

SUPPORTING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER STUDENTS: AN
ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Wendy Ruona)

ABSTRACT

Transfer students face many challenges when transitioning from one institution to another. International transfer students face additional difficulties. The purpose of this action research (AR) study was to explore and deeply understand the difficulties and unique adjustments faced by transfer students, academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically, as they transition to College T from their old institution and implement interventions to smooth this transition. In particular, the experiences of international transfer students, coming from institutions both within and from outside the United States, who speak English as a second language, were examined. This was done through the lenses of Bridges' (1980, 1991) and Schlossberg's (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) theories of transition as well as Oberg's (1960) theory of culture shock. Data were gathered over two and a half years from ten international transfer students at three different times during their first year at College T. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with AR team members as well as staff and graduate/undergraduate students working with transfer students. In addition, survey data were gathered from three different groups of transfer students in spring 2016, fall 2016, and fall 2017.

The AR team followed two cycles of AR, which involved assessing the situation, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

The findings from this study affirm much of the literature related to the challenges of transfer students - that they do experience academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical struggles. In addition, international transfer students have additional challenges stemming from language proficiency, cultural knowledge and culture shock. The major findings drawn from the study were: (1) issues related to language and culture make the transfer and integration experience of international transfer students uniquely challenging; (2) institutions need to be open to making necessary structural changes to provide ongoing, sustained support for transfer students, especially international transfer students, to help them become an integral part of the college community and successful students and Alumni. Implications for future research and practice are offered.

INDEX WORDS: Transfer students, International transfer students, Transfer student adjustment, Transition theory, Culture shock

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DEDICATION

Thank you for loving me

For being my eyes

When I couldn't see

You parted my lips

When I couldn't breathe

Thank you for loving me

—Jon Bon Jovi

To my husband Tony, and daughter Charlotte, for putting up with me during this incredibly time consuming, yet rewarding journey. I hope the promised vacation to Hawaii will make up for all the times I had my head stuck in a book, or my eyes trained on my laptop. To my mum and dad for being the kindest parents anyone could have had. Mum, I wish you could have been here to have shared this moment with me. I know you would have been beyond proud.

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Don't get too comfortable with who you are at any given time - you may miss the opportunity to become who you want to be.

—Jon Bon Jovi

To all the professors who have guided me throughout this process, thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone and helping me grow in more ways than I could have imagined. To my major advisor, Dr. Wendy Ruona, for your meticulous feedback and generous support. To my committee, Dr. Aliko Nicolaidis and Dr. Karen Watkins for your detailed guidance and care.

To the members of my AR team, you gave willingly of your time in order to create an environment for our transfer students to find community and be successful. On behalf of those students I thank you all.

To every transfer student who took the time to fill out a survey or be interviewed, your insights were invaluable and you can be proud that you were instrumental in the interventions that were developed and implemented to help other transfer students. It is a selfless act to do something to help others that is not directly beneficial to you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION: "THANKS FOR THE 60K! SEE YA LATER!"	1
Terminology Clarification	2
Issue Identification	3
Purpose and Research Questions	11
Significance.....	12
Chapter Summary	15
2 LITERATURE REVIEW: "SO MANY FACETS"	16
Are All Transfer Students the Same?.....	16
Challenges for Transfer Students.....	24
Theories Used in the Literature on Transfer Students	33
Theories of Transition.....	39
Conceptual Framework.....	50
Chapter Summary	52
3 METHODOLOGY: "THROWN INTO THE MIX!"	53
Overview of Design	54

Data Collection	59
Data Analysis	74
Ensuring Trustworthiness	78
Delimitations of the Study	84
Chapter Summary	85
4 THE ACTION RESEARCH STORY: "THANKS FOR THE 60K! NOW LET'S SEE HOW WE CAN HELP YOU"	87
The Context.....	87
The Action Research Teams	87
The Action Research Cycles	93
Chapter Summary	121
5 FINDINGS: "LOST AND ALONE"	122
Academic Challenges for Transfer Students.....	127
Social Isolation for Transfer Students.....	134
Emotional Hurdles for Transfer Students	139
Administrative/Practical Frustrations for Transfer Students	152
Learning	154
Chapter Summary	167
6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: "MAKING THE EXTRA LEAP"	168
Summary of the Study	168
Discussion and Conclusions	169
Implications for Further Research	179
Implications for Practice	181

Closing Reflection	184
REFERENCES	186
APPENDICES	
A SUMMARY OF MAJOR EMPIRICAL WORKS RELATED TO TRANSFER	
STUDENTS	200
B INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER	
STUDENTS	210
C FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER	
STUDENTS	213
D SURVEY ITEMS.....	215
E SUPPLEMENTARY SURVEY ITEMS	222

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1.1: Numbers of Incoming TS at College T from Fall 2015 to Fall 2017, Broken Down by Status: Domestic and International	10
Table 2.1: Challenges Faced by Transfer Students as Seen in the Literature.....	25
Table 3.1: Data to Address the Research Questions	60
Table 3.2: Pseudonyms and Biographical Information of International Transfer Student Interviewees	62
Table 3.3: Biographical Information of Student Workers and Staff Interviewees	64
Table 3.4: Pseudonyms and Biographical Information of AR Team Members	65
Table 3.5: Numbers of Incoming TS at College T from Fall 2015 to Fall 2017, Broken Down by Status: Domestic and International	68
Table 3.6: Strategies Used to Demonstrate Trustworthiness	79
Table 4.1: Pseudonyms and Biographical Information of the AR Team.....	88
Table 4.2: Interventions and Findings: Cycle One	104
Table 4.3: Transitioning to College T Classes and Facilitators	114
Table 4.4: Ratings on Transition Class Sessions	118
Table 5.1: Overview of Research Question 1 Findings	124
Table 5.2: Overview of Research Question 2 Findings	125
Table 5.3: ITS Stages of Culture Shock (Oberg, 1960) During Period of this Study.....	146

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1: Complexity of the transfer student population	2
Figure 1.2: Cycles of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).....	14
Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework 1: Transferring to a new college and a new culture.....	52
Figure 3.1: Cycles of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).....	55
Figure 4.1: The AR team’s two cycles of action research	95
Figure 4.2: Round one interventions.....	99
Figure 6.1: Conceptual framework 2: International transfer student adaptation to a new college and culture	175

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: "THANKS FOR THE 60K! SEE YA LATER!"

Each student at an institute of higher education is a unique being with unique needs. Not all students come from the same background, not all students come to college at 18 and work their way through from orientation to graduation, and not all students are successful. Colleges and universities need to understand the individual academic, social, emotional and practical/administrative needs of every student in order to help these students thrive and be successful in all aspects of college life.

Many students studying in U.S. colleges do not stay at one institution for the entire duration of their undergraduate careers but move from one institution to another. According to a National Student Clearinghouse Report (2015) titled *Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions Fall 2008 Cohort* (Shapiro, Dundar, Wakhungu, Yuan, & Harrell, 2015), 36.8 million students started college for the first time in fall 2008. Of those 37.8% transferred at least once to another institution. Of those students who transferred 45% transferred more than once. Some students move from a two-year to a four-year institution (vertical transfers), some from a two-year to another two-year institution, or a four-year to another four-year institution (lateral transfers), and some from a four-year to a two-year institution (reverse transfers). In addition, many students studying in U.S. colleges come from other countries. In the *Open Doors* (2016) report from the Institute of International Education (Farrugia, 2016), 1,043,839 international students studied at colleges and universities in the United States during the 2015-16 academic year, which is 5.2% of the total higher education

population. This number has dramatically increased in recent years; for example, this increase is more than double the number of international students who studied in the U.S. in 1998-9 (490,933). The largest group of international students come from China (31.5%), India (15.9%), Saudi Arabia (5.9%) and South Korea (5.8%).

It needs to be recognized that some transfer students are also international students which makes them international transfer students. In addition, some of these international transfer from institutions within the U.S. (named in this study as *Domestic, International, Transfer Students* or DITS) and others transfer from colleges outside the U.S. (named in this study as *International, International, Transfer Students* or IITS). Thus, we can begin to see the complexity of the issue which can be seen in Figure 1.1.

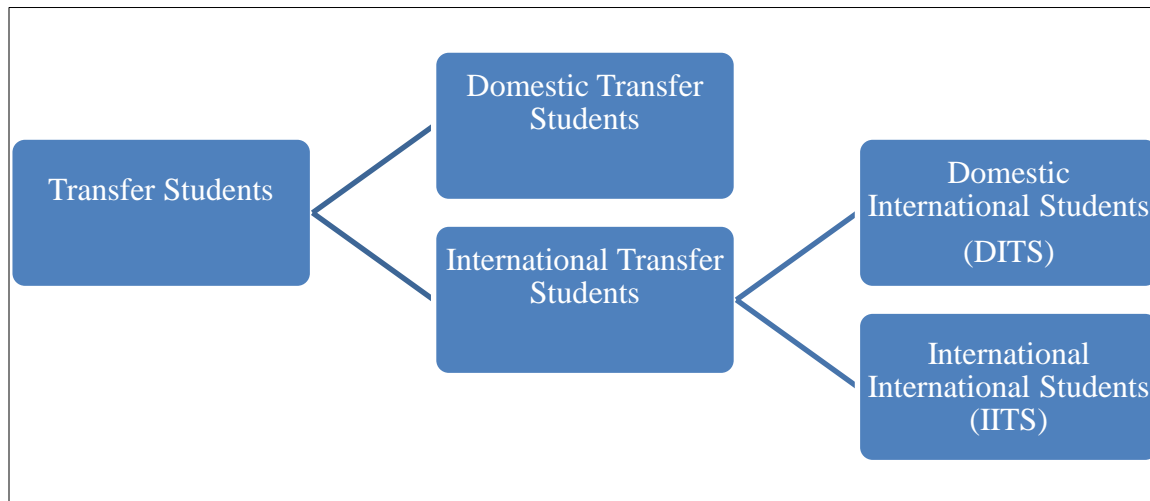


Figure 1.1. Complexity of the transfer student population.

Terminology Clarification

In the literature "native" students are those students who stay at the same institution to complete their degree as opposed to "transfer" students who move to at least one other institution

to complete a particular course of study. These "native" students could therefore, confusingly, in fact be international students who stay at one institution throughout their degree. In addition, the word "native" seems outdated and would seem more appropriate when referring to American or domestic students. Therefore, for the purposes of this study I will be using more streamlined language to avoid confusion:

1. *International Students* are any students from another country studying in the U.S.
2. *Permanent Students* are any American or international students who remain at the institution for the full course of study (referred to as "native" students in other studies).
3. *Transfer Students* are any students, American or international, who transfer from one institution to another.
4. *Domestic Transfer Students* are American students moving from one college to another.
5. *International Transfer Students* are international students moving from one college to another.
6. *Domestic International Transfer Students (DITS)* are international students who came to America to study and have moved from one college in America to another.
7. *International International Transfer Students (IITS)* are international students transferring from an institution outside the U.S. to one inside the U.S.

Issue Identification

There have been many studies focusing on the issues of transfer students (Berner, 2012; Lazarowicz, 2015; Owens, 2007; Townsend, 1995; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Vaala, 1991) and there have been many studies looking at international students and the challenges they face

(Brown & Holloway, 2008; Kim, 2012; Lee & Rice, 2007; Newsome & Cooper 2015; Tarry, 2011). Although there are some studies looking at race and transfer students (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Laanan, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003), I have managed to find only one article specifically about international transfer students (Carpenter, 1991), and no empirical studies solely on this population to date. Townsend (1995) chose to study a group of students transferring from a racially and ethnically diverse urban community college with a large number of international students. She felt that "racial and ethnic diversity would be an advantage in [her] study since [she] assumed that such students would provide perspectives not bounded or dominated by one racial or ethnic group" (p. 178). She interviewed nine enrolled transfer students and received surveys from five transfer students who had left the institution. While she does specify if a student is international when quoting them, her discussion section does not give specific conclusions or recommendations for international students. Also, it is not clear how many of the interviewees and survey respondents were international. Finally, she defines international students as immigrants, not students studying in the U.S. on a visa (who are the focus in this study). I have not, to date, managed to find anything that differentiates between IITS and DITS.

Jacobs (2004) explains:

In today's more mobile society, students sometimes transfer multiple times between both two- and four-year institutions.... Thus, for an institution ... to fully understand the transfer population, it must realize, at the outset, that the students bring with them quite varied backgrounds, experiences and academic portfolios. (p. 3)

Owens (2007) stressed, "Community college transfer students are often diverse, and investigating into the transfer adjustment process for students from underrepresented groups may

enable universities to provide successful academic journeys for these transfer students" (p. 110). These two specific observations from Jacobs and Owens indicate the importance of researchers delving deeper into the issues of diversity, which of course, includes nationality.

Framing the Issue

I was hired by College T in August 2007 to create a program to support the growing number of English as a Second language (ESL) students. At the time there was no vision as to what this would look like, but it was my job to find out what the needs were and how they could be addressed. The main area of concern, at the time, was the struggle many ESL students were having in their first-year writing classes. I was given permission by the English department to create a special section of the required first-year writing class with additional ESL support that I would teach. In addition to the class, I also developed a writing assessment that international students complete during international orientation. This assessment is a timed piece of writing that is holistically scored. At that time the purpose of the test was to identify those students who would most benefit from taking the special writing class for first year students.

Soon it became clear that the need was more than I alone could address. After three years a second ESL instructor was hired so we expanded the number of the first-year writing sections from two to six. Later still, with the addition of a third instructor in fall 2014, we developed classes to fulfill a continuing writing requirement.

With the additional help I was also able to start reviewing the needs of other groups of international students beyond the first-year students. Included in these were male Korean students returning from mandatory military service in Korea, students coming to us from our two-year sister college, and international transfer students. In the fall of 2013 we expanded the writing assessment to include evaluating the writing of international transfer students and

returning Korean students and quickly realized that international transfer students comprised a group of students who needed more support than they were getting. That year we were able to test 28 students. Some were exempted; for example, if English was their first language, and some should have tested but failed to appear to take the test. The average score for the international transfer students on the test, using a five-point scale, was 2.88. This was worryingly low as, at the time, first-year students scoring 3.5 or less were invited to special sections of first-year writing with ESL support. As the international transfer students had already taken their first-year writing classes, and we had no continuous writing classes, we could only direct them to the ESL tutors for support.

The following year, fall 2014, we decided to get more data from international transfer students. There were 34 incoming international transfers that year. This time we distinguished between students coming from colleges within the U.S. (27) and those coming directly from colleges in their homeland (seven). Of these students we tested 22 and identified 15 who would benefit from classes with ESL support. Of these 15 (three IITS and 12 DITS), four decided to accept the offer to take a class in spring 2015 (three DITS and one IITS). Staffing was not available to offer the class fall 2014 when they first came to College T which may have been a more popular time to offer it.

All transfer students face challenges in their new setting and, as Townsend and Wilson (2006) say, may need a "hand hold" (p. 439) initially. These challenges, as identified in the literature, are academic struggles, difficulty in finding friendship networks and fitting in, as well as adjusting to the new institutional setting. Nevertheless, it seemed to me these challenges would be greater for international transfer students in general and, in particular, those coming directly from another country. Specifically, language issues, cultural differences, and

homesickness, potentially could exacerbate the issues. In my initial research to see if this would be a good topic to delve deeper into, after obtaining signed consent, I spoke with five international transfer students, three during the spring 2015 (two IITS and one DITS) and two in summer 2015 (one DITS and one IITS). They confirmed my thoughts but also made me realize that this was more severe than I had imagined and indeed warranted further examination.

An IITS in spring 2015 stressed the difficulty of language on academics, she stated:

*The last semester I was really overwhelmed. I had never took class in a complete English environment. I also had never taken writing class before when I was in China.... That writing class I suffered a lot. You always stayed up late until 2 or 3am writing a paper or a proposal or whatever. I spent a lot of time on it.*¹

Another IITS in spring 2015 highlighted the cultural differences in trying to make friends with American students. She said:

I think it's because I grew up in China, I stayed there for almost twenty years. We don't share common topics or habits with each other, so sometimes I feel awkward or maybe nervous to stay within American students so long, because I don't know what to talk about, what to chat.

Oberg (1960) theorized about the stages of culture shock, these being the honeymoon stage (an exciting time when someone first arrives in a new country), a period of frustration (this could be with the language and customs), recovery (where a person is becoming more comfortable but still has some problems), and finally adaptation. Following this model we can clearly see an IITS in summer 2015 passing through the honeymoon stage to a period of frustration. He sadly told me:

¹ Quotations from student participants in this study are presented in their own words, with only minor editing for clarity of meaning.

Most transfer students from outside the United States were depressed to various extent, because they were so far from home. And together with the stress from college, they're usually very homesick. So homesickness is a big problem. It's not a huge problem in the first semester or second semester, because we just came to the United States. It's very exciting, and we are very, it's like very energetic all day. So the first and second semester we're OK. But the beginning of the second year was extremely hard for each one of us. We were staying here, but we were thinking about our home, and sometimes we just lost ourself and can't do anything.

In my work as the Director of ESL I have worked closely with many of these students. Many rise to this challenge and are very successful. Others seem to find the transition very stressful. I have encountered some that I have sent to the counseling center and others I have referred to tutors. Some will use these services and overcome their problems; others will not. I became more and more interested in the experiences of both IITS and DITS, who also speak English as a second language, and I began to increasingly wonder what adjustment issues the two groups demonstrate. What are the similarities and differences? What can we do to make this adjustment smoother? How are they similar to, and how are they different from, domestic transfer students?

Transfer Students at College T

Transfer students at College T are lateral and vertical transfers. In the last three academic years College T has had approximately 100 incoming transfers each academic year. Numbers are much higher in the fall semester than the spring semester. No IITS are admitted in spring as there is not enough time over the winter break to process the necessary paperwork.

Approximately a quarter of these transfer students are international. In the academic year 2015-

2016 of the 96 transfers 21 were international (21.88% of the transfer population). Of those, 17 were DITS and four were IITS. In 2016-2017 of the 93 transfers 21 were international (22.58% of the transfer population). Of those 14 were DITS and 7 were IITS. In the academic year 2017-2018 of the 98 transfers, 21 were international (21.43% of the transfer population). Of those, 20 were DITS and 1 was an IITS.

Table 1.1

Numbers of Incoming TS at College T from Fall 2015 to Fall 2017, Broken Down by Status: Domestic and International

Type of Transfer Student	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Total 2015-2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Total 2016-2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Total 2017-2018
Domestic	55	20	75	57	15	72	56	21	77
International	17 (13 DITS, 4 IITS)	4 (DITS)	21 (21.88% of TS population)	20 (13 DITS, 7 IITS)	1 (DITS)	21 (22.58% of TS population)	16 (15 DITS, 1 IITS)	5 DITS	21 (21.43% of TS population)
Total	72	24	96	77	16	93	72	26	98

Note. TS = transfer student/s

I formed an action research (AR) team to investigate the issues faced by international transfer students and three interviews were conducted over the academic year 2015-2016 with ten students (six DITS and four IITS). In addition, the team decided to further research the issues faced by all transfer students in order to make a comparison. With the permission of the Dean of the Office for Undergraduate Education (OUE), we obtained the email addresses of all transfer students enrolled in spring 2016 from the registrar. The total was 314 with 88 internationals, 16 of whom had transferred from institutions outside of the United States. These students were surveyed and the team analyzed the similarities and differences between the groups. In addition, incoming transfers in fall 2016 and fall 2017 were surveyed in order to assess the success of the two rounds of interventions the AR team put in place.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this action research (AR) study was to explore and understand the difficulties and unique adjustments faced by transfer students, academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically, as they transition to College T from their old institution and implement interventions to smooth this transition. In particular, the experiences of international transfer students, coming from institutions both within and from outside of the United States, who speak English as a second language, were examined. The research questions were:

1. How is the experience of transition for international transfer students, both those transferring from institutions within the U.S., and those transferring from institutions outside the U.S., different to the experience of domestic transfer students?
2. What can an action research team learn as we help transfer students navigate their academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical transition?

Significance

Carpenter (1991) stated that although there is "a growing body of expertise and literature ... addressing the educational and social needs of the increasing number of international students in the United States" he lamented the fact that, "[l]ittle information is available on the special problems international students have in making the transition from a two- to a four-year school" (p. 162). He asserted that all transfer students will have similar problems, but this group will also have additional challenges. Carpenter admitted his article was based on his own observations at his workplace and discussions with colleagues with a hope to opening the conversation. Sadly it would appear since this date little has changed. While his article is a good first step, it failed to recognize the differences between DITS and IITS. In addition, apart from highlighting the fact that there is little communication between sending and receiving institutions, the issues he raised are the issues faced by all international students, transfers or not: different education systems in the U.S. and other countries and inadequate advising.

Laanan (2001) warned us that "the 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" (p. 6). This study sought to understand the academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical needs of all transfer students but focused in on international transfer students. With a deeper understanding of these students in transition, interventions were designed to assist these students and the impact of those assessed. This is of practical significance and the knowledge generated is potentially applicable to any other institution that has transfer students. Also it highlighted the fact that we need to look beyond the label of transfer student and see the subgroups of students within and the unique challenges they face.

Action Research

This research was conducted using AR to address the struggles of transfer students within College T. AR is a process in which a group of invested people work together to examine a specific problem and find ways to improve the situation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Stringer 2014). The invested people at College T consisted of staff members in various offices serving the transfer population. The way the AR was conducted was through Coghlan and Brannick's model:

1. Pre-step – examining the context of the project and determining if the project to be undertaken is worthwhile
2. Constructing – discussing and assessing the situation and the issues by the stakeholders
3. Planning action – building on and refining the constructing stage and deciding what action is to be taken
4. Taking action – implementing and putting the plans into action
5. Evaluating action – deciding on the success of the implementations and what should be modified or changed in the future. This then leads to further cycles.

