classes greater than the rigor at their community college.

### **Conclusions**

The evidence presented in this research has provided me the opportunity to make some conclusions about how community college transfer students at the University of Missouri perceive their adjustment experience. First, community college transfer student adjustment is an ongoing process wherein students adapt to new situations, events, places, and people within the constraints of their individual bounded realities. Social cognitive theory tells us that individual adjustment to any environment is a dynamic process that builds on past experiences through reflection, and allows individuals to make changes in their behavior. Thus adjustment is an ongoing process that necessarily includes all of an individual's prior experiences and decisions. For community college transfer students, this adjustment process begins when a student decides to attend community college with a plan to transfer to a four-year institution. Therefore, the starting point for adjustment will differ with individual students and their particular circumstances. It follows then, that the adjustment process transfer students experience adapting to new situations might begin as early as high school, when alone or in consultation with parents, the decision and planning begins for students choosing to become a community college student who will later transfer to a four-year college.

Second, one of the lessons that students, especially community college transfer students, must learn in order to be successful in higher education is to take charge of one's own affairs, in

effect, to become proactive in dealing with elements in the bureaucratic, social, and academic realms. Many of today's higher education students appear to have received a lot of handholding in high school, for example, through programs like the A+ Scholarship Program that prepares students for transition to college, as well as through the close involvement of parents who influence students' activities and future plans. Navigating the community college environment and responding to the information demands required for a successful transfer transition is an early adult experience for many students. Since community colleges are able to provide only a minimum of advising and information support services, transfer students must by necessity learn to be proactive in seeking out information pertinent to their individual majors or programs of study at the new four-year institution. This is accomplished by searching for appropriate information on websites at the community college and at the receiving institution, contacting departmental representatives or faculty in specific programs of interest at the receiving institution, or physically visiting the new campus and making connections personally.

Third, although chronological age is apparent and acknowledged by some community college transfer students, perception of age is a state of mind for other students and causes them to feel younger or older when interacting with their student peers. Just a couple of years, for instance, have no impact on some students' propensity to feel like they fit in with the group and to feel more akin to their younger peers. Conversely, for other students that same couple of years causes feelings of being older, not fitting in, and often isolation. Because of this tendency of individuals to act according to their personal/social dispositions and self-held beliefs of locus of control and self-efficacy, community college transfer students experience the adjustment process of being at a new college and a new environment differently.

Fourth, individuals' attitudes about various elements of society change over time as generational cohorts come and go, and life changes with the advent of new technologies and ways of doing and thinking. This is as true of widely held attitudes about higher education as it is of other aspects of life. The relationship parents have with their students who attend higher education, for instance, and the relationship parents have with the institutions of higher education who educate their children have changed over time. The time when parents chose to delegate the care and maintenance of their children to school administrators and faculty at institutions of higher education has passed. As findings from this research suggest, today's parents are exceptionally involved in the higher education of their children. Often, parents are also the primary elements of the personal support networks of community college transfer students. Parents are significantly involved in students' academic careers, often communicating several times a day. This close parental involvement in the day to day academic details of their children's higher education is significant and obliges practitioners to engage with parents at a higher level than was done in previous generations.

Fifth, community college transfer students respond to a variety of ongoing challenges in the academic, social, and bureaucratic realms during the transition from a two-year college to a four-year college. In the bureaucratic realm, these challenges include submitting deadline sensitive paperwork and information, and dealing with representatives of various campus departments. But, the process is often complicated by students receiving misinformation or ambiguous instructions, as well as unexpected requests for action or information with imminent deadlines. Consequently, many students experience psychological distress dealing with these challenging situations. In this study, the most significant challenges requiring adjustment for most community college transfer students occurred in the bureaucratic realm where students had

functional experiences dealing with tasks and activities related to the application process itself. Sixth, understanding students' locus of control and self efficacy provides a glimpse into individuals' world views, aids one in understanding why students adopt the strategies they pursue, and also aids in understanding why students react in certain ways to success and failure. Community college transfer students at the University of Missouri generally reveal an internal locus of control and accept personal responsibility for successes as well as failures. Similarly, self-efficacy beliefs help us understand a students' level of determination to follow through on their higher education decision, and how students view the likelihood that they will be successful in pursuing their academic goals. Most of the community college transfer students in this study hold strong self-efficacy beliefs.