Figure 1.2 shows how this cycle works.

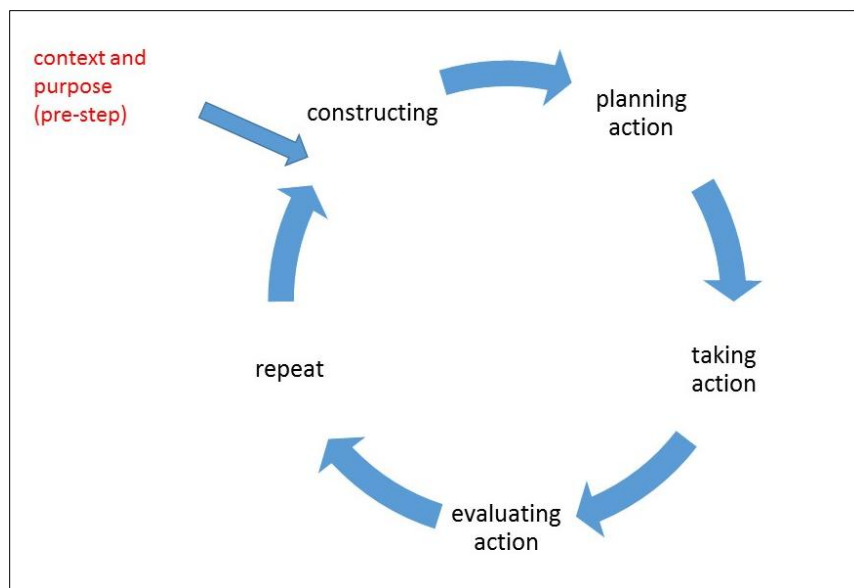


Figure 1.2. Cycles of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

Theories Framing this Research

Several theories framed the study and helped the AR team to understand the experiences of transfer students better. Schlossberg's theory of transition (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) and Bridges' transition model (1980, 1991) helped to guide our thinking about the stages of transition and how a student moves through them. Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) wrote *Getting the Most Out of College* and depicted the importance of moving in, moving through and moving out and how the "4S" system (situation, self, support and strategies) can help or hinder the transition of students in college. The importance of the 4S appeared in other works by Schlossberg and colleagues (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, 2008; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Bridges added another dimension to this and focused on the ending and letting go of an old situation which can cause distress, a neutral zone or feeling of being lost in the new situation then finally a new beginning. The letting go and feelings of sadness was an area the AR team thought long and hard about in our interventions as we attempted to find ways

to help transfer students rapidly feel a part of the social and academic communities at College T. Finally Oberg's theory of culture shock (1960) helped us think through the cultural adjustment piece through his stages of the honeymoon, frustration, recovery and adaptation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I set the stage for the rest of the manuscript by identifying the populations of transfer students and international students in the U.S. I clarified the terminology and acronyms that will be used throughout the paper and identified the issue that will be examined, that being the additional challenges faced by international transfer students compared to domestic transfer students. Further I briefly introduced the methodology of AR and the theories used to frame the research: Schlossberg's theory of transition, (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011), Bridges transition model (1980, 1991) and Oberg's theory of culture shock (1960).

The rest of the manuscript is structured as described: Chapter 2 is the literature review where I examine what is known about transfer students and what theories have been used to study this population culminating in the conceptual framework devised for this study. Chapter 3 takes an in depth look at the methodology of AR as a means to create change. In addition, my sample and data collection methods are described. Chapter 4 tells the story of this AR journey and the interventions that were implemented. Chapter 5 illustrates the findings mapped to the research questions. Chapter 6 describes my conclusions and implications for practice and further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: "SO MANY FACETS"

Machi and McEvoy (2012) explained that a literature review can help us "question the current state of knowledge about a topic in order to define an area for new research" (p. 3). As this study focused on transfer students, an important first step was to review the literature around this population in order to understand what is already known and what is still unknown about this group and their transition experience. In addition, the common theories underlying the current literature were examined: Tinto's model of student integration/retention (1975, 1987, 1993), Astin's theory of student involvement (1984), Pace's concept of quality of effort (QE), (1980, 1982, 1984), Oberg's concept of culture shock (1960), and Schlossberg's theory of transition (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011). Finally, a decision was made as to which of these theories were deemed useful to the current study and an additional model, Bridges' transition model (1980, 1991), was reviewed and added to the conceptual framework.

Are All Transfer Students the Same?

Most of the transfer student literature has examined students transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution and regarded transfer students as a homogeneous group (Berner, 2001; Davies & Casey, 1996; Flaga, 2006; Vaala, 1991) rather than looking at specific subpopulations within the transfer community. Some researchers have stressed that we need to look beyond the label of "transfer student" (Strahn-Koller, 2012; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003) as despite their shared transfer experience, they are unique people with diverse backgrounds. Strahn-Koller warned that, "Due to the increasing number and diversity of transfer students it is important to

examine how their unique characteristics influence transfer and their subsequent integration into their new environment" (p. 1).

Some studies have looked at the difference between traditional and nontraditional transfers (Lazarowicz, 2015; Strahn-Koller, 2012). Occasionally, there has been an article or study that refers to ethnicity but they tend to group students into two large groups, "White" and "Non-White" or "Minority," (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Ishitani, 2008; Keeley & House, 1993; Laanan, 1996, 1999; Strahn-Koller, 2012). Others provide a more detailed breakdown of ethnicity (Berner, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Laanan, 2007; Lazarowicz, 2015; Townsend, 1995; Wawrzynski & Sedacek, 2003).

White, Non-White

Studies grouping students into "White" and "Non-White" or "Minority," (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Ishitani, 2008; Keeley & House, 1993; Laanan, 1996, 1999, 2004; Strahn-Koller, 2012) tend to show that there are some differences between these two large groups. Berger and Malaney (2003) surveyed 372 community college transfer students and drew the conclusion that White students receive better grades and tend to be more satisfied with the whole university experience. They stressed, "This may indicate that the university needs to do a better job of providing a supportive environment for students of color" (p. 18).

Keeley and House (1993) and Ishitani (2008) studied the phenomenon of "transfer shock", that being the drop in a student's Grade Point Average (GPA) on transfer. These were both longitudinal quantitative studies. The group Keeley and House termed "Minority" was a combination of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. It was not stated if the Asians were international students or Asian Americans. Keeley and House admitted "this group is very heterogeneous and does not lend itself to definitive comparisons because of this diversity" (p. 9).

They found this group came into the transfer institution with lower GPAs than Non-Minority groups, experienced greater "transfer shock" and continued to have lower GPAs although these did improve over time. They concluded, as did Berger and Malaney (2003), that an institution should give additional help to this group which they identified as "at risk".

Ishitani (2008) further examined how "transfer shock" affected students' persistence. He studied three cohorts of students both "native" students (non-transfers, known in this study as permanent students) and transfer students. There were 1347 transfer students in the study. Like Keeley and House (1993) he also examined the data based on different student characteristics one being Minority (171 students, 13.1%) as opposed to Caucasian (1171 students, 86.9%). He found that Minority students were more likely to remain than Caucasians in the second semester, but if they returned for a third semester they were 68% more likely to leave than Caucasians. Which students constituted a Minority was not specified but Ishitani did specify that the number of students in the different racial groups was too small to explain any specific effect on those groups which is why they were grouped together.

Laanan (1996, 1999, 2004) conducted various studies in which he broke the transfer population down into White and Non-White transfers. For example, in 1999 he conducted a comparative study between 336 White and 330 Non-White students transferring from a community college to a university using the Transfer Student Questionnaire (TSQ). The purpose of his study was to investigate any differences transfers experience academically and socially based on their racial/ethnic background. The White students were students who marked White/Caucasian on the survey. The Non-White group consisted of African Americans, American Indians, Chinese, East Indian/Pakistanis, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Mexican Americans/Chicanos, Other Spanish/Latinos, Pacific Islanders and Vietnamese. Due to the Non-

White group being so diverse Laanan did not make generalizations across specific racial/ethnic backgrounds, but he was able to say there were many differences between the two larger groups. The results suggested that "non-white students are likely to have different experiences at both the two- and four-year institution than white students in terms of quality of effort, perception of the environment, and educational background" (p. 1). One reason could be that many of the Non-White group were first generation students and had not been exposed to what is needed to be successful at college.

In Strahn-Koller's (2012) study on differences between traditional and nontraditional transfer students she again collapsed race into two categories, White and Non-White or Minority. In the White group she included Asians citing Kao and Thompson (2003), stating Asians "tend to perform similarly to or higher than whites academically; while there remains a substantial gap academically between Whites and Asians and less advantaged minority groups such as Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans" (p. 43). The Non-White or Minority group included Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Other, More than one race. Although she did find some differences connected to gender on transfer shock and academic and social integration she did not find any specific differences based on race.

More Detailed Ethnic Breakdown

Some studies provided more information on ethnic breakdown. (Berner, 2012; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Laanan, 2007; Lazarowicz, 2015; Townsend, 1995; Wawrzynski & Sedacek, 2003). Unfortunately, this information was mostly not used to show any differences between the groups. Berner (2012) used purposeful sampling to ensure diversity. She interviewed 13 community college transfers who experienced "transfer shock" upon transferring

to a university. Of that group six were female and seven were male. Five were white, five from underrepresented minorities (3 Hispanic Latino, 1 Asian, 1 Black), two stated they had more than one ethnicity (White/Native American, Black/Latino) and one declined to answer the question. Reading the student profiles it appears none were international. She found no differences based on ethnicity in academic and social adjustment. Dougherty and Kienzl (2006) studied the effect of social background (socioeconomic status [SES], race/ethnicity, gender and age) on transfer using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of the 8th grade (NELS:88) and the Beginning Post-Secondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:90). Regarding race and ethnicity, students were divided into White, Black, Hispanic and Asian categories. It is not stated if any of these students were international but information specific to race and ethnicity was that black students of the same SES as whites have "higher educational aspirations" (p. 452) and thus are more likely to transfer.

In Laanan's (2007) study we get more details of ethnicity. Out of 717 community college transfers (51%) were students who marked White/Caucasian on the survey. The Non-White group was a combination of predominantly Mexican/Mexican American/Chicano students (8.8%), Chinese/Chinese-Americans (8.6%), Korean/Korean American (5.9%), Vietnamese/Vietnamese American (5.4%), Other Spanish/Latino (5.3%), Japanese/Japanese American (4.7%), African American/Black (2.4%). These were again collapsed into a Non-White group and no conclusions were drawn either by ethnicity or in the larger White/Non-White groups. Laanan explained, "In predicting students' academic and social adjustment, none of the social demographic variables entered (e.g. age, honors status, and racial/ethnic category)" (p. 55).

Laanan's attempt to distinguish differences in students was a useful one and one that needs to be further investigated in the future. However, it must also be noted that an international student will have a vastly different experience to a hyphenated American. A hyphenated American may straddle different identities sharing, and sometimes struggling with, aspects of their native culture contrasted with American culture (Gaertner, 2012). Gaertner found that Korean international students and Korean American students rarely mixed on campus due to large obstacles between the two groups. Further he explained that "This disconnection between Korean international students and [Korean Americans] underscores the dramatic cultural shift that occurs in the first generation of Koreans who grow up in the U.S. and not in South Korea" (p. 168).

Wawrzynski and Sedacek (2003) examined race and gender differences in the transfer student experience. They surveyed 492 transfer students, 14% African American, 14% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 6% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 65% White, 0.7% Other and like Laanan (1999), they discovered that "transfer students do not all share the same experiences and expectations when transferring to a new institution" (p. 493). While it cannot be determined if any of the Latino students were international, the Hispanic students expressed the importance of learning good oral communication skills in college.

Townsend (1995) chose to study a group of students transferring from a racially and ethnically diverse urban community college with a large number of international students. She wanted to discover transfer student perceptions about transferring and what help they had in this from the institutions. In addition, Townsend wanted to know how the students viewed academics at each institution. She interviewed nine enrolled transfers and received surveys from five others who had left the institution. While she does specify an interviewee's gender, ethnic

background and if they are international when quoting them, it is unclear how many total interviewees or survey respondents were international. What is known is that there was at least one Asian international female and one White international female. No biographical details were given for the five survey takers. Disappointingly, Townsend's findings do not provide any specific recommendations for international students. Overall she discovered that successful transfer students were self-reliant, academics were tougher and competition fiercer at the new institution, faculty were not as approachable, and peers not as helpful. Lazarowicz (2015) used journaling and interviews with 12 full-time community college transfer students. He interviewed eight White students, one Hispanic/Latino, one Black or African American, one Biracial/Multiracial, 1 Not Disclosed. Unfortunately again we do not know if any of these students were international and results were not broken down by ethnicity.

Carpenter (1991) spoke to the needs of international transfer students and investigated the cooperation between two- and four-year schools and focused on domestic, international transfer students (those transferring from another institution within the U.S. or DITS). There was no mention of international, international, transfer students (those transferring from another institution from outside the U.S. or IITS). Additionally, I have found no empirical studies to date that look specifically at international transfer students much less at the differences between DITS and IITS.

Future Research

Laanan (2007) recommended that future research should focus on longitudinal, qualitative studies such as focus groups and interviews to provide rich data on the experiences of transfer students. Most research on transfers has been quantitative in nature (Austin, 2006; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Laanan, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007; Strahn-Koller, 2012; Townsend & Wilson,

2006; Wawrzynski & Sedacek, 2003). In addition, there have been longitudinal, quantitative studies (Ishitani, 2008; Keeley & House, 1993). Few studies before Laanan's recommendation used qualitative methods (Townsend, 1995). However since Laanan's (2007) call more studies have used interviews (Lazarowicz, 2015; Patton & Davis, 2014; Tobolowsky & Cox, 2012). Not many have used focus groups (Davies & Casey, 1996). Few qualitative studies have been longitudinal, although Flaga (2006) interviewed 35 community college students after their first and second semester, and Lazarowicz (2015) interviewed 12 transfer students from community college to a large Midwestern research university at three points during their first semester.

Secondly, Laanan (2007) called for researchers to separate the ethnic groups as "Due to the changing demographics of students on college campuses, there is a need for researchers, administrators, and student affairs professionals to begin to understand how different racial/ethnic groups differ within the group and from other groups" (pp. 56-7). Other researchers echo this sentiment (Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Owens (2007) interviewed 57 community college transfer students to understand their adjustment to a four-year university. She understood that her study looked at transfer students in general and called for future research to focus on specific populations. Although she mentioned minority and low-income transfers specially she did state:

Investigating in particular the transfer adjustment process for students from underrepresented groups may enable universities to provide successful academic journeys for these transfer students. This would provide greater depth to the transfer recommendations of targeted populations than was provided through this study of the general transfer population. (p. 110)

Flaga (2002) also stated that although she had collected data on ethnicity and gender she had not analyzed this to discover any similarities or differences of the transfer experience. Berger and Malaney (2003) called for more research on the transfer experience of students of color stating that universities need to offer more support to this group.

This study addressed all Laanan's recommendations. I used a longitudinal approach interviewing international transfer students three times during their first academic year at College T. All the students interviewed were Asian international students, two Koreans and eight Chinese. Further I looked at their experiences based on whether they transferred in from a college within the U.S. (six students) or directly from their home country (four students). Thus I was able to get rich data based on a very specific group of students. Further through the use of surveys I was able to compare their experiences to those of domestic transfer students.

Challenges for Transfer Students

On reviewing the empirical research on transfer students, I sought to identify and understand the challenges they face, categorizing them into four primary areas: academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical. Figure 2.1 provides a summary of these challenges as highlighted in the literature.

As can be seen the literature has focused mostly on academic and social challenges. While both of these can also cause emotional stress this has been less emphasized as has practical/administrative issues. A full empirical table describing these works in more detail can be found in Appendix A. I describe each category in more detail below.

Table 2.1

Challenges Faced by Transfer Students as Seen in the Literature

Academic, Social, and Emotional Challenges Faced by TS Identified in the Literature	Academic Challenges	Social Challenges	Emotional Challenges	Administrative or Practical Challenges
Austin (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Berner (2001)	✓	✓		✓
Berger & Malaney (2003)	✓	✓		
Crisp & Nuñez (2014)				✓
Davies & Casey (1996)	✓	✓		✓
Dougherty & Kienzl (2006)	✓	✓		
Duggan & Pickering (2008)	✓	✓		
Flaga (2006)	✓	✓		✓
Ishitani (2008)	✓			
Keeley & House (1993)	✓			
Laanan (1996)	✓	✓	✓	
Laanan (1999)	✓	✓	✓	
Laanan (2004)	✓	✓	✓	
Laanan (2007)	✓	✓	✓	
Lazarowicz (2015)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Owens (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Patton & Davis (2014)		✓	✓	✓
Strahn-Koller (2012)	✓	✓		
Tobolowsky & Cox (2012)				✓
Townsend (1995)	✓			✓
Townsend & Wilson (2006)	✓	✓		✓
Vaala (1991)	✓	✓		✓
Wawrzynski & Sedlacek (2003)	✓	✓		
Total	20	18	8	12

Academic Challenges

The term "transfer shock" was first coined by Hills in 1965 after he studied research from 1928 to 1964 on transfer students from junior to senior colleges. He surmised that transfers experience a steep drop in grades in the first semester after transfer that gradually lessened and that "native students" (permanent students) would perform better academically. Hill's observations have been verified by other researchers (Ishitani, 2008; Keeley & House, 1993; Laanan, 1996, 2001; Townsend, 1995). The literature also demonstrated academic challenges were not necessarily the same for all transfer students. Laanan (1999) stated, "non-whites had more agreement ... that large classes were intimidating.... In terms of academic adjustments, non-whites were more likely to agree that adjusting to the standards and expectations [had] been difficult, [and] experienced a dip in grades during the first or second quarter" (p. 20).

Townsend and Wilson (2006) interviewed 19 transfer students, nine men and 10 women two of which were minority. They explained that transfers generally saw four-year college faculty as harder to get to know than faculty at community colleges. They also felt they were not noticed in the larger classes and faculty did not seem to care if they were there or not. Although assignments were fewer at the four-year college, they tended to require more work. Transfer students found it harder to keep track of them and liked the accountability of more frequent assignments to be turned in. Some also felt faculty were less interested in teaching and more focused on their research. This could indeed be a true perception. Faculty do have the stress of a publication requirement in order to get and often retain tenure. Jacobs and Winslow (2004) analyzed data from a National Survey of Post-Secondary Faculty (NSOPF, 1998) administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. Their aim was to understand faculty satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their workload. The

results were based on 17,600 responses of faculty from 819 college and universities. One factor they found that led to job dissatisfaction was not just the amount of work but whether it was the work that a faculty member found to be satisfying. They stated, "Those [faculty] spending a larger fraction of their time on research are less likely to complain about their workload... In contrast, spending a larger fraction of time on teaching is not clearly differentiated from spending more time on administration in terms of its effect on workload dissatisfaction" (p. 123). Pan, Cotton and Murray's (2014) case study used interviews and focus groups with both faculty and students at a new university in the U.K. (formally a polytechnic but given status of a university in 1992). They also found that many professors saw teaching as something they had to do, whereas research was something they wanted to do, that would also help their careers.

Often ways to help students were encouraged in the literature. Laanan (2007) explained, "Reducing students' apprehensions and alleviating feelings of anxiety about the 4-year institution appear to be important to facilitating students' academic adjustment" (p. 54). He suggested faculty, staff, and other students could facilitate the reduction of this anxiety and that students could help their adjustment themselves by their quality of effort in using good academic habits such as attending academic workshops. In addition, those students with a strong belief in their abilities ("self-concept") would be able to adjust academically more easily. Berger and Malaney (2003) called for more support structures for "non-white" students and more research on this specific population.

In Austin's (2007) study, students had monthly luncheons with mentors (academic and support staff), and an assigned administrator for personal and academic counseling. Scholarships allowed students to focus on academics without the need to work. These students were given a more personalized orientation, which Austin argued was key to students' academic socialization

into a new college atmosphere. The students appreciated knowing about resources up front rather than having to find out about them during the busy semester. Those who had good faculty mentors felt this also helped their academic performance. These relationships even went beyond academics, with one student saying her advisor was like "a big sister" (p. 284).

Academic challenges were highlighted in the literature, particularly "transfer shock", the increased difficulty of the work, a lack of connection to faculty and larger classes; in short academic adjustment is more difficult at the institution of transfer. Occasionally the literature examined subgroups of students in light of this such as "White" and "Non-White" or traditional and nontraditional students but other than that little to no attention has been made to these populations and academic adjustment issues.

Social Challenges

The literature showed that many transfer students complain that it was difficult to break into friendship groups that were already formed (Austin, 2006; Laanan, 1999, 2004, 2007; Patton & Davis, 2014; Strahn-Koller, 2012; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Wawrzynski, & Sedlacek, 2003).

Townsend and Wilson (2006) found both some traditional and nontraditional students said it was harder to find friends at the four-year institution than at community colleges as the "native" (permanent) students already had their friendship groups established. In the smaller community college they were able to establish friendships with other students in the smaller classes. For the traditional students they were likely to know the other students in the class having grown up with them and having the same experience of starting the college together. For nontraditional students it was also easier to relate to others in the community college which caters for older, working students who often have families.

Laanan (1999) discovered that White students did not have as many problems as Non-Whites adjusting socially. They found it easy to make friends and were involved in social activities. Laanan (2007) explained that:

For students to be successful in their social adjustment ... it is important that they become involved in campus organizations that include academic or cultural groups. Spending time with other students and working on projects will foster a sense of belonging to the institution. (p. 55)

Patton and Davis (2014) reported that the African-American students displaced by Hurricane Katrina found it very hard to find friends. One student said:

The main reason I decided not to stay [in the new institution] was because I felt sick. Not sick from the university, but sick because I felt I was alone. On campus I felt I was alone because my roommates were white. It was hard connecting with the black people up there because I just didn't know them. (p. 12)

Strahn-Koller (2012) discovered social integration was stronger for students who were male, who were more socially integrated in their previous institution, and/or who were living on campus. Conversely, it was weaker for students who were married, had children, and/or had a job. There were some suggestions to help this social integration. Austin (2006) discovered that monthly meetings helped the nontraditional, female, commuter students form bonds they did not feel they had with the traditional students they mixed with in class. One woman said, "I am not on campus and I don't have time to be part of the campus as I have a whole other life I need to attend to" (p. 281).

It can be seen that socially it is a challenge for all transfer students, specifically for non-whites and students who have families. Again there is no specific information on international

students and if they find it easier or more difficult than other transfers to adjust socially. Being in another country far from home are they able to form bonds with their fellow patriots having their nationality and language in common? Or do they experience the same feelings of being an outsider?

Emotional Challenges

Academic and social challenges can work together and overwhelm some students and even lead to depression. Many studies pointed to students feeling overwhelmed by the whole experience; for example, the size of the new institution, the process of transferring itself and how long the transition took (Lazarowicz, 2015). Laanan (1999) explained that Non-Whites stated more often that they "felt overwhelmed by the size of the student body... [and]felt alienated at the University upon transferring" (p. 20).

Fortunately, some institutions recognized these emotional challenges and were striving to help students. The nontraditional, female, commuter students in Austin's (2006) investigation commented that they felt emotionally supported by regular contact with an administrator trained in social work, who helped guide them with school and family concerns. One student said, "If I had not had the contact with Mrs. T I would have been lost on this campus several times" (p. 282). Students appreciated having one person they could approach for any problem or confusion that arose who was able to empathize with the different stressors of being a both a parent and an older student.

Some students recognized the need to help themselves. Patton and Davis (2014) said their African-American transfer students experienced racial tension at the new institution. Some students found that taking direct action helped them, such as protesting the Confederate flag, and others found strength in their faith. Patton and Davis called for support groups "to decrease

feelings of isolation and enhance connections with other experiencing similar transitions... Authentic empathy and understanding can be experienced for displaced students if they are connected with each other (p. 14).

Davies and Casey (1996) and Owens (2015) found transfers wanted the personal attention at the university that they had had at community college. Davies and Casey explained that students in the community college were able to connect with other students, staff and faculty on a one-on-one basis. A student in Owens' study called for the four-year institution to "create a hands-on and individual-based environment where the student feels like a person and not a number" (p. 75). This could be an assigned advisor or help from other students.

Administrative/Practical Issues

Administrative challenges highlighted in the literature included problems with transfer credits and/or paperwork coming from the previous institution as well as navigating a new school and system. The displaced African American students Patton and Davis (2014) studied after Hurricane Katrina had a particularly tough transition. Patton and Davis stated "When students first arrived at their transfer institution, they were immediately thrown into the school's processes and culture, without an orientation or any guidance. This was done hastily, leaving students bewildered and feeling unwelcome" (p. 11).

Lazarowicz (2015) echoed these feelings of being overwhelmed by the amount of information on arrival, reporting that "even being an in-state transfer student did not alleviate the feeling of being overwhelmed initially on campus due to the sheer amount of information and physical buildings each had to learn" (p. 113).

Townsend and Wilson (2006) found students were frustrated at both ends of the transfer process, feeling they received little support from the sending institution. Comments about the

receiving institution were more positive (for example, the orientation they received) but most students reported that there was still not enough help. Students felt they had to do everything on their own. One student commented, "I think [the university] fails because they think that because we've been through college already we're more mature and we should find our way around and we don't need any assistance, but we're pretty much like freshmen when we come up here 'cause we're new" (p. 446). Berner (2012) found transfers did not like to ask for help, "Some transfer students felt they *should* already know how to manage in college and were afraid of being viewed as ignorant if they asked for help" (p. 148).

However, Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) discovered transfer students do not always take advantage of what was actually offered as having already attended orientation in their previous institutions they felt they already knew what they needed to know. An administrator they interviewed stated, "Transfer students come in with a lot more preconceived notions than freshmen.... They assume a lot of those things are the same [as at their previous institution] ... and every college does it [procedures] differently" (p. 397). An assistant dean lamented that transfers coming from small schools were accustomed to being told about and guided through the academic year but at larger institutions this does not necessarily happen. This can lead to problems for students missing important deadlines and missing academic and social opportunities. The head of one undergraduate program worried that transfers got a bad first impression of the new institution that did not go away because they come in at a very busy time when office staff simply do not have the time to give them the guidance they need, "things are very hectic and they get put off or run around or something like that then it's the impression that stays with them" (p. 399).

There is clearly a mismatch between the perceptions of students as highlighted in Townsend and Wilson's (2006) study and that of administrators as seen in Tobolowsky and Cox's (2012) study. What is clear is that transfer students do need guidance moving between the two institutions on both ends of the process. Strahn-Koller (2012) called for community colleges and four-year institutions to work together on articulation agreements to ease the transfer of courses. In addition community colleges should better prepare students for transfer; for example, by having former students who transferred talk to future transfers about how a four- year institution is different. Professors should also rethink how best to prepare transfer students for the academic rigors of the new institution. Once at the new institution orientation is an essential welcoming and informational time but it is not enough. As Patton and Davis (2014) stated, "it is clear that ongoing assistance and clarification are needed beyond a one-time session" (p. 12).

Summary

Social and academic challenges can lead to emotional challenges which are added to by the sheer feelings of being overwhelmed by the transition. A new, bigger institution, more difficult and bigger classes, no friends (at least initially), and a whole new administrative system to learn can be daunting. Both the receiving and sending institution needs to be aware of these issues and work to find solutions.

Theories Used in the Literature on Transfer Students

The main theories used in the studies above were Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student integration, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, Pace's (1980, 1982, 1984) concept of quality of effort (QE), Oberg's theory of culture shock (1960), and Schlossberg's theory of transition (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011). These were all examined to potentially inform this study. Ultimately, Schlossberg's theory was selected together with an additional

theory of transition (Bridges, 1980, 1991) and the theory of culture shock (Oberg, 1960). The reasons these theories were particularly helpful (or not) for the current study are discussed below.

Tinto's Model of Student Integration/Retention (1975, 1987, 1993)

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) studied students' social and academic integration and how this impacted their persistence in an institution. This theory has been one of the most widely used by researchers studying transfer students (Austin, 2006; Townsend, 1995; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Strahn-Koller, 2012). Austin (2006) used this theory to examine which support services, both academic and social, nontraditional female commuter transfers found useful in allowing them to persist at a four-year institution. Townsend and Wilson (2006) also used it as a way to examine factors needed for academic and social integration into the receiving institution.

Tinto (1987) discussed the stages an individual goes through when moving from high school to college and based his work on Dutch anthropologist Van Gennep's (1909/1960) work titled *The Rites of Passage*. The idea of stages that a student must go through is similar to the ideas expressed by both Bridges (1980, 1991) and Schlossberg (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995) below. While Tinto was talking about incoming first year students, this idea can still be applied to transfer students.

Tinto (1987) explained that when students come to college they are moving from one community to another; in doing so they must disconnect from their former community in order to connect to the new community. This first stage of separation can cause adjustment problems and perhaps lead to students leaving the college. In starting college, there is a move from the high school and family community to the college community. The same type of separation applies when moving from one college to another. Tinto explained, "The process leading to the adoption

of behaviors and norms appropriate to the life of the college necessarily requires some degree of transformation and perhaps rejection of the norms of past communities" (p. 95). This experience can be "isolating and distressful" (p. 95), and Tinto specifically mentioned foreign students may find this particularly difficult. This mirrors Bridges' (1980) idea of the endings phase (see below). The next stage is one of transition between the old and the new where the new ways of being are not yet fully adopted. This can be easier or more difficult depending on how different the new situation is. Tinto stressed, "Though external assistance may make a difference, it cannot do so without the individual's willingness to see the adjustment through" (p. 98). This idea reflects Schlossberg's (1984) concept of the self (see below). The final stage is one of incorporation. The individual has moved away from the old ways of being and must now adopt the new ways. Tinto explained, "In most situations, new students are left to make their own way through the maze of institutional life. They...have to learn the ropes of college life largely on their own" (p. 98). He argued that many students are not able to do so, especially those from close-knit families and communities, and they run the risk of dropping out.

The model, although widely used, is also not without its critics. Tierney (1993) felt that Tinto's assimilation model makes underrepresented students invisible and stresses too much what the student should do to adapt rather than what the institution should do. He took umbrage at the implication that the Native American students he studied would need to "remove" themselves from their home culture to persist at college and felt that colleges instead should be more open to listening to diverse student voices.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) criticized the model also for not addressing issues of diversity. They called for additional research on students' transition to college, specifically campus climate and belonging for students from various racial and ethnic groups. They stated that "Tinto's

model is problematic in that it does not acknowledge that integration is complicated by racially tense environments for diverse groups of students whose responses to adversity are complex" (p. 340). In addition, "it cannot account for the experiences of members of different groups, especially those that may interact frequently with multiple subcultures" (p. 199).

Kuh and Love (2000) felt the theory lacked "robust empirical support, may be inadequately operationalized (i.e. academic and social integration), and is based on assumptions that understate the intuitional responsibility for creating hospitable learning conditions" (p. 198). Students are expected to become integrated into the institution and its culture to be successful, but it may be vastly different to the students' own culture.

While this current study addresses social and academic integration the transfer students interviewed and surveyed all said they intended to stay at College T for the remainder of their studies, even if they were not entirely happy. In a survey given to transfers in spring 2016, 73/73 students said they were planning on completing their undergraduate degree at College T. Similarly in fall 2016, 37/37 said they would be staying at College T. Therefore I decided the problem of retention was not an issue for the population being studied.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984)

Astin's (1984) theory was based on a longitudinal study he conducted in 1975 on college dropouts in which he focused on the factors that helped to prevent a student from dropping out of college. He believed that students who are "involved" tend to stay where they are but those who are "uninvolved" leave. What exactly does he mean by "involved"?:

Quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. This highly involved student is one who; for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on

campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students. (p. 518)

Astin (1984) moved beyond subject-matter theory and resources theory. Subject-matter theory "assigns students a passive role in the learning process: The 'knowledgeable' professor lectures to the 'ignorant' student so that the student can acquire the same knowledge" (p. 520). Resource theory believes that "if adequate resources are brought together in one place, student learning and development will occur" (p. 520). These resources may be physical resources (for example, libraries), human resources (for example, high-ranking faculty), and fiscal resources (for example, financial aid). It seems logical that just because a university has great resources and lecturers, unless the students make a conscious effort to use these resources and listen to the faculty, they will not be as successful as students that do.

Laanan (1999, 2004, 2007) used this framework. He stated that although the theory had previously been used to study traditional "native" (permanent) students it would also be useful to study transfer students. He theorized that students who were involved socially and academically at community college would adjust better once they transferred to a four-year institution.

As with Tinto's theory (1975, 1987, 1993) dropout of transfer students has not been a factor at College T; therefore, this theory was also disregarded as particularly helpful for the current study.

Pace's Concept of Quality of Effort (QE) (1980, 1982, 1984)

Pace's (1980, 1982, 1984) concept of quality of effort (QE) was used in three studies by Laanan (1999, 2004, 2007). The QE focuses not just on what an institution offers (resource

theory) but what students themselves put into the college experience (Schlossberg's self). Education is both "process" and "product" and requires time and effort. It is not just what the student can produce but what their process was and how much time and effort it took. Pace (1982) declared "accountability for achievement and related student outcomes must consider both what the institution offers and what the students do with those offerings" (p. 4).

Pace developed the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) in the 1970s. It measures what resources a student uses and what opportunities they take to develop their own academic and social life. Laanan (2004) explained that this framework is intended to evaluate the degree of student responsibility for their own learning and development, specifically how and whether they use facilities and opportunities provided on campus.

The idea of students taking responsibility for their own adjustment and learning is certainly present in this current study. However, a more holistic theory was needed to look beyond the student to how an institution can help a student with their adjustment.

Oberg's Concept of Culture Shock (1960)

The theory of culture shock, as originally intended by Oberg, describes how people feel when they move from one country to another. Laanan (2007) believed this could also be used when talking about transfer students, as the new environment of a four-year university may seem foreign when coming from a two-year community college. Laanan (2007) stated:

During the transition or movement of students, the place of origin is the community college, the foreign environment is the university. Given the unique institutional, faculty, and student culture at the 2- versus 4-, students will be required to make numerous adjustments. For transfer students possessing the coping mechanisms to deal with the stress, and the extent to which they have the skills to fit in and become involved highly

impacts the successful relocation from the community college to the university. (p. 41)
 It was decided this theory would be beneficial for this current study and is discussed more fully below.

Theories of Transition

More recently, studies have been using Schlossberg's (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) theory of transition to study the experience of transfer students (Berner, 2012; Lazarowicz, 2015; Patton & Davis, 2014). Upon reviewing these and then examining Schlossberg's articles and books it became clear this theory allowed for a more holistic examination of the experiences of transfer students. In addition, Bridges' (1980, 1991) theory of transition was also examined which added an extra dimension

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011)

Schlossberg's (1981) theory first appeared in the article "A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation" and later formed the core of several books, including *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Schlossberg's Theory to Practice in a Diverse World* (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, first published in 1984), *Improving Higher Education for Adults* (Schlossberg et al., 1989), *Overwhelmed: Coping with Life's Ups and Downs* (Schlossberg, first published in 1989), and *Getting the Most out of College* (Chickering & Schlossberg, first published in 1995).

Schlossberg (1981) explained that life is full of transitions for all people and "these changes often result in new networks of relationships, new behaviors, and new self-perceptions" (p. 2). The question is why some adults adapt to life's transitions better than others. Schlossberg (1981) defined a transition as occurring when "an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about one's self and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). How well a person adapts to the transition depends on: (1) the

characteristics of the transition, (2) the pre- and post- transition environments, and (3) the individual undergoing the transition. Schlossberg believed that the way these three things are combined determines whether a person adapts well or not.

Chickering and Schlossberg (first published in 1995) wrote a book to guide students in making the transition from school to college, through college and later on out of college. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Moving In," is designed to help the student transition to college. They told students, "All transitions involve learning new roles, new routines, and new relationships. They involve new assumptions about yourself and your future. Moving into college is no different" (2002, p. *xiv*). Part 2, "Moving Through," focuses on supporting the student move through the academic and social world of college. Part 3, "Moving On," is designed to help the student easily and effortlessly into whatever next lies ahead. For a transfer student, moving in could include moving to a bigger campus, moving through adjusting to the new environment academically, socially, emotionally and practically/administratively, and moving out transferring to yet another school or graduating. For an international transfer student it would seem that the change from one institution to another is even more difficult. They encounter not only the same issues of transition that American students face, but also issues of language and culture shock. This is further exacerbated if the student transfers from an institution outside of the United States which is becoming more frequent.

The 4S. Schlossberg first described the 4S model in 1984. As Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg (2012) explain, the model was "designed to depict the extraordinarily complex reality that accompanies and defines the human capacity to cope with change" (p. 61). Each of the components of the 4S model are described below. These do not exist in isolation, but are interconnected, each influencing the other.

Situation. Everyone's situation is different. What started the transition? Does it come at a good time (or not)? What part of the transition can the individual control (or not)? Does it mean a change in the individual's role? Is it a temporary transition (or not)? Has the individual had any experience of a similar transition? Is it causing any stress? Is it seen as positive or negative (or neither)?

Self. Each individual copes with transitions in different ways. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) identified the following as specifically relevant: "socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, psychological resources, ego development, outlook-optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, spirituality and resilience" (p. 73).

Support. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) referred to two types of support; that of family and friends and also the institutions and communities people belong to. I would add resources to the idea of support such as what the institution can offer in terms of tutoring, advising, or other support.

Strategies. These are what does an individual do to ease their transition. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) identified the following: "information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior...mindsets individuals use to resolve problems that arise" (p. 90).

Importantly, Schlossberg's (1981) model strived to "provide the basis for appropriate interventions, for it is after all the goal of counseling psychology to develop preventative interventions, as well as effective support and counsel for those in transition" (pp. 16-17). Chickering and Schlossberg (2002) explained that changes to routine can be disorienting but eventually a student can become settled and understand the new environment and how it works.

They offered many strategies that could help transfer students. Academically they stressed that it is essential to connect with faculty both to discuss class work but also more generally to develop a mentor/mentee relationship. Socially, they encouraged students to get involved in the community to prevent social isolation, yet they also warned that "it takes time to form a trusting, intimate relationship where you share your inner world" (p. 156).

Many studies using Schlossberg's (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) theory have focused on American veterans making the transition from active duty to college life (Diamond, 2012; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Hargrave, Jacques, & Cobham, 2016; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). Several studies focusing on education have also used this theory. DeVilbiss (2014) used the theory to study the transition from high school to college for conditionally-admitted students. Others have seen it as a useful tool to look at the transition experience of international students (Jackson & Heggins, 2003; Kovton, 2010; Kim, 2012). More recently it has been used to look at students transferring between institutions of higher education (Berner, 2001; Lazarowicz, 2015; Patton & Davis, 2014). Patton and Davis used it to understand the multiple transitions African-American students made following their displacement after Hurricane Katrina. Lazarowicz (2015) used it as a lens through which to study transfer students moving from a two-year community college to a four-year institution. All of these studies have relied heavily on the 4S model as described above as a useful tool to explain the ease (or not) of transition for the populations they studied. To date I have not found anyone using it to look at international transfer students, but given its use with transfer students and international students it appeared to be a good fit.

Bridges' (1980, 1991) Transition Model

Bridges (1980) first described his transition model in his book titled *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes*. He made a distinction between change and transition, explaining that change is situational, that is, an event such as a moving to a new place, whereas transition is psychological, "the inner reorientation and self-definition that you have to go through in order to incorporate any of those changes into your life... Unless transition happens, the change won't work, because it doesn't 'take'" (2004, p. xii). Unlike Schlossberg (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) who only discusses moving into a new situation, Bridges (2004) emphasized "the difficult process of letting go of an old situation, of suffering the confusing nowhere of inbetweenness, and of launching forth again in a new situation" (p. 4). All transitions, he explained, consist of a three-part process which include an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning. These transitions are not always chosen, such as when a person loses a loved one, and each person will deal with the transition differently.

Endings. Letting go of an old situation can be difficult even if the change was chosen. Bridges (2004) explained:

Even though we are all likely to view an ending as the conclusion of the situation it terminates, it is also—and it is too bad that we don't have better ways of reminding ourselves about this—the initiation of a process. We have it backwards. Endings are the first, not the last, act of this play. (p. 132)

Echoing Schlossberg's (1984) idea of self, Bridges (2004) explained that a person's previous experience of endings and the way a person has coped with those will color how a new ending is experienced. One person may take an active role in the transition, which he termed "a dasher", yet another person may take a more passive role, "a lingerer" (p. 16). A change may completely

destroy one person yet another may not seem affected at all. He warned that some transitions are seen as "good" and not supposed to cause problems for people. A chosen transfer to a new school would easily fall into this category. However, even a "good" transition may still unexpectedly cause problems.

The neutral zone. The neutral zone is often experienced as an empty feeling after an ending. It can be a time of great anxiety and disorientation. However, it is an important time because it is "a time when the real business of transition takes place. It is a time when inner reorientation and realignment are occurring, a time when we are making the all-but-imperceptible shift from one season of life to the next" (Bridges, 2004, p. 154).

The new beginning. The new beginning follows the neutral zone but this becomes accepted but only when the person is ready to do so. In addition, Bridges (2004) cautioned, "Even though the external 'new beginning' may happen very quickly once it becomes evident, the internal re-identification and re-engagement always occur more slowly" (p. 172). For transfer students we need to be aware that more may be going on inside than they show. They may seem happy but in fact not be.

Studies using Bridges' (1980, 1991) theory. This theory has been used in several studies. Duchscher (2009) studied newly graduated registered nurses and based her theory of "transition shock" on the work of Bridges as well as Kramer (1974) who introduced the idea of "reality shock." She explained that transition shock accounts for the feelings of loss, doubt, confusion, and disorientation student nurses experience when they change from that secure known world to the new role of a professional nurse.

Bridges' (1980, 1991) theory has mainly been used to look at the sometimes multiple transitions youth have to make in foster care as they become adults and how it can be used to

help them in these transitions (Nesmith, 2017; Van Ryzin et al., 2011). Nesmith (2017) looked at the often multiple transitions of older youth in foster care and felt the framework "shows some promise in smoothing foster youth reactions to change" (p. 41). Anghel (2011) examined youth leaving long-stay institutional care in Romania. The framework was used to understand both the transitions of the youth and also the people who cared for them. She stressed the importance of the role of the transition leader, in this case the care giver, in aiding the transition of the youth. In addition, she felt the model was important in understanding professional transitions the care staff made as they dealt with extensive changes in bureaucracy at the time of the study (2002-2004).

Diamond (2012) looked at the transition from military to student. She used the theories of Schlossberg (1981,1984) and Bridges (1980) to develop the *Adaptive Military Transition Theory* and stated, "The grounding in the personality of the individual before the change takes place is critical to understanding how the Past is reflected in the Present and can be projected into Future phases" (p. 105). This shows the importance of endings in a transition and how we need to appreciate how hard this can be for a transfer student.

Culture Shock

Whilst Schlossberg's (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) and Bridges' (1980, 1991) theories are useful in helping to understand the transition transfer students in general need to make, there needs to be another layer of thought to address the specific issues related to the cultural transition experienced by international transfer students. This led to the investigation of the theory of culture shock which is another useful framework in which to embed in my study. Oberg (1954), an anthropologist, first coined the term culture shock in a presentation. In a later article (1960) he explained, "Culture shock tends to be an occupational disease of people who have been

suddenly transplanted abroad. Like most ailments it has its own symptoms, cause, and cure" (p. 142). Oberg explained that culture shock is caused by the stress and turmoil experienced from being in a place with a different language and customs to those in our homeland.