In the next section, I will discuss the implications for research and practice of this study.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

My research expands modestly and is inspired by the pioneering research of Townsend (1995, 2001, 2008) and the ongoing research of Laanan (1996, 2001, 2004, 2007) into transfer student behavior, and is useful in that it adds a page of analysis to the growing body of knowledge about transfer students' perception of adjustment.

### **Research Implications**

My finding that the adjustment process for transfer students begins when the transfer decision is formed is a new and exciting finding in the field of transfer student adjustment, and opens completely fresh areas of inquiry for research. In this sense, researchers can now explore the experiences of transfer students in the community college context in greater depth and with a focus on the dynamics of the decision making process to choose a community college versus attending a four-year institution as a freshman student. The influence of the dimensions of free

tuition provided by the A+ Scholarship Program and the low cost tuition in general at community colleges in Missouri offer fertile areas for inquiry that will in turn help researchers to understand this early phase of transfer student adjustment. For instance, researchers could focus on the parental role in the transfer decision, or on the decision to pursue the A+ Scholarship Program while still in high school, or the impact of taking dual college credit courses while in high school in preparation for a higher education experience that includes matriculating at a community college and later transferring to a four-year college as part of the plan. All of these topics would expand our understanding of student adjustment.

Another potential research topic is the advising experience at Missouri community colleges. Findings hint that some community colleges in Missouri may lack the necessary advising infrastructure to provide assigned advisors for each student, but this study is unable to address this topic meaningfully because of the small number of research participants compared to the large enrollment figures for the community colleges in the state. In-depth research at individual community colleges on the advising process would aid practitioners in designing the types of support that the students need in this area. Potential related topics would include identifying the type of advising students receive at the community college; for example, do they receive advising about the two-year requirements to receive an associate's degree, advising for transfer to a four-year college, or advising in a specific major? Research could also identify the information dissemination activities of the advising process and the level of engagement advisors have with the University of Missouri in obtaining that information. Researchers could also explore the proactive information seeking behavior that many students are forced to adopt by necessity when transferring from the community college to the four-year college and the connection, if any, to the advising philosophy of the community college.

As indicated in the Chapter 2 literature review and in numerous examples presented in Chapter 4, parental involvement seems to have a significant influence on the adjustment of transfer students. Another line of research inquiry would be to research the close relationship maintained between younger transfer students and their parents. For many community college transfer students, parents are an ongoing and powerful element of students' personal support networks. There are a variety of nuances to this discussion. For example, researchers could focus on the communication media used by students and parents, which includes telephone, email, and social media like Facebook, or researchers could further explore the notion of distance from home and how frequent communication with parents might mitigate homesickness or the challenge of making new friends.

Researchers could also pursue new lines of inquiry into the notion of personal/social disposition. Individuals' personal dispositions influence self-held beliefs of age and social status and the ability to connect with people in new situations. This directly relates to how transfer students perceive the adjustment process in a new college environment, and would expand our discussion beyond student retention and student involvement.

I also encourage further use of social cognitive learning as a theoretical umbrella for research into transfer student adjustment because of its broad applicability. Previous research on transfer students has often been grounded in student developmental theories from the work of researchers like Astin (1985, 1993) and Tinto (1993), and this has built a foundation for researchers investigating new areas of inquiry like transfer student perception of adjustment. The conceptual tools available within social cognitive learning, for instance, locus of control and self-efficacy, provide unique perspectives and opportunities to aid qualitative researchers in understanding the self-held beliefs of research participants. Although locus of control has been

used quantitatively in an academic setting (Landrum, 2010; Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004), locus of control offers useful insight for qualitative inquiry as the present study has shown.