Oberg (1960) described four stages of culture shock. The first he referred to as the honeymoon stage, which can last from a few days to a few months. During this time the newcomer is filled with fascination for everything about the country. In my experience, when international students first arrive at college they are excited to be in America, many for the first time, and want to experience American life. They have not had to deal with the day-to-day reality of life.

The second stage is a period of frustration "characterized by a hostile and aggressive attitude to the host country. This hostility evidently grows out of the genuine difficulty which the visitor experiences in the process of adjustment" (p. 143). This frustration can be with the language, customs, or school systems. Another issue may be that people from the same country tend to group together feeling safety in numbers and may be critical of the host people and country. Some people may even feel a "terrible longing to be back home to be able to have a good cup of coffee and a piece of apple pie...to visit one's relatives, and, in general, to talk to people who make sense" (p. 143). I often see this in international students toward the middle of the first semester. It is difficult and often exhausting to take academic classes in another language. International students often find it hard to make their voices heard, partly due to language limitations, and partly due to cultural differences in education. For example, in many Asian countries, education is still very much teacher centered and the teacher is still seen as the fountain of knowledge. The students are expected to listen, not ask questions. I have also heard complaints from both staff and faculty about how students from certain nationality groups tend to

stick together on campus in a very obvious way, speaking their native language and not mixing with students from other countries.

The third stage is one of recovery. The newcomer still has difficulties but is becoming more adjusted and more familiar with the language and customs. Oberg (1960) explained that "Usually in this stage the visitor takes a superior attitude to people of the host country...Instead of criticizing he jokes about the people and even cracks jokes about his or her own difficulties" (p. 143). Many international students appear to reach this stage in their second year.

Finally, the fourth stage is adaptation which is when a person's "adjustment is about as complete as it can be. The visitor now accepts the customs of the country as just another way of living" (p. 143). They start to understand better and even like both the cuisine and the customs. If and when the person ever returns to their home country they may want to take back food and items they have come to like. Often students at the graduation phase tell me they wish they could stay in the United States and list all the things they like about it. These stages are often referred to as a U curve, with the left top part of the curve representing positive feelings in the honeymoon stage which go down during the stage of frustration, then feelings rising again during recovery and back up to adaptation.

Nevertheless, as Oberg (1960) reminds us, not everyone will react in the same way or to the same degree when they go to another country. Some people never adapt and remain feeling like outsiders. He explained the way to get over culture shock is to "get to know the people of the host country. But this you cannot do with any success without knowing the language, for language is the principal symbol system of communication" (p. 145). However, this does not mean they need to give up their own language and culture. Oberg stressed that support and

sympathy from others from the same country as the person suffering from culture shock can help a person's recovery which will not happen overnight.

Much has been written about culture shock since 1960, and different writers have devised different models; however, most still see culture shock as a set of stages that an individual will pass through and base their models on Oberg. For example, Peter Alder (1975) has a model with five stages. The first four, known as the honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, and autonomy phases, mirror Oberg's stages. A final stage he calls interdependence occurs when a person becomes fully bicultural. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) added the notion of reverse culture shock which occurs when a person returns to their country of origin. Nevertheless, Oberg's model is still the one most frequently cited in the literature related to this idea.

Dutton (2011) tells us that although Oberg himself never validated his theory with student data, many studies since on expatriates and international students have. Dutton cited studies by Black and Mendenhall (1991) and Selmer (1999) which clearly show the honeymoon stage expatriate workers go through. Newsome and Cooper (2016) researched international students in Britain and their adjustment to the culture and interactions with the local people. They found that the students did experience a honeymoon stage, but that it was brief. Soon this was replaced by "feelings of distress in response to the unfamiliarity of their surroundings. They also commonly expressed a sense of alienation and bewilderment in response to the racism and hostility to which they were exposed" (p. 202). Cultural differences also caused problems as the students tried to navigate confusing social norms and found the British people unfriendly. One student said, "I don't like the feeling. I just hate everything because I need to find a house, and I need to cook, and I have language problem.... So I don't like living here now" (p. 204). Brown and Holloway (2008) found that although there were things that made the international students

excited in the first four weeks of their stay (such as the educational opportunities and the environment), the main findings were feelings of nervousness, confusion, depression, loneliness, and homesickness. Newsome and Cooper's (2016) study also highlighted recovery, with one student saying, "The important thing we learn here is how to survive" (p. 208). As for adaptation, only five of the 18 students in the study became comfortable with living in the UK.

Pederson's (1995) book looked at critical incidents, real stories from students studying abroad during a "Semester at Sea". The incidents included in the book come from 664 students' experiences he collected as the students visited different ports around the world. While his stages corresponded to Adler's (1975) stages they are also extremely close to Oberg's: honeymoon, disintegration (akin to Oberg's frustration), reintegration (recovery), autonomy, and interdependence (Oberg's adaptation phase includes both autonomy and interdependence). Pederson (1995) stated that "only rarely will a person achieve as high a level of functioning in the host culture as in the previous home culture, suggesting a backwards J-curve as more authentic" (p. 26).

Pederson (1995) found that students experienced the honeymoon stage as a time of excitement and curiosity where the student "is usually having a very good time and feels little fear or apprehension about the host culture" (p. 27). In addition, sometimes they displayed disregard for their own actions that may offend people in the home culture. Several students reflected upon things they had done that in retrospect had offended the natives, such as one who recounted a group of them taking pictures of the locals in Nairobi and having a rock thrown at them. Disintegration is where reality sets in and "involves a sense of confusion and disorientation where differences between the home and host culture become very noticeable causing tension and frustration" (p. 78). One student told the story of a friend's experience of the

very different (for her) type of restrooms at the Great Wall of China, and another talked about an experience of a pushy vendor in Kenya who would not let her leave the store until she bought something. Reintegration is where there is a stereotypical judgement about the host culture and the individual may feel overly self-protective. For instance, a student told of a group visit to the Amazon where they traveled for 16 hours, on multiple uncomfortable modes of transport, and the accommodation was characterized as "not only rough, [it was] unethical" (p. 143). Nevertheless, she decided to stay and "make a conscious effort to stop complaining and to only emphasize the good points" (p. 143). Autonomy comes when a person feels relaxed in the new culture and can begin to enjoy it. One girl told the story of her visit to Caracas, Venezuela, with three friends. At first they were scared, but they met some locals who showed them around. The girls were even invited to meet the locals' families. She concluded with this statement: "I find it interesting to realize that I felt closer to Andre and Isaac in the four hours we were together than I do towards friends of two years" (p. 207). Pederson does not quite agree with others that in this final stage "the individual has moved from alienation to a new identity that is equally comfortable, settled, accepted, and fluent in both the old and the new cultures" (p. 245), but he does agree that "ideally, the fifth-stage person will be referred to as a bi-cultural, or multi-cultural person" (p. 245). One student told about a taxi ride he had, and rather than leaving the taxi at his destination, he decided to continue the conversation with the taxi driver. When the student tried to pay the fare and give a tip the driver refused, saying, "This one is on me. When I am able to visit America we will have another conversation and you will drive" (p. 253).

Conceptual Framework

My three main theories are depicted in the conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1) which informs this study. According to Schlossberg and Chickering (1995) all students coming to

college will experience moving in, moving through, and eventually moving out of the environment. They also explained that a successful transition is dependent upon the 4S (or four coping resources). These are what is happening at the time of the transition (the situation), the person who is experiencing the transition (the self), how much help is available (the support), and what strategies the person uses to help navigate the transition. This is depicted by the four rectangles. The situation is placed in the diagram at the top left hand, and corresponds to the timing of the transition. The self, strategies and support are interconnected each influencing the other throughout the transition and appear below the arrow.

Bridges (2004) adds the idea of the importance of the ending of an old situation, the neutral zone (akin to Schlossberg's moving in), the new beginning (Schlossberg's moving through) and back to endings again (Schlossberg's moving out). In addition, for the international transfer students, Oberg's (1960) stages of cultural transition are shown in the small circles within the block arrow. In order for international transfer students to make a successful transition they need to navigate through the stages of culture shock which he explains as the honeymoon stage where everything is new and exciting and into later feelings of frustration, recovery and eventually adaptation.

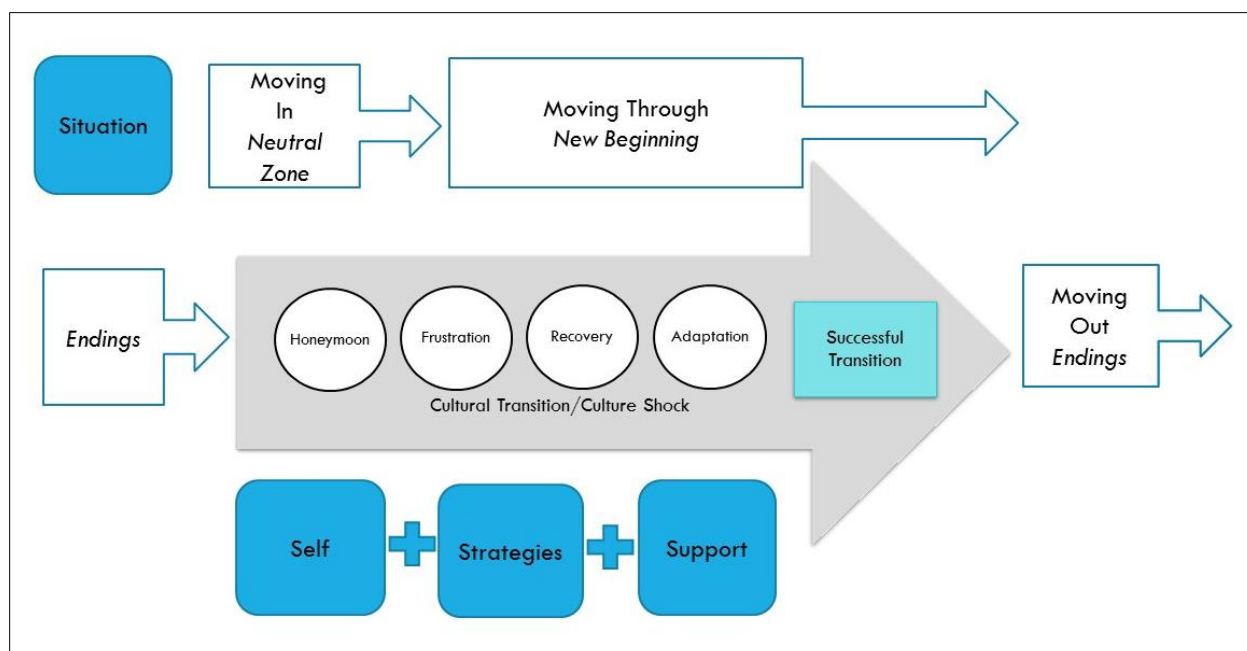


Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework 1: Transferring to a new college and a new culture.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized the current literature regarding transfer students. It demonstrated that most of the literature focused on the issues faced by transfer students, yet few studies looked at particular subgroups within that population. No empirical studies were found targeting international transfer students. In addition, this literature review examined the theories and ideas that previous empirical studies on transfers have used as lenses through which to center their studies. Finally, it concluded with a conceptual framework specifying the theories used for this particular study.

In Chapter 3 I will provide an overview of the design of the study, describe my data collection methods and sample, explain my data analysis methods, justify how I kept trustworthiness in the study and finally acknowledge the delimitations of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: "THROWN INTO THE MIX!"

The purpose of this action research (AR) study was to explore and understand the difficulties and unique adjustments faced by transfer students, academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically, as they transition to College T from their old institution and implement interventions to smooth this transition. In particular, the experiences of international transfer students, coming from institutions both within and from outside of the United States, who speak English as a second language, were examined. The research questions were:

1. How is the experience of transition for international transfer students, both those transferring from institutions within the U.S., and those transferring from institutions outside the U.S., different to the experience of domestic transfer students?
2. What can an action research team learn as we help transfer students navigate their academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical transition?

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the design of the study, describe my data collection methods and sample, explain my data analysis methods, justify how I kept trustworthiness in the study, and finally acknowledge the delimitations of the study.

Overview of Design

Creswell (2014) asserted:

Researchers need to think through their philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice. (p. 5)

The worldview for this study was constructivist/interpretive, the research design qualitative (AR), and the methods interviews, surveys, meeting transcriptions and documents.

Schwandt (1998) told us:

The constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and action of social actors. (p. 222)

This aligns with qualitative research. Creswell (2014) characterized this type of research as having different sources of data gathered at the site of the problem by the researcher. These data are analyzed inductively and/or deductively with the focus being on the participants' understanding of the issue (not the researchers). It is a changing/emergent process with constant reflection which results in the telling of the complete story. Creswell (2014) stated:

Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.... Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance or rendering the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

The methodology for this study was action research (AR) which is a reflective, collaborative practice that aims to bring ever-evolving positive, sustainable change to a context. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) explained the steps in AR. The first component is the pre-step in which the context of the project is examined, and it is determined if the project to be undertaken is worthwhile. Next is the constructing phase where stakeholders provisionally discuss and assess the situation. After is planning action which builds on and refines the constructing stage and decides what action is to be taken. Then taking action, involves implementing and putting the plans into action. The final stage is evaluating action to decide on the success of the implementations and what should be modified or changed in the future. Figure 3.1 shows the components of Coghlan and Brannick's approach to AR.

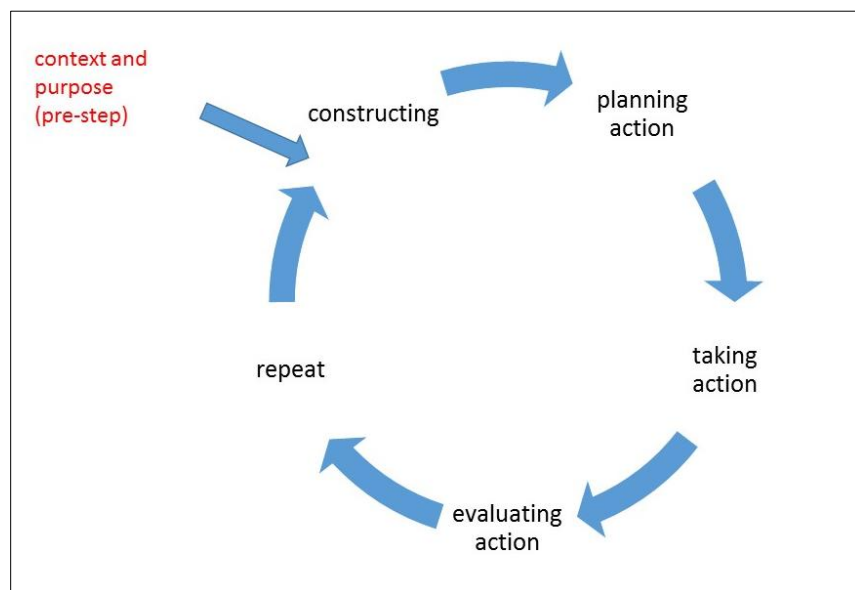


Figure 3.1. Cycles of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014).

According to Stringer (2014), AR is "a process of generating knowledge and designing action, with local stakeholders and trained experts working together in a joint learning process"

(p. 66). This means that people from inside the organization who know the culture and climate of the organization work together to find a practical solution to a local problem. This can be conceptualized as first, second, and third person inquiry. The first focuses on the individual and their own learning. The second focuses on the team or organization and the benefits and learning that take place there. The third focuses on the wider community and the contributions the AR makes to this, including scholarly practice. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) also stressed the importance of "learning from outcomes both intended and unintended, and a contribution to actionable knowledge that is knowledge that is useful for practitioners and robust for scholars" (p. 6). The term actionable knowledge refers to knowledge that the practitioner can use in the local situation (in this case, College T), but is also strong enough on which scholars can base further research.

Action research was the best approach for my study because, as Herr and Anderson (2015) stated, "Unlike traditional research, action research produces knowledge grounded in local realities that is also useful to local participants" (p. 121). Herr and Anderson explained that it is common for doctoral students to become insider researchers in their own organization and formalize and make more systematic the process of grappling with a real-life puzzle or problem. It was important for me during my dissertation process to help generate a positive change in my own organization, most importantly for the transfer students and international transfer students studying there. This I felt could be best achieved by working with a team of peers situated within the organization, creating a space in our busy schedules to study the reality of the situation for our transfers, and envisaging what we could do to benefit them.

Action research is not without its critics. Levin (2012) told us that, in traditional research, "Rigor is seen as fundamental in research, whereas relevance is understood as a

'commodity nice to have'. If research creates useful knowledge that can have practical application, it is a plus, but not considered mandatory for good research" (p. 134). This is very different in AR where the researchers themselves find solutions to local problems (which might be applicable to other situations) and then intervene in the system with sustainable solutions. Levin explained that some traditional researchers do not trust AR as it does not contribute in the same way to scientific knowledge. Herr and Anderson (2015) also recognized that academics are uncomfortable with AR beyond the local setting and the fact that the knowledge produced is more practice driven than theory driven. Therefore, there is a challenge for any action researcher to demonstrate that a study meets the criteria for trustworthiness. I will address this in the section below on trustworthiness.

Pilot Study

In summer 2015 I conducted a small pilot study with two international transfer students. One was a Chinese male who had transferred from a university in China (IITS), the other was a Korean male who had transferred from another institution in the U.S. (DITS). I wanted to see if the idea I had for my AR study would be beneficial to these students, and I also wanted to practice my interviewing skills. I used a semi-structured interview guide which was later developed into my formal international transfer student interview protocol, administered from fall 2015 to spring 2016. The students, who had signed consent forms, were interviewed in person, and the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. I later used these interviews for a project in a doctoral class. We were to take the transcripts of selected interviews and, using Glesne's (1997) technique of poetic transcription, isolate significant phrases and words and rearrange these to tell the story in a poetic way without changing the words of the interviewee. Glesne explained that poetic transcription, like other qualitative data,

is "also filtered through the researcher but involves word reduction while illuminating the wholeness and interconnections of thoughts ...the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures" (p. 206). These poems can be read in Chapter 5.

I do not pretend to have Glesne's (1997) skill in constructing poems from interviews, but the remarks from these students gave me some direction for my further research on the academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical needs of international transfer students. Academic work was more rigorous than in their previous institution. This coupled with weaker language skills, and a lack of background knowledge in certain subjects, made this academic work even harder. Socially, they found it difficult to form friendships, especially with American friends, which was again compounded by language and cultural differences. Emotionally, the DITS did not experience any culture shock or difficulties in transitioning; however, the situation was completely different for the IITS. He sadly stated, "*Suddenly all feeling all homesickness and stress just attack you.*" With all these issues they were experiencing I found it strange that they were reluctant to ask for help. Both students felt that talking to professional staff would be difficult for them.

Through the poetic transcription process described here, I noticed these powerful themes emerging. In addition, the assignment made me more aware of the questions I needed to ask to get the rich data I needed in my formal interviews. For example, why were these students so reluctant to seek help? Do all IITS experience the same feelings of loneliness and homesickness? Also, looking back at the transcripts, I was able to see where I should have prompted more and what follow-up questions I should have asked to get more information. Although this was a useful initial activity I felt that moving forward I wanted a more traditional approach for my study which I have outlined below.

Data Collection

There were four methods of data collection, each involving different research participants. Each sample population and the methods are described in detail in the following sections. Table 3.1 summarizes the data collected to answer research questions 1 and 2, the sources of the data, how the data were analyzed, and how trustworthiness was ensured.

Interviews

Stringer (2014) said:

Interviews provide opportunities for participants to describe the situation in their own terms. It is a reflective process that enables the interviewee to explore his or her experience in detail and to reveal the many features of that experiences that have an effect on the issue investigated. (p. 105)

Semi-structured interviews were chosen with open questions to allow for the interview to go in the direction seen as important to the students and to allow for follow-up questions or clarification (Roulston, 2013). Again, this is especially important with students who are not native English speakers and allowed the flexibility for both interviewer and interviewee to ask clarifying questions if the message was not understood.

Table 3.1

Data to Address the Research Questions

RQ	Data	Source/Participants	Analysis Method	Ensuring Trustworthiness
1,2	Interviews	3 interviews of 10 ITS. 30 total. Student Peer Mentors and Staff working with TS. AR Team Members.	Constant comparative analysis. Interviews recorded, transcribed, and coded using the Ruona Method (2005).	Member check, Peer debriefing, Triangulation, Journal/Audit trail, Reflection, Subjectivity statement.
1	Survey	All enrolled TS spring 2016 N= 316 (84 students started the survey, 70 completed it). All incoming TS fall 2016 N = 77 (41 students started the survey, 38 completed it). All incoming TS fall 2017 N = 72 (40 students started the survey, 38 completed it).	Survey Monkey analysis function. Open ended questions coded using the Ruona Method (2005).	Peer debriefing, Journal/Audit trail, Triangulation, Reflection, Subjectivity statement.
1,2	AR Team Meetings	AR Team members.	Constant comparative analysis. Meetings recorded, transcribed, and coded using the Ruona Method (2005).	Member check, Journal/Audit trail, Reflection, Subjectivity statement.
1,2	Documents	PRIVATE Researcher's journal, Observations, Conversations. PUBLIC College T Documents (e.g. orientation information for TS), College T Website.	Constant comparative analysis.	Peer debriefing, Journal/Audit trail, Reflection, Subjectivity statement.

Note. TS = transfer student/s; ITS = international transfer student/s.