Similarly, self-efficacy beliefs offer an open window to examine the determination and confidence of transfer students and can provide qualitative researchers an additional perspective to use when interpreting the narratives of research participants. Locus of control and self-efficacy thus are conceptual tools that offer useful insight into students' self-held beliefs and will subsequently help advance research knowledge of community college transfer students' adjustment.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

The roadmap for the remainder of this chapter includes some recommendations based on the overall findings, and concludes with a brief summary. In my opening remarks in Chapter 1, I said the ambiguity inherent in understanding just what exactly a transfer student *is* had implications for researchers and practitioners. Practitioners simply need to be aware of the ways transfer students are different from ongoing freshman students, and in light of the findings of this research, understand that transfer student adjustment is an ongoing process that varies with individuals according to their personal/social dispositions, and may begin for some students as early as high school.

**Land-grant role.** In the broadest sense, the land-grant mission of the University of Missouri has been an evolving one, as it has for all land-grant institutions. For example, today the land-grant mission is no longer solely focused on furthering agriculture and practical tradecraft, but instead is reflected by a close relationship with the state community college system to provide democratic access and higher education to all the citizens of the state (Washington State University, 2014). The following recommendations are based on the findings

of this research and are meant to aid the University of Missouri in providing the best possible support for community college transfer students.

The University of Missouri should establish a full-time transfer student center with an appropriate level administrator. This transfer student center should take over all things related to incoming transfer students, including the application process, and should be the main point of contact for all transfer students, not just those coming from local community colleges. The transfer student center should also assume responsibility for conducting specific orientation sessions for transfer students, separate from those for freshman students. Campus tours and information dissemination should be clearly focused on the practical needs of transfer students.

Foremost among the responsibilities of the transfer student center would be the establishment and maintenance of a transfer student website. This informational website would be accessible to all transfer students across the state. The website should contain complete and up to date program and major information for all departments at the University of Missouri, including prerequisite information and contact information. Course equivalencies for courses at Missouri community colleges and the corresponding courses at the university should be provided on the website. The website should provide a forum for visitors to post questions and a procedure for providing replies.

Additionally, the transfer student center should assume direction of the information fairs at various community colleges in an effort to provide better information dissemination to community college transfer students. An assessment should be made as to the efficacy of these events and to determine whether it would be feasible to expand the scope to include more community colleges or to increase the frequency of the existing fairs. As well, the transfer student center should assume direction of the transfer interest group seminar program, and

integrate its activities of information dissemination and student socialization as part of a broader orientation for transfer students.

Finally, in view of the findings that the application process itself was considered as the main challenge to adjustment by the participants in this research, the University of Missouri should perform a comprehensive assessment of the application process. This should focus on slowness in updating records and student concerns about unclear deadlines and application requirements. This assessment should include a significant component that measures customer satisfaction with the goal of improvements in student service and satisfaction.

### **Summary**

The importance of community college transfer students to four-year institutions is clear. Nearly half of higher education students begin at two-year colleges, and more than a quarter of those students later transfer to a four-year school (College Board, 2008). The better we understand the complexity of transfer student adjustment, the more we will be able to help those students achieve academic success.

Flaga (2006) tell us that four-year institutions that enroll meaningful numbers of transfer students should take an active role in interacting with the latter before, during, and after transfer. A transfer student center could provide closer connections between two-year colleges and help the University of Missouri to fulfill its role as a land grant institution that would increase transfer students' overall access to information. In addition to establishing a transfer student website, increased use of personal visits by campus representatives at Missouri community colleges in the form of information fairs would also help the support the same purpose. As Flaga (2006) puts it: A culture needs to be established in which community college advisors feel comfortable

calling university advisors for specific information when working with students. Therefore, knowledge of exactly who to contact is critical. Development of such a culture can be assisted in smoothing transitions (p. 10).