There were four groups of people interviewed. International transfer students, student workers (included in this groups are: Orientation Leaders (OLs), Resident Advisors (RAs), and Academic Mentors (who work with international students during international student orientation), staff working with transfer students (such as academic advisors) and the AR team members. All interviews were recorded using a handheld digital recorder and stored on password-protected system. All interviewees were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Below, each group will be further explained.

International transfer students. The first group of participants in the study were incoming international transfer students to College T who spoke English as a second language (ESL) in fall 2015. Some of these had transferred from another institution inside of the U.S. and others had transferred from an institution outside of the U.S. These students were initially identified from the data of all incoming international transfer students and emailed prior to orientation with information about the study and an invitation to email directly if they were interested in participating. There were 17 international transfer students in total, 13 DITS and four IITS. Twelve of these international transfer students, who spoke English as a second language, took an English language assessment during fall 2015 orientation and were also given a flyer at that time with further information about the study. In addition, they were sent a follow-up email two days later. Each international transfer student who responded and met the research criteria (which was determined over email) was sent a copy of the consent form and invited to an initial face-to-face meeting. In total there were ten international transfer students, six DITS (one only did the second and third interviews) and four IITS. Only one of these students (one DITS) did not take the language assessment. All interviewees came from China (eight) and Korea (two), which are the two main countries from which College T has international students. There

were four females and six males. Table 3.2 summarizes the students' pseudonyms, gender, transfer status, and home country.

Table 3.2

Pseudonyms and Biographical Information of International Transfer Student Interviewees

Pseudonym	Gender	Transfer Status	Country
Gang	M	IITS	Chinese
Wei	M	IITS	Chinese
Fang	F	IITS	Chinese
Hyo Jun	M	IITS	Korean
Seung Hoon	M	DITS	Korean
Yong	M	DITS	Chinese
Jing	F	DITS	Chinese
Min	F	DITS	Chinese
Yang	M	DITS	Chinese
Na	F	DITS	Chinese

As this group of students all spoke English as a second language (ESL), it was imperative they understood informed consent and confidentiality. This was done by emailing the consent form to them before we met so they had time to study it; also, it was reviewed in detail when we met face-to-face so they had the opportunity to ask any questions. It was explained that the information would be kept confidential and that they would be given pseudonyms. Informed consent followed guidelines from *The Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). This report explains that informed consent gives subjects the choice about what happens to them. This was done by giving the research subjects sufficient information about the research, its purpose, possible risks

and benefits, and the knowledge that they could withdraw from the study at any time. This discussion and all interviews took place in a private location at a time convenient for the students.

The first interview was conducted as soon as possible after orientation (August 2015) to gather information about the initial transfer experience and establish an immediate relationship with the student (see Appendix B). The second was completed at the end of the first semester to determine how the transition was going academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically. The third was at the end of the second semester and was designed to explore if there had been any changes in the students' experience (Appendix C). As I interviewed the same students three times, I needed to make sure I carefully analyzed the transcripts well in advance of follow-up interviews in order to craft specific questions to elicit more information about their specific situations. Participant attrition was not an issue with this study, as all participants returned for their second and third interview. I felt a good rapport was established from the start and several expressed disappointment when the third interview was over.

Staff members and student workers. Potential staff interviewees were emailed based on the role they play with transfer students. Four out of five agreed to be interviewed, these being the Director of Orientation (who left before completion of the project but was replaced by the new Director), two Academic Advisors, and the Point Person (mentor) for international transfer students (new role given fall 2016 after the first round of interventions). One person from the admissions office did not reply to the request. Student workers emailed included Orientation Leaders (OLs) who worked specifically with international transfer students (starting fall 2016), Resident Advisors (RAs), and Academic Mentors (who worked with incoming

international students during international orientation). One Academic Mentor, one RA, and three OLs were eventually interviewed. These interviews were designed to look at the issue from different perspectives. I wanted to discover what issues this group of people working directly with transfer students and international transfer students may have noticed and what, if anything, they had done to resolve any problems. The same procedures for informed consent and anonymity were employed as with the international transfer student interviews. Table 3.3 shows the biographical information of these interviewees.

Table 3.3

Biographical Information of Student Workers and Staff Interviewees

Role	Student or Staff	Gender	Ethnicity
Director of Orientation	Staff	F	Caucasian
Academic Advisor	Staff	F	Caucasian
Academic Advisor	Graduate student	M	Caucasian
TS Point Person	Staff	M	Caucasian
Academic Mentor	Undergraduate student	F	Asian
RA	Undergraduate student	F	African American
OL	Undergraduate student	F	Asian
OL	Undergraduate student	F	Caucasian
OL	Undergraduate student	M	Asian

Action research team members. All members of the AR teams were interviewed at the conclusion of their part in the project as had been agreed to when they first signed the consent form to be a part of the team. The final interview for the main team members occurred after the conclusion of the first round of interventions (early spring 2017). A smaller more focused AR team worked on the second round of interventions and they were interviewed in December 2017.

This team consisted of three members of the original team plus one new member. These interviews were designed to assess team members' experience of being part of an AR team, how effective they felt the team was, what they learned by being a part of the team, and what they felt about the interventions that were implemented. The same procedures for informed consent and anonymity were employed as with the international transfer student interviews. Table 3.4 gives the pseudonyms and biographical information of team members.

Table 3.4

Pseudonyms and Biographical Information of AR Team Members

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Position
Catherine	F	Caucasian	Associate Dean
Anne	F	Asian American	Associate Director/Learning Specialist
Henry	M	Caucasian	Associate Director, Advising
Bessie	F	Asian American	Assistant Director of ESL
Mary	F	Caucasian	Assistant Director, Academic Advising Left College T Oct 2016
Elizabeth	F	Caucasian	Assistant Director Tutoring
Margaret	F	Caucasian	International Student Advisor
Thomas	M	African American	Director of Orientation Joined team Jan. 2016
Jane	F	Caucasian	Director of ESL Me (no pseudonym)
Eleanor	F	African American	Assistant Director of Programs Joined second AR Team June 2017

Surveys

The advantage of a survey is the ability to gather data from a larger population more quickly than by interviewing (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). Stringer (2014) explained, "In the later stages of action research ... a survey may provide a very useful tool for extending the data collection process to a broader range of participants. It provides the means to check whether information acquired from participants in the first cycles of a process is relevant to other individuals and groups" (p. 118). This indeed was the reasoning behind the survey administered for this study. What are the issues faced by all transfer students which could then be compared to international transfer students? What is the same and what is different?

Surveys were sent out to all transfers on the College T campus in spring 2016 (before any AR interventions). After that, a new group of incoming transfers were surveyed in fall 2016 after the first round of AR interventions. Finally, a third group of incoming transfers were surveyed in fall 2017 after the second round of AR interventions.

Transfer students surveyed spring 2016. The AR team decided it would be wise to look beyond the small group of ten international transfer students who were being interviewed and investigate the experiences of all transfers at College T. Although the focus of this study is on the unique challenges experienced by the international transfers we needed to probe what the challenges were for all students to discover the differences. Therefore, the team decided to look at the total number of all incoming transfers in a given year (not just the fall semester) and divided the population into domestic transfers and international transfers. In the last three academic years College T has had approximately 100 incoming transfer students. Numbers are much higher in the fall semester than the spring semester. No IITS are admitted in spring as there is not enough time over the winter break to process the necessary paperwork.

Approximately a quarter of these transfer students are international. Table 3.5 shows the numbers of incoming transfers between fall 2015 and spring 2018 by status (domestic or international).

Table 3.5

Numbers of Incoming TS at College T from Fall 2015 to Fall 2017, Broken Down by Status: Domestic and International

Type of Transfer Student	Fall 2015	Spring 2016	Total 2015-2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Total 2016-2017	Fall 2017	Spring 2018	Total 2017-2018
Domestic	55	20	75	57	15	72	56	21	77
International	17 (13 DITS, 4 IITS)	4 (DITS)	21 (21.88% of TS population)	20 (13 DITS, 7 IITS)	1 (DITS)	21 (22.58% of TS population)	16 (15 DITS, 1 IITS)	5 (DITS)	21 (21.43% of TS population)
Total	72	24	96	77	16	93	72	26	98

Note. TS = transfer student/s

In addition, the AR team decided to find out how many transfer students total were enrolled across the college in the spring semester of 2016. With the permission of the undergraduate education dean, we obtained the email addresses of all enrolled transfer students at that time from the registrar. The total was 314 with 88 internationals, 16 of whom had transferred from institutions outside of the United States. Survey questions were written by the AR team and focused on what the team wanted to know about this population (see Appendix D). Questions pertained to transfer student experiences academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically at their previous institution. We also wanted to know why they transferred, what their academic, social, emotional, and administrative/practical experiences were at College T; and what they thought College T should be doing to help them. Question types differed. Some were multiple-choice; for example, "Why did you choose to come to College T?" with a drop-down menu of possible reasons to choose from. Other questions had a rating scale with four possible responses. The reason four responses were chosen rather than five was so that students would need to choose a positive or negative response rather than be a neutral one. An example of this would be, "How welcomed did you feel when you arrived at College T?", to which possible responses were "not at all welcomed", "not very welcomed", "somewhat welcomed", and "very welcomed". All questions also had a comment box, and many respondents chose to add extra information.

I contacted the IRB office to determine whether I needed any additional paperwork in order to send out the survey to these students. They explained that as my research was "exempt" that would not be necessary. However, as is good scholarly practice, I explained the purpose for the study in my emails as well as on the first page of the survey. In addition, I disclosed the study procedures as well in there being no anticipated risks and no direct benefits aside from

helping future transfer students. I also assured complete confidentiality. As in the interviews, this was done following the guidelines for informed consent from *The Belmont Report* ((National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978).

Eighty-four students started the survey and 70 completed it, a response rate of 22.29% for completed surveys. All of the students had been at College T for at least one semester. Of the 84 students, one (1.19%) had first-year standing, 17 (20.24%) were sophomores, 27 (32.14%) were juniors, and 39 (46.43%) were seniors. Sixty-four (76.19%) were domestic transfer students and 20 (23.81%) were international transfer students. Eleven of the internationals came from China, five from Korea, two from Hong Kong, one from Ecuador, and one from India. Only 19 international transfers answered the question regarding their previous institution. Of those 19, fifteen of the internationals were DITS and four were IITS. Forty-one (48.81%) were male, 41 (48.81%) were female, one declared they were "other", and one preferred not to answer.

Fall 2016. At the end of fall 2016, the 77 incoming transfer students were emailed a link to the slightly-amended survey. The aim was to see how this group of incoming transfers had adapted academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically compared to the group the year before. In addition to the questions posed the previous year as to the usefulness of the transfer orientation, we also wanted to know more specifically whether the transfer Orientation Leaders (OLs) had helped them become more connected, how welcomed they felt during orientation, and whether they made use of the increased opportunities to connect with other students. On the academic side, we wanted to know how prepared they felt academically and if they were making use of the resources they were introduced to during orientation.

The same procedures were followed as in the previous survey. Forty-one students responded and 38 completed the survey, a response rate of 49.35% for completed surveys. Of the 41 students, 24 (58.54%) were sophomores and 17 (41.46%) were juniors. Of the 41 students, 14 (34.15%) were international. Eight were DITS and six were IITS. Eight of the internationals came from China, two from Korea, one from Peru, one from Saudi Arabia, one from Azerbaijan, and one from Japan. Eleven (26.83%) were male, 30 (73.17%) were female.

Fall 2017. We sent out a third survey at the end of the fall 2017 semester to the 72 incoming transfer students. Again, the aim was to see how this group had adapted academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically compared to the two previous groups. The survey was the same as fall 2016 with the addition of questions specific to the newly implemented transition class (see Appendix E). The same procedures were followed as in the previous survey. Forty students responded, and 38 completed the survey a response rate of 53.78% for completed surveys. Of the 39 who answered the question, 29 (74.36%) of the students took the Transitioning to College T class and 10 (25.64%) did not. Of the 40 students 23 (57.54%) were sophomores and 17 (42.50%) were juniors. Six (15%) students were international. Five were DITS and only one was a IITS. Two of the ITS came from China, one from Ecuador, one from Japan, one from Singapore, and one from Vietnam. Fifteen (37.50%) were male, 25 (62.30%) were female.

AR Team Meetings

In addition to the AR team interviews, all AR meetings were recorded using a handheld device and stored on a password-protected system. All team members were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. By recording the meetings, I was able to be fully present and engaged in the conversations. After listening to the session recordings, I was better able to reflect on our

team processes, see areas of conflict, and also capture information for further thought and planning in subsequent meetings.

It was extremely important that all meetings were recorded and transcribed accurately rather than simply having someone write minutes. In minutes, the person writing them selects only what she or he feels is essential, and some important information may slip through. I taped all AR team meetings and had these transcribed by a professional agency. I then reviewed the transcripts against the recording to ensure their accuracy and made any changes necessary. In addition, participants in the meetings were made to feel as comfortable as possible and assured of confidentiality so they would say what they really thought about the issues being discussed.

Documents

Documents include all written material, such as reports, spreadsheets, books, articles, and digital media. Creswell (2014) distinguished between public documents (such as newspapers) and private documents (such as journals and letters) and so I also followed these conventions. Merriam (1988) stated documents "can ground an investigator in the context of the problem being investigated.... They are a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world" (p. 109). Nevertheless, we need to remember that documents may not provide a complete or fully accurate picture and we need to be mindful of both the purpose and the audience (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2015).

Yin (2015) urged researchers to do an internet search before any field work and also retrieve any institutional documents relevant to the study stating, "There is little excuse for omitting a thorough review of documentary evidence" (p. 107). Bowen (2009) suggests five uses for documents:

1. To provide background information to the research

2. To suggest what questions need to be asked
3. To provide additional research data
4. To track change in a situation
5. To verify findings

The documents used in this study were both private and public. These documents were primarily to address Bowen's first, second, and third uses of documents listed above.

Private documents. Private documents consisted of emails, my personal journal and various spreadsheets with information about the transfer students. Many emails were generated during the course of the project. These included emails with team members, my advisor, students, and other staff connected with the study. All of these were copied into my personal journal in chronological order, which also served as an audit trail. The reason they were placed in the journal and not in another document was that the journal served as the place for my personal reflections along the journey, and I was able to make notes clarifying the content and describing my feelings. Other elements of the journal included notes and reflections on team meetings, casual conversations, and observations. Maxwell (2013) stressed that "you should regularly write memos while you are doing data analysis; memos not only capture your analytic thinking about your data but also *facilitate* such thinking, stimulating analytic insights" (p. 105). Keeping a journal and reflecting on the entire process was an important part of my journey. In addition, spreadsheets containing information about incoming students, such as their English assessment scores, were studied. This was to give us some initial information about our population.

Public documents. Atkinson and Coffrey (2011) explained, "In the contemporary world, we should also include electronic and digital resources among the ways in which documentary

realities are produced and consumed" (p. 78). Organizational documents were reviewed by the AR team as a way to ground ourselves in what information and services were on offer for transfer students at the beginning of the study. For example, we reviewed the College T website and information that was given to these students over the summer and during orientation.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

Ruona (2005) stated, "Anyone who has attempted to analyze qualitative data has surely experienced that all too familiar feeling of being overwhelmed with the sheer volume of data to be explored or drowning in the data once immersed in it" (p. 234). Therefore, it was essential that I began to analyze my data immediately following the first round of interviews with the international transfer students and initial AR meetings. This also provided me with the opportunity to see what additional or follow-up questions I might need to ask in future interviews or meetings. In addition, I needed to keep in mind that I had to maintain flexibility so as to not have too rigid a plan for my research; as Creswell (2003) warned us, this often changes once data is collected. These qualitative data, along with the open-ended survey questions, were analyzed using Ruona's (2005) suggested phases which include: data preparation, familiarization, coding and generating meaning.

Data preparation. I had all of the interviews and meetings transcribed by a professional transcription service, and I checked the accuracy of the transcriptions by listening to the original recording while making needed changes. I found there were several errors to be corrected in the international transfer interviews, probably because the transcriber was not accustomed to listening to second language speakers of English. I also cleaned the interviews so they best

represented what the participant said. To keep the "voice" of the international students, I did not change any language or correct any grammatical errors.

Familiarization. I started to become familiar with the data when I was checking the audio against the transcripts. I started to make initial notes as themes emerged, thus "immersing in the data much more deeply... to 'tune into' what the participant is saying" (Ruona, p. 240-241). What were the students saying that was the same, what was different, and why was it different? Were differences coming from those students outside the U.S. compared to those transferring from another institution within the U.S.? Were any differences based on a student's personality (the self as described in Schlossberg's theory of transition)? Who was making the transition more easily and why was that?

Coding. I then started looking more closely at the emerging themes and started the process of coding using an inductive approach to allow the ideas to emerge. I decided to use the software HyperRESEARCH to support this process. The first thing I did was use the word counter tool to find the most frequently used words in my source material to see if these would be useful in the coding process. After excluding commonly used words such as "you," and words not needed like "transfer" as my study was about transfer students, the words that appeared most frequently and more than 100 times were: class/classes 793, friend/friends 633, America/American 426, different 349, work 330, hard/difficult 322, English 320, orientation 273, help 268, experience 263, team 217, study 210, better 194, life 189, academic 189, home 145, professor 135, difficult 128, social 120, writing 119, community 101. I was then able to find in all my sources where these words were mentioned and use the auto code function to apply a basic code; for example, "friends"

It soon became clear that this was not as easy a process as it seemed. My initial codes were often too broad and needed streamlining or completely changed. Although this was frustrating and time consuming, it was necessary, as Ruona (2005) warned:

The coding system that you initially created will evolve... It would be a disservice to the participants if you hold too tightly to your initial coding system.... You will "see" and learn new things as you continue to collect data and immerse yourself in the data. Things that you initially thought fit into one theme will seem to fit better into a different one.

Outliers will emerge that will have to be conceptually dealt with. (p. 243)

This is what Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) explained as first and second cycle coding, the first being assigning codes to broader chunks of data and the second refining these into smaller categories. I often felt I was somewhere between these two cycles, going back and forth and constantly changing my codes. However, by doing this I was constantly getting more familiar with my data.

Generating meaning. Finally, the fourth stage was to generate meaning from the data. This I found to be rather challenging, even though Ruona (2005) advised us to enjoy this and play with the data by exploring the codes and themes and seeing how things fit together. As Creswell (2003) informed us, "It involves segmenting and taking apart the data (like peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together" (p. 195). This was the time to look deeply into the emerging themes.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The survey quantitative data came from closed questions, both yes/no questions and items using a Likert scale. According to Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011), "Stakeholder groups want quantitative data to be summarized and analyzed in a relatively parsimonious way"

(p. 445). Survey Monkey survey administration and analysis software, fortunately, is able to perform much of this work through the analysis functionality

The three surveys contained the same questions with a few modifications in each iteration after the first administration. As there were a different number of respondents to the surveys, I focused mostly on the percentage response rate to the questions. I wanted to measure the changes or patterns in transfer responses to certain college events (e.g., orientation programs) across the three surveys, whilst acknowledging the populations were different. With further analysis, by looking at the international students' who answered the survey, original institution, I could filter the data to see what IITS and DITS said to compare any differences.

Document Analysis

In document analysis, Atkinson and Coffrey (2011) reminded us that "Documentary sources are not surrogates for other kinds of data" (p. 89), and Merriam (1988) warned us that we need to be wary of the authenticity and accuracy of documents and watch for built-in biases.

Bowen also expressed concern that:

The researcher should consider the original purpose of the document – the reason it was produced – and the target audience. Information about the author of the document and the ordinal sources of information could be helpful in the assessment of a document. (p. 33)

In this research I was not concerned about the accuracy of public documents. For example, the information presented on the College T website was an accurate representation of what was offered to transfer students during orientation and beyond. Private documents such as spreadsheets caused more of an issue in ensuring the accuracy of numbers. For example, numbers of incoming transfers were ever changing due to students, for whatever reason, deciding

not to attend College T, and also students deciding to come late in the process. Therefore, final numbers were drawn from the data well after the semester began, and we were sure of who was here and who was not.

The documents were analyzed in two ways. The journal, which included emails as well as reflections, was analyzed using the Ruona (2005) method (see above). Other institutional documents were reviewed as a resource or snapshot in time to show us what College T was already doing for transfers. Documents were analyzed by skimming (superficially examining), reading (thoroughly examining), and interpreting them for their purpose and meaning (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Spreadsheets were used to gather information such as the ethnicity of the students.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

There are four criteria to demonstrate trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is establishing the truth and accuracy of the research (also known as internal validity). Stringer (2014) saw this as fundamental to AR. Transferability is being able to show that the findings are applicable to other contexts (external validity). This is difficult in in qualitative work due to the fact that the findings are usually specific to a small sample size in a specific context. Dependability (reliability) is demonstrating that the findings would be similar in the same context, with the same methods and the same sample. Therefore, this demonstrates the rigor of the research process. Confirmability (objectivity) is showing that the research is not biased by the researcher's views. Ivankova (2015) stressed, "In action research, it is critical to demonstrate that the study findings are the result of the experiences and views of the informants so as to ensure stakeholders' buy-in to the problem and thus engage them with the action/intervention planning and implementations" (p. 265).

The following sections describe the strategies utilized in this study based on these criteria. Table 3.6 illustrates these strategies across the criteria that were used in this study.

Table 3.6

Strategies Used to Demonstrate Trustworthiness

Strategy	Credibility	Transferability	Dependability	Confirmability
Peer debriefing	✓			✓
Triangulation	✓		✓	✓
Member checks	✓			✓
Ensuring confidentiality	✓			
Thick description	✓	✓	✓	✓
Audit Trail	✓	✓	✓	✓
Subjectivity Statement				✓

Peer Debriefing

Guba (1981) stressed the importance of peer debriefing "to provide inquirers the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions" (p.86). AR is the perfect mechanism for this. I had frequent meetings with both the AR teams. In the meetings we reviewed all transcripts from the interviews as well as studied the survey data. This led us to two rounds of interventions, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, I had frequent meetings with my Ed.D. advisor and committee to help stretch my thinking. This all helped me to consider alternative ways to conceptualize the data and ensure I had not omitted anything that did not fit the way I was making meaning from the data (Maxwell, 2013).

Triangulation

Triangulation is using different sources of information and/or many different types of informants to check results. Maxwell (2013) described this as "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods." (p. 128). In this study this was done by not only conducting interviews with international transfer students, but also using surveys for all transfer students in order to cross-check information as well as by interviewing student workers and staff. I also reviewed previous research on the topic.

Member Checks

Member checking is one of the most important ways of ensuring no information was misinterpreted. Maxwell (2013) called this respondent validation, allowing researchers to identify their observational biases and/or misunderstandings. Shenton (2004) explained that this does not have to happen after the fact but can be done during an interview. I did this frequently in my interviews, especially with the non-native speakers. I had to be sure I was understanding correctly what the students were trying to say by asking clarifying questions and sometimes echoing what they said to make sure I understood it correctly.

Ensuring Confidentiality

This was done for interviewees from the moment of invitation by assuring participants that they would be given pseudonyms and that any information that could identify them would be removed. They were also told the information would be password protected and they could terminate their involvement at any point. I made sure the interviewee felt comfortable and relaxed in my presence and was in a place that was both private yet welcoming. Stringer (2014) believed that we should conduct interviews as casual conversations, as "One of the key features of successful interviews is the need for participants to feel as if they can say what they are really

thinking or to express what they're really feeling" (p. 106). Survey takers were also ensured confidentiality via email and on the first page of the survey itself. In addition, I explained to them the purpose of the study, the fact that the survey was voluntary, that they could stop the survey at any point (some did), and that there were no anticipated risks and no benefits apart from helping future transfer students.

Thick Description

A thick description of both the context and phenomenon under question is necessary. This allows another researcher to judge if it fits with their situation. In my study, I achieved transferability by ensuring a detailed description of the context of the study (College T) in Chapter 4, whilst maintaining the site's anonymity. I also fully explained the phenomenon in Chapter 1, "Issue Identification".

Audit Trail

An audit trail is a list of what happened, when it happened and who was involved documenting in chronological order every part of a research project. Whilst conducting my research I felt it was important to carefully and systematically think through each aspect of the research, not just what happened but why? What could the reason be for a situation? What assumptions, if any, was I making? Were any of my biases being reflected in my thinking? This was an ongoing process and my thoughts were recorded in an electronic document which served both as a reflective journal and an audit trail. This document was updated in real time and not at a later date when much of the information could be forgotten or become distorted. If I was not at a computer, I used my iPhone to record my notes and then I added them as soon as possible after. This documented every meeting and had a copy of every email sent and received related to this

project along with my thoughts and reflections. I also created a data inventory document which listed the date of every interview and when they were transcribed, checked, and coded.

Subjectivity Statement

Everyone views the world through spectacles constructed from many things, including their race, class, and educational background, and thus brings assumptions and biases to whatever they do. Researchers are no different. Levin (2012) put it this way: "Researchers will not be more objective than any other person in society, but professionally in the perspective of the research process, it is necessary to cope with these 'distortions' in a systematic way" (p. 144).

Roulston (2010) observed that "writing a subjectivity statement can be a helpful step when one is learning how to design and conduct a research project because it forces a researcher to consider key questions about the impetus and decisions made concerning theories and methods" (p. 120). To ensure my own trustworthiness, I took time to reflect on how my age, gender, color, and position might influence what students would feel comfortable saying to me. Writing my own Subjectivity Statement and revisiting it throughout the research helped me to think through my biases and preunderstandings and helped me look at the familiar with a critical eye. This statement is as follows.

I am a white middle-class woman aged 53 who speaks English as her first language. I grew up in England in a small town in the rural South. When I look back at my school photos, I can only see one black face in the whole school and, except at the local Indian restaurant, a product of colonialism, I did not hear different languages being spoken around me. According to the 1981 census, when I was in high school, the population in my hometown was 22,534. Of

those, 21,451 (95%) were born in the U.K., 201 (1%) Republic of Ireland, 252 (1%) E.U., and 630, (3%) other. A person's ethnicity was not asked until the 1991 census.

After attaining my undergraduate degree and a certificate to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) I moved to Spain where I taught for six years. I arrived with no knowledge of the language and only a stereotypical idea of the culture I had gleaned from TV. My time in Spain opened my eyes to the wonders of living in another country. It also showed me how stressful it can be when you have communication problems and a different cultural background. When I returned to teach in the U.K. and later in the U.S.A., I made sure I did not forget how it felt to not be proficient in a language and unfamiliar with the culture. I wanted to hang onto those feelings and use them to help and understand my students from countries ranging from Russia to Eritrea and Azerbaijan.

I am now the Director of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at a small liberal arts college in the southern U.S. I test students' language skills and I teach English language classes. On undertaking this study, I needed to be mindful that my age, gender, and ethnicity, coupled with my status in the college, could have an impact on international transfer students reporting what they really thought, as opposed to what they thought I wanted to hear.

I must disclose that I did come to the study with certain assumptions. As I had worked with international students for over 29 years, I had formed certain ideas about what students would do well and how they would struggle. However, a student today is likely to be very different to my students of 29 years ago. Had I taken the changing times into account? Was I familiar with the lives of these young people today? My experience of discomfort in Spain certainly colored how I viewed international students. I assumed they would also feel uncomfortable with the language and culture, thus experiencing a certain amount of culture

shock. But things have changed since I was in Spain. Back in the early 1990s, I did not even have a phone in my house, let alone a cell phone. If I wanted to call home, I had to find some change and wait for a phone box to be available. Nowadays, students can be in daily contact back home. Does that make a difference to their experience studying overseas? I also assumed that all transfer students would experience some level of difficulty in changing schools academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically and that this would be stronger for international transfer students, given the additional issues of a different language and culture.

Being an eleven year veteran in College T had many advantages, as I knew the people, the resources, and the politics. As Coghlan and Brannick (2014) stated, "One advantage that you have as an insider researcher over an outside researcher is that you have valuable knowledge about the cultures and informal structures of your organization" (p. 133). However, they also explained that this can be a disadvantage as it can be difficult to look at things you are accustomed to with a critical eye and open mind. Therefore, I needed to make sure I was very self-aware of my own biases. I did this by constant reflection and by keeping a journal. The AR Team was essential as we worked together in the AR cycles of reflection to test each other's ideas and assumptions and offer additional ideas.

Delimitations of the Study

The main delimitation for this study was the relatively small sample size of international transfer students (10) whom I interviewed. This was due to the fact that a small percentage of incoming transfer students to College T are international (17 in fall 2015, when the interviews began). In addition, all of the internationals interviewed were Asian (eight Chinese and two Koreans), so the findings are not generalizable to all international transfer students. Indeed,

every person is unique, so the findings cannot even be generalizable to all Asian transfer students or even all Chinese and Korean transfer students.

This was linked to a second delimitation of time. As each international transfer student would be interviewed three times throughout the year (30 interviews), as well as interviews with student and staff workers and the AR team, there was little additional time to conduct more interviews. These students were only tracked through one academic year, not their entire time at College T, so we cannot know if some of their feelings changed in their second or third years here. In addition, the transfer students surveyed were only surveyed once. Again, after more time at the college, their feelings might have changed. Finally, on the day they took the surveys, they may have been having a good or a bad day, which could have influenced their answers.

A third delimitation was the context. College T is a small, private liberal arts college located near a major city in the southeastern United States. Therefore, results could be different in a different location or different type of educational institution.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the design of the study, situated in AR. I described my data collection methods, those being primarily interviews, surveys, and document collection. I explained my data analysis methods using and justified how I kept trustworthiness in the study based on four criteria: credibility, transferability dependability and confirmability. Finally, I acknowledged the delimitations of the study.

In Chapter 4, I will give a description of the context of the study, including a thick description of College T (establishing Transferability), and how the AR team was formed. In addition, I will recount the story of the AR project and research, explaining the AR cycles and

interventions implemented. Quotations from participants will be shown in italics to distinguish them from the quotes I have used from scholars.

CHAPTER 4

THE ACTION RESEARCH STORY: "THANKS FOR THE 60K! NOW LET'S SEE HOW WE CAN HELP YOU"

This chapter will explain the story of the action research (AR) team's journey in learning more about our transfer student community, the issues they face, and ways we can better serve them so they do not just feel "*thrown into the mix*" (spring 2016 survey).

The Context

The setting for this AR project is a small, private liberal arts college located near a major city in the southeastern United States. For the purposes of this study it has been named College Transfer or College T. According to the Admissions Office website (2015-16), the college boasted 70+ majors and 50+ minors and 32% of students had a double major. The college has a strong study abroad program and 700 students studied in 35 countries that year. In addition, College T has over 550 student organizations. The average class size was 24 with 80% of classes having fewer than 30 students and a student-to-faculty ratio of eight-to-one. Students came from 49 states and 75 countries. In fall 2016 the entering first-year class totaled 1,371 with 16.3% international students. There were 77 incoming transfers, 57 domestic transfer students and 20 international transfers. Thirteen of these were students transferring from other institutions within the U.S. (DITS) and seven were coming from institutions outside of the U.S. (IITS).

The Action Research Teams

There were two AR teams who were handpicked by the researcher due to their role,

interest in the transfer student population, and track record of being a good team player. After informally chatting with each member, they were sent a recruitment email and a copy of the consent form to review and sign if they agreed to the project. Table 4.1 shows the team breakdown by gender, ethnicity, and role. The first AR team consisted of nine members, the first nine on the list below. We met on a monthly basis between summer 2015 and fall 2016. A second smaller team was formed in spring 2017 which consisted of Catherine, Thomas, a new member, Eleanor, and myself. We met on a monthly basis until the end of the fall 2017 semester.

Table 4.1

Pseudonyms and Biographical Information of the AR Team

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Position
Catherine	F	Caucasian	Associate Dean
Anne	F	Asian American	Associate Director/Learning Specialist
Henry	M	Caucasian	Associate Director, Advising
Bessie	F	Asian American	Assistant Director of English as a Second Language (ESL)
Mary	F	Caucasian	Assistant Director, Academic Advising Left College T Jan 2016
Elizabeth	F	Caucasian	Assistant Director Tutoring
Margaret	F	Caucasian	International Student & Scholar Advisor
Thomas	M	African American	Director of Orientation Joined team Jan 2016
Jane	F	Caucasian	Director of ESL Me (no pseudonym)
Eleanor	F	African American	Assistant Director of Programs Joined Second AR Team June 2017

The AR teams were groups of highly motivated professionals all of whom work directly with the transfer student population. All members of the teams already knew each other and had worked together in the past either on an ad hoc basis or more closely on a regular basis. All team members expressed that overall they felt the teams had been effective, the members a good choice, and the meetings well organized and (mostly) on task. Catherine stated, "*I think that it got us to actually do something ... because of being on the AR team we actually pushed through.*" Henry shared that:

It was a really interesting team. I think that the composition of the team really helped, because there were a lot of different personalities and positions and offices reflected, so we got feedback from different places, that I think that was very helpful. If it had been a group of like three, it might have been a little bit more narrowly focused and we wouldn't have gotten such wide-ranging feedback as we were able to get.

Margaret added, "*it was a really well put together team. Everybody brought in their own expertise.... Everyone kind of had their own kingdom to bring in and talk about, and I think that we all respect each other's expertise.*"

Conflict Within Team One

Nevertheless, there were some difficulties within Team One. Catherine, being an Associate Dean, was the team member with the most power in the group, and she was also the most vocal member. Most other team members were reluctant to challenge her strong opinions due to their lower positions in the college, including the researcher. In the final AR team interviews, the members felt more able to voice their anonymous opinions. One stated that she felt intimidated by Catherine, who had attained a higher degree and had a higher position, which made her less likely to argue her point.

Catherine seemed frequently irritated about transfer students during meetings, stating that, "*They just don't do what we ask them to do ... they don't read the emails!*" Further, she explained:

I don't know how much of this is really just students who don't want to be new students even though they're coming to a new place and so kind of turn off the listening.... You know they're also coming from a place where they weren't happy, into another place.... I find this is a very challenging population, always!... So sorry that's my soapbox. It's very frustrating because we actually have a lot of resources for transfers and we push it and the same things happen every year and so you just want to shake them.

This clearly showed her assumption that transfer students were not happy at their previous institution which is not necessarily the case as there are many reasons to transfer. Bessie countered Catherine stating, "*It's just young people!*" but Catherine continued expressing her irritation, saying these are students "*who want to be spoon-fed at the time that they want which is at 3 in the morning on a Thursday, but to you it's 2 in the morning on Tuesday, and to you it's 1 in the afternoon on Friday of week 7.*" She was worried that we "*are not helping them become more resourceful by coddling and enabling.*" Several students in both the spring 2016 and fall 2016 surveys reported that they would have liked to meet in a small group with other transfer students and a staff member. Again Catherine expressed her frustration, "*But they have people and when it's mandatory then they're angry that it's mandatory, when it's optional they don't go or she might go but then four others wouldn't go.*" She explained the Office for Undergraduate Education (OUE) had been trying to do more for spring transfers and the year before they had Transfer Tuesday meetings and other special programming, yet no transfers attended. She finished by stating "*they [spring transfer students] are the neediest of needy kids who are never*

happy, and can't get their stuff together."

Henry, who works mainly with international students and therefore also international transfer students, countered Catherine's feelings of frustration in one meeting and tried to refocus the conversation by stating:

I don't find international students are demanding of 'I want this right now.' I may get questions at two o'clock in the morning but I never get any complaints if I write them back at 10 the next day. They like one-on-one more than they like group stuff or at least to have an identified source that they can go to get a response. I've never had anybody be rude or demanding like ever.... They are all just incredibly grateful for the services...they just write late at night when they are thinking of stuff.

He was concerned about differing viewpoints of transfer students in the team. In his final interview he explained:

I think some people really view them negatively, and there was a lot of very negative things that were said about transfer students in some of our meetings. That always troubles me, because I just don't have those kinds of experiences. People are grateful and nice and polite, and they're not demanding and whiny and needy.

In another meeting Catherine repeated her feelings that transfer students need to take more responsibility for themselves saying, "*The burden is on you [transfer student] and to say that does sound unwelcoming but it's the same thing as the burden is on you to go to office hours. The burden is on you to seek help. The burden is on you.*" Again Henry quietly countered:

It's not even a burden, it's more like you're in charge of your experience here. It takes active effort to make this a positive experience. It's not going to be handed to you because this is a community of 6,000 to 7,000 people. There's a whole lot of people here,

and it's a pretty fast paced environment here, and you're going to have to make this happen. This is a great learning experience of how do you jump into a new environment and make connections because you'll do it after graduation most likely as well.

Resistance to Change

According to Burke (2014), resistance to change can be blind (from those who are frightened of any type of change), political (from those who are worried they will be denied something because of the change), and ideological (from those who believe the change will not be successful if it is against their beliefs). He stated, "Change usually involves a shift away from a known situation, with all its familiarity, comfort, and advantages" (p. 111). The team member most resistant to change was again the most vocal member Catherine, the Associate Dean. She had worked at College T for over 10 years and seemed to feel she had seen it all and tried it all before; therefore, whatever we did would be unsuccessful (Burke would categorize this as ideological resistance to change). The suggested intervention to form a new one-credit class for transfer students to help them acclimatize to the campus was the one she was most strongly against and in fact initially vetoed it stating, "*No. I'm just going to say no...there's just too much going on.*" You could feel the disappointment of the team in the air as everyone else thought this would be a great idea and was something many students in both the surveys and interviews asked to have. Nevertheless, none of us had the power to create and run the class without this dean's backing, and no one felt they could continue the argument in favor of the class.

As Burke (2014) told us not everyone resists change; in fact, some people welcome change. The strongest desire for change came from the younger members of the team. Mary explained that she was "*mind-blowingly frustrated*" that the key player, in the team (meaning the associate dean but declining to say so), who had greater power within the organization, could

have been more open to ideas when the rest of the team felt they were totally doable. She stated:

I'm just going to be blunt. I hate the red tape. [Instead of being told] 'Go for it!' there's always push back. And I don't know why... I wish people [in authority] were a little bit more open-minded to allowing, 'Let's try this. Let's see how it goes.' Or piloting something ... people are quick to say no instead of saying yes.

As Cohen (2005) warned, "probably the most serious challenge to successful change comes when members of leadership and management-those you're relying upon to implement change-resist the effort" (p. 121).

The Action Research Cycles

In the following section I will describe the two cycles of AR the team followed. We used Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) approach consisting of a pre-step, constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action.

Pre-Step

I was first alerted to the struggles of international transfer students in the fall of 2013 when I started to administer the same language assessment that first-year students were given. I noticed that many of these students demonstrated a lower level of language proficiency than the incoming first-year students. Based on ten years work with incoming international first year students, I already knew that many struggle when they first start college in the U.S., but by their second or third year they have usually settled into the institution, become more comfortable with the language, and started to overcome any feelings of culture shock. As I reflected on this I wondered if this group of students were having additional problems. International transfer students differ from regular international students as they are starting the process of settling into a new college all over again. Some are coming to a new institution within the U.S. (DITS), but

others are coming from an institution outside the U.S. (IITS). If we equate going to college with learning to drive an automatic car, transferring is like now having to learn to drive a stick shift. You know the basics of driving, but you have new things to learn. Additionally, if you are coming from another country, it's like learning to do this on the other side of the road, with different rules and signposts to master. The team decided to look more deeply into this population.

The teams went through two cycles of AR, as can be seen in Figure 4.1. The first cycle involved the first, larger team. At the end of that cycle we were happy, evaluated our interventions, and felt we had completed the project. At that point we were prepared to stop as indicated by the red circle. However, communication with my committee lead me to reflect further and discuss with the AR team if we had substantially addressed the problem. We reviewed the fall 2016 survey and felt that, although we had done some good work, it did not go far enough. Students were still making similar complaints after the initial orientation. This led to the formation of a second smaller team and a second cycle of AR. Although I finished this study with the evaluation of the second round of interventions, there is no red circle indicating completion. These interventions will continue to be reflected upon and changes will continue to be made.

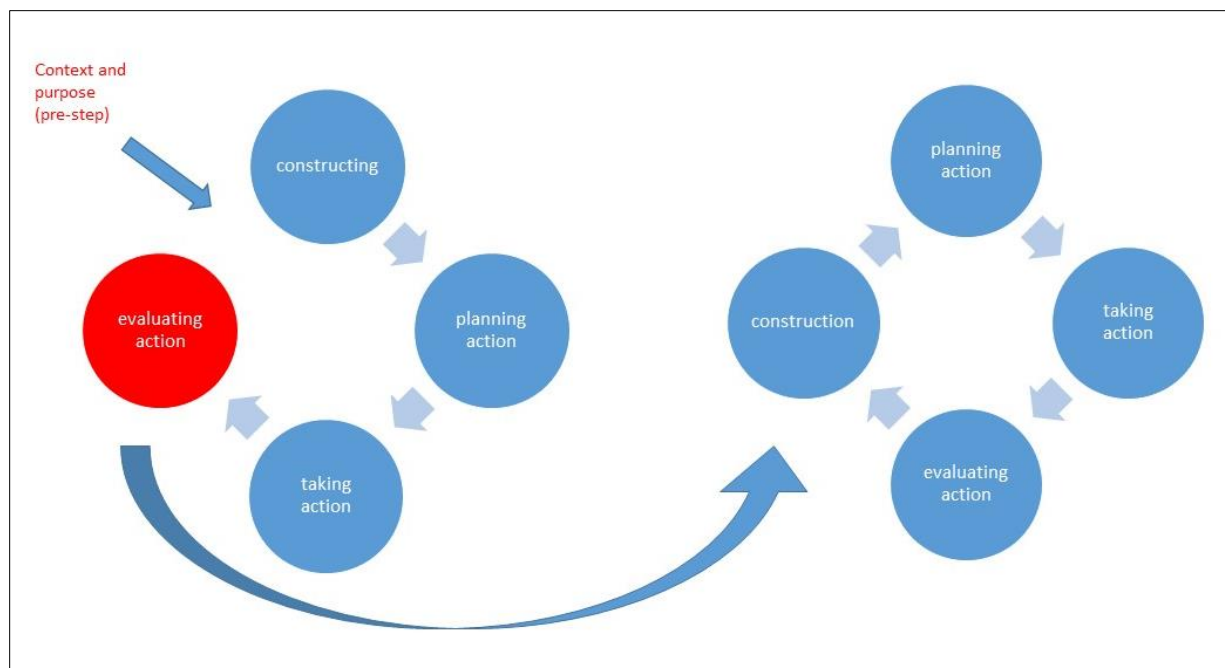


Figure 4.1. The AR team's two cycles of action research.

AR Cycle One

The AR team had their first meeting in summer 2015 in which I gave a PowerPoint presentation explaining AR and the problem the team would be examining. All present agreed this would be an important and worthwhile project.

Constructing (assessing the situation). Before any action could be planned it was important for the AR team to understand the challenges facing international transfer students. Additionally, we were interested in the experiences of both IITS and DITS who also speak English as a second language (ESL). What adjustment issues do the two groups demonstrate? What are the similarities and differences? What can we do to make this adjustment smoother? The AR team designed two interview protocols (Appendices B and C) to find out the experiences of these ITS. The first was to gather their initial experiences on arrival at College T (administered after orientation fall 2015) and the second to see how they fared by the end of the

first semester (administered at the end of the fall 2015 semester) and at the end of the second semester (administered at the end of the spring 2016 semester). Ten international transfer students were interviewed, 6 DITS and 4 IITS. The team later decided we needed to understand the experience of all transfer students in order to discover what was unique to internationals; we collaboratively designed a survey (Appendix D) to capture these data which was administered to all transfers in the college in spring 2016. The survey, with slight amendments, was also given to incoming transfers (fall 2016) to assess the interventions. In spring 2016, 84/314 students started the survey and 70 completed it, a response rate of 22.29% for completed surveys. In fall 2016, 41/77 students responded to and 38 completed the survey, a response rate of 49.35% for completed surveys.