This research generally affirms that community college transfer students participating in this study at the University of Missouri perceive their adjustment to the transfer process favorably. Community college transfer students act within their individual frameworks of locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs, with individual variations of circumstance, environment, and personal/social disposition coming into play at various points in the transfer process. My six main conclusions summarize how the findings of this research answer my research question and add some new findings to the existing research literature on community college transfer students' perception of adjustment during the transfer process. Finally, my recommendation that the university establish a transfer student center will help create a best practices standard for highly intensive research institutions and will also help the University of Missouri fulfill its institutional role as a public land grant institution of higher education for the state of Missouri by supporting access and information dissemination for community college transfer students from across the state.

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## **Appendix A**

### Mass Email Survey Request

Hello Fellow MU Student,

I'd appreciate it very much if you would take my research survey about your transfer experience here at MU. I'm Bob Eames, a PhD student working on my dissertation, and I'd very much like to hear your story. This survey should take about 15 – 20 minutes depending on the length of your responses.

There is nothing sensitive about the information I'm interested in, and I will not ask you anything controversial, anything extremely personal, or anything that puts you at risk.

Please click on the link to take the survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/T2P5WPG>

If you'd be interested in participating in a personal interview about your transfer experience, please send me a reply email to set up an appointment for somewhere on campus or anywhere convenient for you that we can talk. Thanks for taking the time to read this message. Best,

Bob Eames

Doctoral Candidate

Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis

University of Missouri [rwec98@missouri.edu](mailto:rwec98@missouri.edu)

Here is additional contact information if you have any questions or concerns about this research:

Dr. Joe Donaldson (Committee Chair): [donaldsonj@missouri.edu](mailto:donaldsonj@missouri.edu)

Campus Institutional Research Board University of Missouri: 573-882-9585,  
[umresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umresearchcirb@missouri.edu)

## **Appendix B**

### Personal Interview Recruitment Request

Hello Fellow MU Student,

I'd like to interview you about your transfer experience here at MU. I'm Bob Eames, a PhD student working on my dissertation about the transfer adjustment process, and I'd very much like to hear your story.

Naturally, your participation is entirely voluntary. The interview will generally take no more than 50 – 60 minutes and I will make an audio recording with your permission. There is nothing sensitive about the information I'm interested in, and I will not ask you anything controversial, anything sensitive, or anything that puts you at risk.

Please send me a reply email to set up an appointment for somewhere on campus or anywhere convenient for you that we can talk. Thanks for taking the time to read this message. Best,

Bob Eames

Doctoral Candidate

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Here is additional contact information if you have any questions or concerns:

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## **Appendix C**

### Survey - Community College Transfer Student Adjustment

Welcome and thank you for taking this survey.

Please take a moment to read the following statement about your rights as a participant and then check the box below acknowledging that you've read and understand the statement.

### Statement of Informed Consent

The purpose of my research is to understand the adjustment experience of Missouri adult community college transfer students. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may stop the process at any time. This survey should take approximately 15 - 20 minutes, depending on the length of your responses. I will not ask you anything controversial and there is nothing

sensitive about the information I am seeking. There is no risk of any type associated with the type of questions I will ask you.

Your identity is not needed for this research, but will be protected from disclosure in those instances where I receive identifiable information. No persons other than my dissertation committee will be allowed access to your responses. Any personally identifiable information I collect in the course of this research will be stored in a secure, locked file cabinet accessible only to me for 8 years.

Feel free to contact me by email [rwec98@missouri.edu](mailto:rwec98@missouri.edu) if you would like to contribute a personal interview to this research. Here is complete contact information if you have any questions or concerns about this survey:

Bob Eames (Primary researcher): 573-639-0336 [rwec98@missouri.edu](mailto:rwec98@missouri.edu)

Dr. Joe Donaldson (Advisor): [donaldsonj@missouri.edu](mailto:donaldsonj@missouri.edu)

Campus Institutional Research Board University of Missouri: 573-882-9585  
[umresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umresearchcirb@missouri.edu)

I have read and understand the Statement of Informed Consent

1. I am 18 years of age or older.

Yes  No

2. Did you transfer to the University of Missouri from a community college in Missouri?

Yes  No

3. Approximately how many credits were you able to transfer?

4. Have you been accepted into a degree-seeking program?

Yes

No

5. Please discuss the advising and preparation you had at your community college to ready you for the transfer process. How did this help or hinder your transfer experience?