Planning action. Using the data gathered from the spring 2016 survey plus the international transfer student interviews, the AR team planned the action or first set of interventions to be taken. Each AR team member was given one or two students who they would “get to know” by reading the transcripts of their three interviews. They were to report these findings back to the group. In addition, the whole team analyzed the survey data from spring 2016. What really stood out to us was that all transfer students struggle with academics, find it hard to connect socially, suffer from emotional issues, and have administrative and practical challenges. Moreover, international transfer students have additional challenges connected to language and culture.

In the spring 2016 survey 31/74 (41.89%) stated the workload at College T to be one of their main challenges, and 25/74 (33.78%) said the difficulty of assignments and classes had been a main challenge. One student stated “*academics are as tough as old leather.*” Not surprisingly 37/74 (50.00%) pointed to issues with time management. Unfortunately, we also

saw there was an underuse of academic support resources; 36/73 (49.32%) had not used the writing center and 39/73 (53.42%) had not used subject tutors. Finding friends was even more difficult, with 42/74 (56.76%) citing that as a main challenge and 37/73 (50.69%) stating they had few to no friends. Just over half the transfer students, 37/73 (50.68%) did not feel there was a staff or faculty member they felt connected with and could go to with an issue. One student stated *“I’m disappointed with the professors. I expected them to be more engaged with the students but in reality they are more focused on their research.”* Another stated professors were *“rude and condescending.”* One transfer spelled out that there is a *“lack of social and emotional support for transfer students.”* Disappointingly, 38/73 (52.02%) did not feel College T had a welcoming environment. Administrative/practical issues revolved around the transferring of credit and finding their way around campus and different offices. We felt these issues could be best addressed by making sure we provided them with more personal connections before/during and after orientation and better information on services provided.

Interviews with the international transfer students in fall 2015-spring 2016 demonstrated the same issues above. In addition, language added another layer of difficulty to their academic and social adjustment, as did coming from other cultures with different cultural knowledge. Wei (IITS) explained that difficulties with academics came from

A lot of materials to read and lots of terminologies that I never heard before....

Sometimes it's very difficult for me to understand those articles so it's very hard....

Sometimes I just cannot read all of them. Just too much to read.

Seung Hoon (DITS) showed that coming from a different educational background led to a gap in his background knowledge which impeded his understanding particularly in his history class. He stated, *“I hated that class ... because the class is about black history in [this region]*

and a lot of students were African American so I found it really challenging for me because I don't have background." Hyo Jun (IITS) disclosed that his social isolation was "*because of language problem and culture problem so it wasn't easy to make American friends.*" Min (DITS) articulated her discomfort with living in America stating:

It's not comfortable ... because I live in China for 19 years. Some Chinese people right now they come to America when they are high school student, I think for those people maybe they get used to America and they become very like native speaker. But for me I feel like I'm still a Chinese person. I miss my food, I miss my hometown. I hope to back to Shanghai.... Yeah, sure [I'm homesick].

Taking action. The first round of interventions started summer 2016. As can be seen from Figure 4.2, some of these interventions continued through the first semester and others occurred at different points during the summer, on arrival, or after arrival.

Information dissemination. Emails already went out to transfers on a Tuesday in the regular semester with information such as when add/drop/swap finishes, but it was felt that these needed to start immediately in the summer on a weekly basis. As transfer students "trickle in" throughout the summer and would only read emails from the time they matriculate, it was decided key information, such as deadlines, would need to be repeated. Information was also passed on via the website and personal connections.

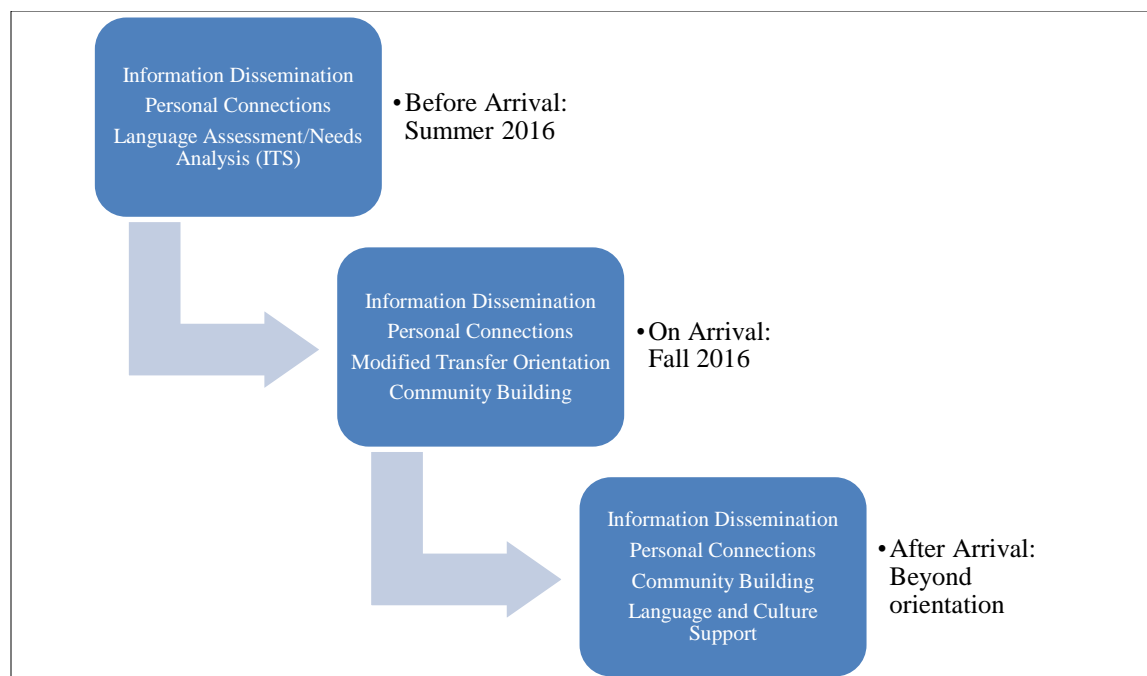


Figure 4.2. Round one interventions. ITS = international transfer student/s.

Personal connections. There were many ways transfer students were reached out to over the summer to make personal connections. This was to give them a feeling of being welcomed, feeling informed and connected to the college so when they arrived on campus they would already know some people and were able to put names to faces.

Academic advisors. Advisors (mostly graduate students) reached out to the transfer students over the summer. They were given a checklist to go over with them during the sessions. The checklist included reviewing their transfer credits, informing them of the general education requirements (GERs) and classes to take, and making sure the international transfer students were aware they had to take the language assessment. These advisors were on hand during orientation and throughout the academic year.

Academic peer mentors. The academic peer mentor program had been established five years previously in 2011 to connect incoming international students with a current mentor

student, either domestic or international. The mentor was given a small group of mentees and together they attended the international orientation events; for example, academic information sessions, as well as social events such as the evening pool party. This was extended in fall 2016 to include international transfer students with the aim of making sure they would also come to international student orientation (which takes place before transfer orientation) so they could get connected to the international community as well as the transfer community. These mentors reached out to all international transfer students during the summer to get to know them then met them on their arrival to College T.

Orientation peer leaders. As the academic peer mentor program had been successful, the team felt this, or a similar program, should be expanded to include all transfer students. These should be kept as small groups, around five students, for greater connectivity. The AR team worked with Residence Life to extend this idea to all transfers in fall 2016 by offering transfer specific peer Orientation Leaders (OLs,) of which there were 10 with a transfer student OL captain. These OLs were connected with the transfer students on arrival to campus and stayed with them during transfer orientation. The OLs were also to maintain contact informally with them so these groups could form their own community and invite them to a dinner at the six-week mark. In addition, the OLs provided information on academic support. One OL explained this role was to

help transfer students orient to campus, help them socialize, make new bonds both with other transfer students and outside of that group, and just ensure they have a smooth transition to campus and that they are not feeling like newcomers. One thing that we did emphasize ... was that we were told to make sure we were not treating them like freshmen because they were not freshmen.

Point person. Several international transfer students mentioned in their interviews they would appreciate meetings with an "*authority*." This is not necessarily the same as an academic advisor but a Point Person to talk to about anything they wished. It could be about resources to help academically or it could just be almost a parental figure, someone who they know is looking out for them. This person would have regular check-ins throughout the students' time at College T and send e-mails with important academic deadlines and social opportunities. One person (Henry from the AR team) was assigned this task for the Asian international transfers starting fall 2016. He was to help this group of students in all aspects of their transition (academic, social, emotional, and administrative/practical).

English assessment and needs analysis. In the previous two years the international transfer students had been given an English language test during orientation. Results had shown a need for language support, but available classes were usually full by the time they were able to register. In summer 2016 students were remotely tested during the summer so better advising with the Director of ESL and class placement could occur if needed. In addition, a video was made with the ESL director explaining the test and why it is given. The students were also given a needs analysis. This was to find out more about their educational background. For example, we wanted to know if they attended high school in the U.S. or if they transferred from a college inside or outside of the U.S. which would indicate a greater or lesser need for ESL resources such as ESL tutors. We also asked if they used ESL support at their last institution, if they were interested in taking an ESL supported writing course at College T, if they were interested in attending a language and cultural support group, and if they had any further questions about ESL support.

Modified transfer orientation. Many changes were made to orientation. These included both more information sharing and additional opportunities to meet people. The OLs played a key role in this. For example, in 2015 there was only one three-hour required session specifically for transfer students with a lot of information delivered in a lecture format. There was a short add-on for international transfers about visas (which was a repeat of the session at international student orientation). This was followed by a campus tour and an ice cream social. In fall 2016 the team knew this needed to become more dynamic and help these students feel fully welcomed to campus and fully informed from day one. In addition, there needed to be more chances to meet with both other transfer students as well as other College T students. Changes included smaller group meetings with OLs. Academic information previously given in lecture form was given in a "round robin" style with smaller groups circling round the three topics of academic support, majors and minors, and credit appeals /degree audits. In addition, information was shared about what we know already about the challenges transfer students face and how to avoid any potential problems. After there was an ice cream break for socializing where College T t-shirts were distributed. It was hoped a group photo could be taken and a copy given to the transfer students. Due to a lack of time this did not in fact happen, but it was added to the fall 2017 orientation. Afterwards there was a panel where the incoming students could ask questions to previous transfer students.

For the international transfer students there was an additional session with the ESL Director to explain the language services available to them such as ESL tutors, and give each a small gift with the ESL contact details on it (a water bottle and bag). This small group setting promoted good questions and an opportunity to meet the ESL director face-to-face whom they had already been in contact with in the summer.

Community building. Important to the team was to find ways to get transfer students connected to other students socially. This meant with other transfers who were sharing the same experience as them, as well as other College T students, both American and international. The transfer specific OLs were to be a key factor in this. They hosted events during orientation and after, specifically a transfer student dinner six weeks into the semester. In addition, international transfer students had the chance to connect as a group with other international students and their academic mentors during international student orientation. These students also met as a group with the ESL director at transfer orientation. A couple of weeks after orientation they were invited to a bubble tea event, where incoming international transfer students were invited to meet current international transfer students. Finally, they were invited to a "Try a Pie with a Slice of Advice" event in late fall 2016 with international first-year students.

Language and culture support. The language assessment provided information to the ESL Director as to which students would benefit from ESL supported classes and those students were offered places in those classes. Also, a new intervention for fall 2016 was an international transfer student conversation class designed to improve language skills, create community, and help any students with culture shock.

Evaluating action. Interventions were evaluated by gathering information via surveys and interviews. Incoming fall 2016 transfers were surveyed at the end of that semester. Also, three transfer-specific OLs were interviewed, as was the new Point Person for international transfers. This is summarized in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Interventions and Findings: Cycle One

Interventions	Data Collection	Evaluation Findings
Information Dissemination	Fall 2016 survey	32/39 (82.05%) found the improved website somewhat helpful-very helpful 30/40 (75.00%) found the Transfer Tuesday emails somewhat helpful-very helpful
Personal Connections	Fall 2016 survey	<i>Academic Advisors</i> 33/40 (82.50%) of incoming TS said that academic advisors were somewhat helpful-very helpful
	Fall 2016 survey	<i>Academic Peer Mentors (ITS only)</i> 6/8 (75.00%) found these to be somewhat helpful-very helpful.
	Fall 2016 survey	<i>Orientation Peer Leaders</i> 34/40 (85.00%) felt the new TS OLs were somewhat helpful to very helpful
	Point Person Interview	<i>Point Person</i> PILOT. Worked with Asian ITS 15/20 incoming ITS "The big benefit is, for any of the students I work with, is having someone who actually knows a whole lot of stuff. I can answer virtually every question they ask."
Language Assessment/Needs Analysis	<i>English Assessment</i>	<i>English Assessment</i> There were 20 incoming ITS Fall 2016, 13 DITS and 7 IITS.
	<i>Fall 2016</i>	13 were tested (6 DITS, 7 IITS), 7 were exempt. 7 of those tested were recommended to take a class with ESL support All 7 took the advice. (4 IITS, 3 DITS)
	<i>Needs Analysis</i>	<i>Needs Analysis</i> 13 ITS completed this 6 DITS and 7 IITS (the same students who took the assessment)
	<i>Fall 2016</i>	4 had taken ESL classes at their previous institution (1 DITS, 3 IITS) 7 felt they would benefit from taking classes with ESL support (4 DITS, 3 IITS) 8 said they would be interested in being a part of a weekly language/discussion group (4 DITS, 4 IITS)

Interventions	Data Collection	Evaluation Findings
	<i>Fall 2016 Survey</i>	8/8 (100%) ITS felt contact with ESL director had been somewhat to very helpful.
Modified Transfer Student Orientation	<i>Fall 2016 Survey</i>	<i>Modified Orientation</i> 34/40 (85%) felt orientation was somewhat to very helpful 33/40(82.50%) felt the orientation team was somewhat to very helpful 38/40 (95.00%) felt somewhat to very welcomed
Community Building	<i>OL interviews</i>	<i>TS Community Building</i> OLs had events for their group throughout the semester with mixed participation OLs posted events on the TS Facebook page The biggest event was a TS dinner near the end of the first semester an attendance of 30 TS
	<i>Event sign in sheets</i>	<i>ITS Community Building</i> Bubble Tea TS Mixer. 30 attendees. One ITS interviewee (2015-2016), 3 previous TS, 12 new TS, 5 staff, 1 TS OL, 8 other Try a Pie with a Slice of Advice. 6 IS, 2 ITS, 3 advisors
Language and Culture Support	<i>Observation</i>	<i>ITS Conversation Group</i> 0 attendees

Note. TS = transfer student/s; ITS = international transfer student/s.

Key Learnings from AR Cycle One

1. Having more targeted academic advising in the summer, during orientation and into the semester is a positive change. In spring 2016 a staggering 30/73 transfer students (41.1%) said advisors were not helpful. Although we must remember respondents in fall 2016 were a different group of transfers, it was gratifying to see the number was only 7/40 (17.50%) who felt the same way.
2. Personnel connections to peers and professionals is important in making students feel both welcome and informed. The OL captain felt strongly that having the new transfer specific OLs were *"integral to changing the transfer student experience, because they had a...mentor that was a resource for information but also a friend."* One OL was still in touch with 7/11 (63.64%) of his group by the winter break and stated they had bonded really well. He felt this was as he had arranged social activities outside of the mandated ones. The fall 2016 survey showed that 34/40 (85.00%) felt the new transfer student OLs were somewhat helpful to very helpful. Also 6/8 (75.00%) international transfer students found their academic mentor to be somewhat helpful-very helpful. The Point Person, who was also a member of the AR team, and extremely involved with the Asian international transfer students, had a core group he continued to see regularly and work with closely. In addition, 8/8 (100%) of internationals said working with the ESL Director over the summer had been beneficial.
3. Focusing on making orientation more helpful and welcoming is a hugely positive change. In spring 2016 only 42/79 (53.16%) stated that orientation had been at least somewhat helpful to very helpful. In fall 2016 34/40 (85%) said the same. In addition, only 14/79 (17.72%) had said they felt very welcomed on arrival to College T in spring 2016, yet 25/40 (62.50%) felt the same in fall 2016. Negative comments

were numerous and quite vocal in spring 2016. Comments included: *"I felt as though we were thrown into the mix, with a very poor community established"* and *"There was literally no support or direction given to transfer students, it was like thank you for the 60k, see ya later."* Comments in fall 2016 were much more positive including: *"Everyone was very kind, attentive"*, *"Some schools I got accepted to besides College T didn't even offer a transfer orientation. It's clear College T is supportive of its transfer community,"* and *"people involved in orientation were very hospitable."*

4. Getting students to participate, even in things they request, can be very much hit and miss. While one transfer OL was very successful in meeting with his group and was still in touch with seven of his eleven group members, by the winter another OL was extremely frustrated at the lack of participation in her group of transfer students. She said, *"I'm not going to constantly be on you about coming to things.... There's only so much I can do."* The International Transfer Student Bubble Tea Mixer following orientation fall 2016 only had 30 attendees. Disappointingly all ten international transfer students interviewed in 2015-2016 said they would like to help welcome the new international transfers. However, when they were personally invited to the Bubble Tea only one attended. Three other (not interviewed) current international transfers came and 12 new international transfer students. The other participants were staff members and students who happened to pass by. Another event before finals in the fall semester 2016 was for all first-year international students and all international transfer students. Academic advisors were on hand to help transfers think through their spring classes, and typical American fall pies were on offer for students to try (apple, cherry, pumpkin, sweet potato). Attendance was very low with

only eight students attending (six international students and two international transfer students), despite advertising by email, flyers, and in class. One graduate student academic advisor stated in an interview "*I was pretty astounded by our low turnout at the [Try a Pie with a Slice of Advice event]. I expected many, many more than that.*" We had so many pies left over so we started handing them out to random students passing by so they could share them in their dorms. What disappointed me most personally, as the organizer of the group, was the zero attendance to the informal conversation group for international transfer students. This had been requested by prior international transfer students and 8/13 (61.53%) of the incoming international transfers, who answered the needs analysis, had said they were interested in attending. The aim of the group was to improve conversational skills and be a venue for learning more about culture and College T. All incoming international transfers in fall 2016 were contacted several times via email yet despite these numerous emails, as well as trying different days and times for the group, no one showed up. The one exception was that all seven international transfer students who were recommended to take an ESL supported class did so. This class was a four-credit class which fulfilled a continuing writing requirement. In addition to a first year writing class, three more continuous writing classes are required by College T. Therefore, participation in something that is required is much higher than something that is not required, even if it is something to the students' benefit.

Reflections on Cycle One

The team felt satisfied with the interventions initially and believed we had made a substantial change in the experience for transfer students. We were happy for that to be the end of the project and just administer surveys each fall semester to make any other minor changes. My committee suggested that these were not real interventions but merely tweaks and it would be advisable to think on a deeper level to create a better and more sustained intervention. After my initial disappointment and feelings of resentment and resistance to yet more work, I reflected on the interventions and realized that they had been merely a scratch on the surface of the issue. I reconvened the AR team and we realized that indeed we had only made changes we may have made anyway in our regular roles. As Watkins (1991) stated "many Action Research studies appear to abort at the stage of diagnosis of a problem or the implementation of a single solution strategy, irrespective of whether or not it resolves the presenting problem" (p. 7). As we thought further our initial feelings of despondence converted to a new surge of enthusiasm. Although we could see that the changes we had initiated had been positive they had not made a huge impact. The fall 2016 survey showed that feelings of isolation and academic struggles in courses continued: 22/40 transfer students (52.50%) still cited difficulty of courses and assignments as a major challenge and 18/40 (45.00%) still found finding friends to be a major challenge. Some of the comments were: *"I feel like there is a sense of community missing, and it made me feel very isolated for the first month or so. We were kind of just thrown in and expected to swim on our own."* Another said, *"Transfer orientation was very welcoming, but when the year started I still felt like an outsider"* and *"I felt like after the orientation, there was not much done by College T to make sure we had a community of any kind."* In addition, the interview with the Point Person showed that we had to do more for this group as a whole. It appeared that the students he

worked closely with had mostly found their niche in the college with his guiding hand. Most importantly, the team realized that there needed to be follow-through for these students. We could make orientation as welcoming as we wanted, but this could not be the end of the contact with this group. Having academic mentors for international transfer students and OLs for all transfer students to check in through the semester, as well as the Point Person for international transfer students, had been a great improvement but there was still more we could do.

Most surprisingly, Catherine, the Associate Dean, who had been the most resistant to any changes, surprised us all by explaining that we had to stop "*pop up*" small solutions and "*be institutional/intentional about [changes]*." Therefore, it was decided by the team, with her blessing, to go ahead and plan a new transition class for transfer students to be implemented fall 2017. The team believed this would be a way for the students to maintain contact with us, as well as other transfers, and help support their academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical integration to College T. A second smaller team was then formed with two of the former AR team members (Thomas and Catherine) plus myself as well as a new member, Eleanor. The reason for a second AR team was to have a focused group for this major intervention which the group would plan and then facilitate. Eleanor was asked to join the team due to her expertise with a similar class run for first-year students.

AR Cycle Two

The new team met through summer 2017 to construct the class. We also met through fall 2017 during the class to discuss/monitor how it was proceeding.