6. Did you have any problems with your transferred coursework being accepted? If so, how did this affect you? Please give details.

7. The University of Missouri has various orientation and support programs, for example, Summer Welcome, Freshman Orientation, Winter Welcome, Transfer Student Orientation, Transfer Student Interest Group (TRIG), etc. What orientation did you participate in and what is your opinion of the usefulness of what you learned?

8. Did you receive any information about the Transfer Interest Group (TRIG) program during the transfer process?  Yes  
 No

9. Please describe a notable experience that really sticks in your mind, either positive or negative, that you had during your participation in orientation.

10. Please describe your biggest challenge of the transfer process.

11. What has been your level of involvement with support services like the Math and Writing Centers? How has the availability and quality of these services affected you?

12. How does the University of Missouri compare to the community college you attended with regard to size and ease of use?

13. How does the University of Missouri compare to your community college in terms of student and faculty diversity?

14. How does the University of Missouri compare to your community college in terms of class size? How has that affected you?

15. How does the University of Missouri compare to your community college in terms of the academic difficulty of class work and assignments?

16. How do your professors here at the University of Missouri compare with those you had at your community college in terms of quality and academic expectations?

17. How easy has it been for you to find the information that you have needed as a transfer student about services and academic programs? Please explain.

18. What sorts of challenges have you encountered moving to the community of Columbia such as housing, transportation, family, etc.? How has this affected your transfer experience?

19. What sorts of challenges have you had balancing work/life commitments and your academic goals? How has this affected your transfer student experience?

20. What is your perception of a 'welcoming attitude' at the University of Missouri from staff, faculty, and other students as a new student at this school?

21. What has been your involvement with social activities on campus like athletics, clubs, or student government, and how has that involvement affected your experience?

22. How has closeness to home and/or parental involvement affected your transfer experience?

23. What challenges have you faced with your personal financial situation and obtaining financial aid? How has this affected your student experience?

24. What is your level of determination and confidence in your ability to do what is necessary to get your baccalaureate degree? Please explain.

25. What do you think are the main reasons you have been able to be successful so far as a student both at your community college and at the University of Missouri? Please explain.

26. Describe your level of satisfaction so far with the University of Missouri as a transfer student. Please explain why you feel that way.

27. If you could change something about your transfer experience, what would it be?

28. Is there anything else you think I should know about your transfer experience that I haven't asked?

Thank you very much for taking this survey!

## Appendix D

### Provost's Office Focus Group Interview Guide Questions Research

#### Questions:

1. Is there an increase in the positive attitudes of transfer students toward MU; who after one semester, express that their MU transfer experiences were very satisfying?
2. Is there an increase in the positive attitudes of transfer students toward MU, who after graduation express that their overall MU experiences were very satisfying?

#### Focus Group Questions:

1. In which scenario were you quite certain you would eventually transfer to MU?
  - I was certain while still in high school, but first chose to start at my community college.
  - I was not certain until sometime after I enrolled at my community college.
2. Describe two best reasons why you chose to attend your community college before transferring to Mizzou.
3. Describe two best reasons why you chose to attend Mizzou after the community college.
4. Describe the one biggest challenge you experienced in making the transition from your community college.
5. Mizzou wants to provide transfer students with high quality and reliable service at all the points of contact, as well as ensure a welcoming feeling during each stage/phase of the process. During your own transfer experience, describe some transfer services you received from MU, which you were—mostly satisfied – to very satisfied—with MU customer services: (That is, MU processes, procedures, and staff were “welcoming, helpful, positive and easy to navigate”.)
6. During your own transfer process, describe which transfer services you received from MU in which you were really not very satisfied with MU customer services (that is, MU

processes, procedures and personnel were “negative, confusing, challenging, or had obstacles.”)

7. If you are currently enrolled in a TRIG section (“Transfer Interest Group”), please explain the reason(s) why you chose to enroll in the TRIG program.
8. If you are currently enrolled in a TRIG section, describe a memorable positive experience which is/may be helping you better navigate or make the transition to Mizzou.
9. If you are currently enrolled in a TRIG section, list any negative feelings which describe how your TRIG experience does not meet your Mizzou adjustment needs.
10. Mizzou wants to do everything possible to help transfer students adjust to their new Mizzou life once on campus. Given all the challenges you have encountered at Mizzou, describe your level of satisfaction with your overall adjustment to Mizzou. Could you please be a little more specific—in which areas?
11. Is there anything more you would like to describe about your decision to transfer to Mizzou?

## **Appendix E**

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### **Welcome & thank-you**

Read & hand out Statement of Informed Consent

- ✓ Find out if they are a new transfer or a graduating senior & meet inclusion criteria

Topics to consider: semester transferred, semester planning to graduate, # if credits completed

(Keep it informal!) – Ask a couple of general opening questions:

#### **Where did you go to community college?**

#### **What was your experience like there?**

- ✓ How did pre-transfer preparation in advising/receiving needed information possibly affect adjustment?

Topics to consider: frequency of advising, perceived usefulness, availability of transfer info, participation in transfer related programs

#### **How was the quality of your advising at your community college?**

#### **Did you get all the information you needed to transfer? Please explain.**

#### **How has that preparation affected your transfer experience? Please explain.**

- ✓ What are the academic, social, & personal factors that affect adjustment?

General topics: biggest challenge of transfer process, comparison of cc to University of Missouri for class size, campus size, diversity

Academic topics: use of support services, transferability of coursework, use of information resources, academic rigor, quality of faculty, quality of academic programs

Social topics: involvement in campus social activities (athletics, clubs, etc.), perception of welcoming attitude (staff, students, faculty), use of campus facilities (rec center, learning support, track, etc.)

Personal topics: on – off-campus housing, family commitments, job commitments, financial aid, personal financial challenges, parental involvement, closeness to home

#### **What's been the biggest challenge of your transfer experience? How do you feel about how the process has been going?**

**What has been the most positive experience you've had as a transfer student?  
 What's been the most negative thing that's happened during the transfer process?  
 What's been your level of involvement with support services? Please explain.  
 What's been the biggest challenge of balancing your personal life commitments with your school commitments?**

✓ What is their self-efficacy belief?

**What's your level of confidence in your ability to do what is necessary to get your baccalaureate degree?**

Topics to consider: what's their determination level, what's their attitude about persevering?  
 What's their level of confidence? Try & rate them in some manner: weak, moderate, strong

✓ What is their LOC?

**What do you think has been the biggest reason that's made you successful here at MU?**

Topics to consider: Try to identify internal vs. external LOC, it should be reflected in accomplishments or setbacks based on personal achievement or upon luck or fate

✓ What has been the impact of support services for community college transfer students?

**Describe a memorable positive experience you've had using any of the available support services here at MU.**

**Describe your level of satisfaction with the support services offered here at MU.**

**Describe a negative experience you might have had with support services or orientation.**

Topics to consider: Summer Welcome, Fall Orientation, Winter Welcome, learning center, Women's Center, TRIG program, Rec Center, Library, any support effort

✓ Closing questions:

**If you could change something about your transfer experience, what would it be? Please explain.  
 Is there anything else you think I should know about your transfer experience? Would you consider letting me interview you again sometime?**

**You've been very helpful, thank-you very much.**

## Appendix F

### Statement of Informed Consent

The purpose of my research is to understand the adjustment experience of adult community college transfer students. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may stop the process at any time. The interview will generally take no more than 50 – 60 minutes and I will make an audio recording with your permission. You may ask me to stop the recording at any time and I will comply. I will not ask you anything controversial and there is nothing sensitive about the information I am seeking. There is no risk of any type associated with the type of questions I will ask you. Although the research will not benefit you individually, it will contribute to the body of knowledge on this topic and help future community college transfer students.

Your identity is not needed for this research, but will be protected from disclosure in those instances where I receive identifiable information. All data will be assigned a code and stored in a key list. Your identity will therefore not be anonymous, but will be kept confidential. The audio recording of our interview will be transcribed in private so no one but me will hear your remarks. No persons other than my dissertation committee will be allowed access to my data. Any written or electronic personally identifiable information as well as the data I collect will be stored in a secure, locked file cabinet accessible only to me for 8 years. Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. Here is contact information if you have any questions or concerns:

Bob Eames (Primary researcher): 573-639-0336 [rwec98@missouri.edu](mailto:rwec98@missouri.edu)

Dr. Joe Donaldson (Advisor): [donaldsonj@missouri.edu](mailto:donaldsonj@missouri.edu)

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[umresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umresearchcirb@missouri.edu)

Appendix G - Thematic Categories

Chapter 4

Background Context

Financial considerations - At  
 Closeness to Home & Family

Table 1

Salient Themes of Transfer Student Adjustment

| Pre-transfer Preparation Process                   |                                                 | Being Younger           | Being Older                           |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ① Advising<br>(CC's mission to push AA degree)     | Application process                             | Feeling like a freshman | Feeling different<br>Feeling isolated |
| ③ Learning to be Being proactive<br>Academic focus | Transferring courses<br>- AA degree controversy | Transfer stigma         | Transfer stigma                       |
| Context ← Enrollment decision                      | Program req's                                   | Work/school balance     | Work/school balance                   |
| ② Receiving institutional visits                   | Large campus                                    | Social life             | Social life →                         |
| Learning to be Proactive                           | Large class size                                | Being on one's own      | Looking back                          |
| CC focus                                           | Self-efficacy                                   | Distance from home      | Looking back                          |
| Receiving institutional visits                     | Locus of control                                | Homesickness            | Orientation                           |
| Information seeking                                | Academic services                               | Enrollment decision     | Orientation                           |
| General Topics                                     | Orientation                                     | Support Networks        | Orientation                           |
| - cut across theme                                 | Housing                                         |                         |                                       |
| Self-efficacy & LOC                                | Transportation                                  |                         |                                       |
|                                                    | Personal Issues                                 |                         |                                       |
|                                                    | Relationships                                   |                         |                                       |
|                                                    | Family                                          |                         |                                       |
|                                                    | Unexpected events                               |                         |                                       |
|                                                    | Father's health                                 |                         |                                       |
|                                                    | Car accident                                    |                         |                                       |
|                                                    | Strategies for adjusting                        |                         |                                       |

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Robert W. Eames, Jr. has had a varied and interesting career in higher education interrupted by conducting two small businesses and raising a family. He first attended Palomar College, a community college in north San Diego County in southern California, and graduated with an Associate's in Arts degree in general education. After a brief two-year stint in the U. S. Army after being drafted, he returned to his studies and completed a B. A. in History at San Diego State University in 1975. Graduate studies in history were discontinued due to a variety of life events. Robert established his first small business in the late 1980s as a licensed low voltage contractor installing telephone systems and telephone wiring and did this until the early 1990s. In 1994, he moved his family to Columbia, Missouri, and opened a comic book store named Red Planet Comics. This venture lasted until 2000, when times and cultural changes and the advent of the internet caused the business model to be less productive. Robert decided to update his education and obtained a B. S. in Computer Information Systems in 2001 and a Master's in Business Administration in 2005, both from Columbia College in Columbia, Missouri. Upon graduation Robert began to teach business courses as an adjunct at Columbia College and did this while enrolled in the Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis Ph.D. program at the University of Missouri beginning in 2007. In 2009, he began to teach part time at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, and was awarded a full-time visiting instructor's contract in 2012. In 2013, Robert was successful in gaining a tenure track position as Assistant Professor of Business at Westminster College where he teaches an assortment of business and management courses.