Constructing (assessing the situation). The new team reflected further on the international transfer student, staff and student worker interviews plus the survey results from spring 2016 and fall 2016 (administered after the first round of interventions). We reassessed the

situation and decided what was needed was indeed a one credit hour transition class as well as a Point Person for all transfers not just the international transfers. These two things could help address transfer students' feelings of a lack of community and academic struggles. A mini survey had already been sent out in December 2016 to the incoming transfers that fall to see what would be of interest to them in a transition to College T class. Sixteen students completed the survey. They were given optional sessions to rank in order of importance for new transfers as well as space to suggest alternative sessions not suggested. We asked if any would like to attend some workshops in spring 2017 to meet incoming spring transfer students and help design the new class which would incorporate the workshops. Seven responded they would like to do that.

Planning action. Five workshops were planned for the spring of 2017 to pilot five class sessions. The first session was to be run by the second AR team based on what we had learned about transfers who had made a successful transition and brought in Schlossberg's 4S system as described in Chapter 2. The other sessions were run by experts in each area. Workshops consisted of:

- Workshop 1: Transitioning to College T (Schlossberg's 4S)
- Workshop 2: Getting Involved on Campus 1. Student Clubs and Activities
- Workshop 3: Getting Involved on Campus 2. Undergraduate Research and Internships
- Workshop 4: Academics at College T: Resources and Time Management
- Workshop 5: Life Balance

Taking action. The action we took in cycle two comprised three interventions: Workshops in spring 2017, a new Point Person for domestic transfer students starting in summer 2016, and a new transition class for transfers starting fall 2017.

Workshops. In spring 2017 the series of five workshops was administered. Disappointingly, only two students from the seven who showed interest attended only one of the workshops. All incoming fall 2016 and spring 2017 transfer students were invited (93 students). The overall turnout was disappointingly low: Workshop 1: 7 attendees, Workshop 2: 4 attendees, Workshop 3: 6 attendees, Workshop 4: 1 attendee, Workshop 5: 1 attendee. Nevertheless, the feedback on the workshops was encouraging. Out of the 19 evaluations, 15 found the workshop they attended to be very helpful and 3 found it to be somewhat helpful; 16 said it was very enjoyable and 2 somewhat enjoyable; 16 would be very likely to recommend it to a friend and 3 would be somewhat likely.

Class. The class had been proposed and accepted by the curriculum committee a few years previously, but no further action had been taken and a syllabus had not been written. It was a major undertaking to write the syllabus and invite and organize the presenters. We felt it important that the sessions were not run by us, but by different experts in College T, so the students could get to know them and they could answer questions about their program or department more effectively than we could. We contacted all of the guests, all of whom expressed excitement for this new class. We carefully constructed the syllabus and flow of classes so they would come at logical points in the semester. For example, the session on time management occurred near the beginning of the semester so the transfer students could plan for their classes and assignments, and the one on life balance came near the end before finals. The class was designed to introduce transfers, not only to the resources College T has to offer, but

also as a way to get them to bond as a group. In addition, we made sure this was not a duplication of the class for incoming first-year students, but all sessions were tailored for students further along in their academic career with additional sessions on careers, internships, and fellowships. We also had two sessions outside the classroom to visit the research library and campus museum. In addition, students had to do four outside activities to get them out and about around campus. One was a scavenger hunt to find various offices/ other locations. To prove they had been there they had to take a selfie at the location. At one spot they had to ask questions and record the question and answer. They also had a long list of sports, arts, and careers events to choose from. They had to go to them, take a selfie again, and write a reflection paper about the event. Finally, we constructed the online learning platform (Canvas) to house all the PowerPoints, assignments and links to websites. The classes are listed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Transitioning to College T Classes and Facilitators

Class	Topic	Facilitator / Office
1	Transitioning to College T	<i>Director of ESL</i> AR Team Facilitator
2	Getting Involved on Campus 1. Student Clubs and Activities	<i>Associate Director</i> Student Involvement
3	Academics at College T 1. Resources and Time Management	<i>Academic Peer Coach</i>
4	Getting Involved on Campus 2: Undergraduate Research and Internships	<i>Assistant Director</i> <i>Research Peer Mentors</i> Undergraduate Research <i>Director</i> Career Center
5	Gems of College T 1 Research Library "College T History and Traditions" or College T Museum	<i>Instructional Archivist</i> Research Library <i>Director of Education</i> Museum
6	Academics at College T 2. Degree Planning – Useful Tools on Your Path to Graduation	<i>Associate Director</i> Academic Advising
7	Majors, Minors and Careers	<i>Executive Director</i> Career Center
8	Summer Opportunities	<i>Senior Associate Director</i> Summer Programs
9	Gems of College T 2 Research Library "College T History and Traditions" or College T Museum	<i>Instructional Archivist</i> Research Library <i>Director of Education</i> Museum
10	Scholarships and Fellowships	<i>Director</i> National Scholarships and Fellowships
11	Life Balance	<i>Associate Director</i> Counselling Center
12	Reflecting and Looking Ahead	<i>Associate Dean</i> AR Team Member

Point person. Henry, who became the Point Person for Asian international transfers in fall 2016 felt strongly that this should be expanded to all domestic and international transfers.

He stated they all need

a person that [they] can develop a relationship with, who will answer [their] questions.

Because I do feel like people get lost in the shuffle sometimes, or it just feels impersonal if [they] get a different person every time.... They just need a guide, a Sherpa to help them navigate this place when they first get here.

In summer 2017 an additional Point Person was charged with working specifically with all domestic transfer students, and then to track them through their time at College T. This advisor made sure they enrolled in the correct classes and led them to support systems as and when needed. All international transfers were then seen by Henry from fall 2016.

Evaluating action. The survey was again administered at the end of fall 2017 with the addition of questions directly related to the transition class (see Appendix E). There were 40 respondents and 38 completed the survey, a response rate of 52.78% for completed surveys. Twenty-nine respondents took the Transitioning to College T class and ten did not (the one student who did not answer this question cannot have taken the class). All students who finished the class finished the survey, and eight of the 10 students who did not take the class completed the survey. Of those students who did not take the class five stated it did not fit their schedule and four that they were not interested in taking it. Two wished they had in fact taken it. One had the misconception that you would fail the class if you missed a session which in fact was not true. You could miss up to two sessions (out of 12) but needed to take a make-up assignment (a quiz or short reflection paper).

Of the students that took the class 27/29 (93%) were happy they took the class. Written comments mostly said the instructors were nice and helpful, it was good to have the time to bond with other students, it was useful to be given reminders for deadlines and learn about the resources instead of having to search for the information themselves. One transfer stated "*it bought transfers together which was very nice.*" One seemed a little surprised saying "*It was actually helpful and a nice time to get together with other transfer students.*" Feedback on the individual sessions showed the most popular session was majors, minors and careers with an aggregate score of 3.55 out of 4, followed by summer opportunities (3.48) and research and internships (3.38). This would make sense as this group of students, being further along in their academic careers, would now be thinking about their future careers and needing to take summer classes to make up for credit that had not transferred over. Students were split into two groups for the College T museum and research library. One group in each session had a lesser experience than the other. For one group, on their research library visit, the Instructional Archivist was absent, so they were only able to view the artifacts and not have the interactive session, which the second group clearly enjoyed. Similarly, for one group visiting the museum, the curator had forgotten their appointment and arrived very late. Therefore, the session was rushed and the most popular collection was missed. Again, the other group had the full experience. Therefore, the ratings for both of those, the research library (2.86) and the museum (3.0), I feel could have been much higher. Sadly, the lowest scoring session was an interactive exploration with the students of Schlossberg's 4S system in the first class, Transitioning to College T (2.83). This session will be reviewed for fall 2018 and possibly revised by having the students revisit the 4S grid they produced at the mid-point and end of the semester (in the

reflection session). Table 4.4 shows all weighted totals for each session, based on how helpful the students felt they were, from 1 (not at all helpful) to 4 (very helpful).

The students were asked to complete three outside activities and write a brief two-paragraph reflection. We asked them if they would have done the activity anyway if they had not been required to do so. Thirteen (44.83%) said yes, six (20.69%) said no, and ten (34.48%) said maybe. Thus, we can see from this that some students did activities they probably would not have done which was the purpose of asking them to do them. We wanted to encourage them to get out and experience the non-academic life of College T and hopefully expose them to something new. Additionally, they were asked if they were happy we had asked them to do the activities. Sixteen (55.17%) said yes and 13 (44.83%) said no. Included were comments such as *"They make you get integrated into the College T community when maybe you would not have if not"* as well as complaints about having to write about the events: *"I went to a lot of things I was interested in throughout the semester, but having to write reflections was the worst part."* Finally, we asked the students who took the class if they would recommend it to an incoming transfer student. No student said it was not at all likely, three (10.34%) said it was not very likely, 14 (48.28%) said it was somewhat likely and 12 (41.38%) said it was very likely.

Table 4.4

Ratings on Transition Class Sessions

	Weighted Total		Weighted Total		Weighted Total		Weighted Total
1. Transitioning to College T (Schlossberg's 4S model)	2.83	2. Student Clubs and Activities	3.17	3. Academic Resources and Time Management	3.24	4. Undergraduate Research and Internships	3.38
5. College T Research Library	2.86	6. Degree Planning	3.28	7. Majors, Minors and Careers	3.55	8. Summer Opportunities	3.48
9. College T Museum	3.0	10. Scholarships and fellowships	3.03	11. Life balance	3.10	12. Reflecting and looking ahead	3.14

Note. The lowest scoring sessions are highlighted in red and the highest in green.

Other comments about the class focused on an appreciation for the guest speakers. Each speaker was an expert on the day's topic and could answer any questions as opposed to the facilitator merely being able to give a general overview. In addition, they appreciated the guides at the museum and library. One student said *"Having someone there to explain things was very helpful and enhanced the experience. Thank you all so much for putting this class together, the hard work on your end definitely showed and I really appreciate it."* Another stated, *"I think [the class] is a nice way to bring transfer students together and make them feel like they have support even if they do not take advantage of it"*. Yet another said, *"I liked the different speakers because they gave a variety of perspectives and suggestions."*

Many also mentioned the fact that they were able to make friends with others in similar situations, but that we should have changed the seating each day to allow them to get to know the others in the group, as well as asked them to do the outside activities with other students. One transfer student said, *"The groups are not necessary. We are only confined to the people in the group and don't get to meet the others."* Another stated, *"I think it would be great if the students in the class had more opportunities to meet each other and carry out group activities in class or outside of class."* Finally, one more said, *"Allow for students to interact with each other. It allows for students to build up a social group."*

Comments about resources included *"I have used resources I wouldn't have if I didn't go to this class."* Another stated:

Maybe try instead to physically show students where many resources actually are as opposed to just talking about them. We aren't very familiar with the campus and guided tours to different academic resources like tutoring or the career center could be very helpful.

Reflections and Learning on AR Cycle 2

Abraham Lincoln stated, "You can please some of the people some of the time, all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but you can never please all of the people all of the time." We cannot say the class was a complete success as not all the transfer students chose to take it. Nevertheless, as Catherine said:

I 100% noticed that [the transfer students] got to know each other. They actually built a community, and that was I think the biggest joy.... I also think that them having a place to come every week and ask those questions, you could see how many of those questions were like, 'Oh by the way,' without that, where would those have gone?... Just being like I know your face every week, I'm going to ask you.

It was decided by the second AR team to run the class again in fall 2018 but make it mandatory and with four sections to keep the intimacy and the possibility of social bonding. There would also be occasions to bring the four sections together. The reason we decided to make it mandatory was due to the positive feedback on the class. We wanted to make sure that all transfer students were getting the same experiences. The student feedback was very useful in helping the group reimagine the class. It was decided to keep the guest speakers but encourage some of them to have more interactive sessions. For others, where possible, it was decided to take the students to their space rather than have the speakers come to the students. Further, we will be changing the composition of student groups more often so they can get to know more people and have more social events.

I was lucky to have a team that was dedicated and wanted to make a difference to the lives of transfers so they wouldn't just feel abandoned after orientation. The team felt happy about the work we had done yet realized, as Mary stated, "*More work needs to be done.*" We will

continue to monitor this population. Feedback from the class in fall 2018 will need to be scrutinized due to the class being made mandatory. Will the feedback still be as positive as when the students were able to self-select? Will students be resentful about being made to take the class, or will they find it has helped their transition to College T academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically?

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I explained the context where the research took place, the story of the AR teams and interventions, and an evaluation of these interventions. I illustrated the team's reflections after the first AR cycle which led to the second cycle, and biggest intervention, the transition class. Finally, I assessed the success of the class and explained what will happen in the future. In Chapter 5 I will explain my findings relative to my research questions.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: "LOST AND ALONE"

The purpose of this action research (AR) study was to explore and understand the difficulties and unique adjustments faced by transfer students, academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically, as they transition to College T from their old institution and implement interventions to smooth this transition. In particular, the experiences of international transfer students, coming from institutions both within and from outside of the United States, who speak English as a second language, were examined. The research questions were:

1. How is the experience of transition for international transfer students, both those transferring from institutions within the U.S., and those transferring from institutions outside the U.S., different to the experience of domestic transfer students?
2. What can an action research team learn as we help transfer students navigate their academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical transition?

This chapter illustrates the findings from interviews and surveys. Three interviews were conducted with ten international transfer students at various points over the year before any interventions were implemented (2015-2016). Furthermore, interviews were conducted with the AR team members and student and staff workers involved with transfer students. In addition, in order to understand the issues faced by all transfer students, to compare these to the issues faced by international transfer students, surveys were sent out to all transfers. One survey was given to all transfers attending college T in spring 2016 (before any interventions). Eighty-four students

responded out of 314, and 70 completed the survey, a response rate of 22.29% for completed surveys. An amended survey was given al all incoming students in fall 2016 (to gauge how this group of incoming transfers had adapted academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically compared to the group the year before). Forty-one students responded out of 77 and 38 completed the survey, a response rate of 49.35% for completed surveys. A further survey was sent out to incoming transfer students fall 2017 after the second round of interventions, again to gauge how this group of incoming students had adapted academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically compared to the previous two groups. Of the 72 transfers that semester, 40 responded to the survey and 38 completed it, a response rate of 52.78% for completed surveys. Twenty nine of these students took the newly created one credit hour class for transfers.

In Tables 5.1 and 5.2, the key findings from the data are mapped to the research questions. As can be seen, the data revealed many challenges were similar for domestic transfers and international transfers, and these are also highlighted in the previous literature (as examined in Chapter 2). However, there were also unique challenges for international transfer students which are described in the next section of this chapter.

Table 5.1

Overview of Research Question 1 Findings

Category	Findings
Academic Challenges	<p>TS felt the work was more rigorous and the workload was heavier which led to a drop in GPA as well as time management problems. In addition, they were not fully utilizing the academic resources provided.</p> <p>Additionally, ITS faced the following difficulties*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of integration into the U.S. classroom • Language proficiency interfered with understanding and assignments • Lack of cultural background knowledge hindered understanding
Social Isolation	<p>TS found social bonds were hard to form as friendship networks were already established. Those with housing off the main campus had additional problems integrating into college life, but joining an organization was a key to gaining social acceptance.</p> <p>Additionally, ITS faced the following difficulties*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of connection to American students • Tendency to remain in nationality clusters
Emotional Hurdles	<p>Many of the TS felt sad to leave their old institutions and not welcomed at College T causing them to experience issues with their identity. They felt a lack of connection to the college and its staff/faculty. In addition, they were not fully utilizing emotional resources.</p> <p>Additionally, ITS faced the following difficulties*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural norms distanced ITS from connecting with staff/faculty and seeking emotional support • Transition through culture shock phases
Administrative/ Practical Frustrations	<p>TS felt Transfer Orientation was not helpful enough. There were problems connected with registration and the transfer of credit. Additionally, they felt there was no help in guiding them through the logistics of the new college.</p>

Note. * Reader will find a heading/section that describes each of these additional challenges below. TS = transfer student/s; ITS = international transfer student/s.

Table 5.2

Overview of Research Question 2 Findings

Category	Findings
Learning of the AR Team	<p>Learning about Self and Group*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal insights • Learning about each other and the power of collaboration <p>Learning about TS and ITS*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding TS unique identities and needs • Grappling with issues of student participation • Deciding what help to give TS • Recognizing the importance of peer support <p>Learning about Organization Change*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehending it "takes a village" • Realizing the complexities of making change in a system

Note. * Reader will find a heading/section that describes each of these additional challenges below. TS = transfer student/s; ITS = international transfer student/s.

Before delving more fully into the findings from this study I wanted to offer here the poems I created in the pilot study mentioned in Chapter 3. As can be seen they powerfully demonstrate some of the themes I will explore further below particularly social and emotional issues.

Poem A:

Very hard to make friends

Especially at first

They already know each other

A shock to me

So that's what's tough

A minority inside this minority

It's very hard

Now I have a small group of friends
Friends of my friends
But it's still hard
It's hard to make some American friends
Impossible to bridge the distance
They are somewhat impatient to you
It can hurt you sometimes
Depressed
Stress from college
Very homesick.
That feeling is very strange
When I look at local students with their parents
Helping them moving in and out
I will feel sad
Drinking heavily
You are wide awake in your dorm, 4 a.m.
Suddenly...homesickness and stress just attack you.
Bringing up yourself, personal issues to staffs
It's just inappropriate

Poem B (Korean DITS):

Transfer
For a better school

Process of transferring was not hard for me

Hard thing was

I didn't know many people

I didn't have many friends

Transfer should work harder to meet other people

Didn't make many American friends

I have to work harder to make American friends.

Hard to get a good grade

I never studied that before

International students have to work harder

Just work harder

Advisers?

It is uncomfortable

Academic Challenges for Transfer Students

Much of the findings from this research mirrors the previous research on transfer students as outlined in Chapter 2. As these students usually transfer to higher ranked institutions it follows that there is a greater quantity of work, which in turn is more challenging, and leads to a drop in GPA. For example; in the fall 2016 survey 21/40 (52.50 %) transfers said the difficulty of classes and assignments had been one of their main challenges in College T. As one of the respondents succinctly put it "*classes are kicking my butt.*" Further, 22/40 (55.00%) considered workload to be a main challenge. It is not surprising that time management was also a main concern with 24/40 (60.00%) of students citing this. Due to the increased rigor about 60-65% of the transfer students across the three surveys reported or predicted a decrease in their grade point

average (GPA) from their previous institutions (in spring 2016 students already had a College T GPA, in the fall 2016 and fall 2017 survey the incoming transfers were predicting their GPA.)

There are academic resources (support) in place to help transfer students; however, in the surveys these students often reported that these resources were either not used or not helpful. In spring 2016 one student stated, "*Some teachers are ridiculously not helpful during office hour.*"

Another contended:

We have all these programs and support systems, but not a lot of people know about them or know how to fully utilize them. Who cares if we have all these nice programs when it's barely being used? There must be a better way to inform the students about these support systems.

In fall 2016 only 14/38 (36.84%) transfer students reported using the writing center and in fall 2017 only 18/39 (46.15%). Interestingly, when comparing the students that took the Transitioning to College T class in fall 2017 to those that did not take the class we can see a clear difference. Only 1/10 (10%) of those not taking the class used the writing center. Whereas just over half the students taking the class did use the writing center 15/29 (51.72%). Regarding the career center, in the fall 2017 survey, 14/38 (36.84%) stated they had used the service. Looking more closely at the fall 2017 survey, only 1/10 (10%) of students not taking the class used the service; whereas 13/28 (46.43%) of students taking the class used it. Also all of the students in the transition class had a session with the Director of the Career Center explaining majors, minors and career opportunities. In fall 2016 12/38 (31.58%) used subject tutors, and in fall 2017 25/39 (64.10%). Again there was a difference between those who took the class and those who did not take the class; 5/10 (50%) of the transfers not taking the class saw tutors yet and 30/39 (76.92%) of those who took the class saw a tutor. Academic coaches are trained student

mentors in areas such as study skills, time management, and exam preparation. The program started fall 2016. In the fall 2016 survey 12/38 (31.58%) used an academic coach. In fall 2016, 9/38 (23.68 %) used an academic coach. Of the students who did not take the class, 0/10 (0%) used an academic coach. On the other hand of the students who took the class, 9/28 (31.14%) saw a coach. All students who took the class had a session on time management with a coach during class time.

From these data it can be seen more students in the fall 2017 survey were using resources than in fall 2016. Further those students taking the transition class were far more likely to use them both in class and outside it. One transfer student who took the class wrote in the final survey, *"It was nice because I got so much information instead of always having to look for it myself."*

Additional Academic Challenges for International Transfer Students

In interviews with the international transfer students the above themes were also reflected. However there were also some differences that are explained below. These focus on differences in teaching and learning in the countries these Asian international students come from, limited language skills which hinders academic progress, and a lack of knowledge of certain historical and cultural references known to domestic students.

Issues of integration into the U.S. classroom. For the students who had neither attended high school nor college in the U.S, there was a steep learning curve in getting accustomed to the different teaching styles and expectations. I interviewed a Chinese PhD student at College T who had done both her bachelor's and master's degree in a tier 1 Chinese university to find out more about life in college there. She explained that Chinese education, even at the college level, is much more formal and disciplined with the teacher as the primary

focus delivering knowledge in a lecture format. Students do not ask questions, as that is seen as rude, and an interruption of the teacher's authority and expertise. Instructors in the U.S. often find this silence from Asian students in class disconcerting; but this is based on the way these students were educated. Jing (DITS) described how she struggled with this saying that when she first came to a U.S. college she had to reach deep into her self and she is beginning to overcome this:

I'm afraid to talk in the class and ask professor question in class, but now I try to sit in the front of the class and sit more closer to professor, and I can ask some question because we are close and when she ask question, we have eye contact so I raise my hand to answer it.

Fang (IITS) explained, *"I think it's hard for students, especially students that already take two years study in China and make the decision to almost give up everything and come to a new country and to restart your university again."* To get into university in China students have to take a very high pressured exam called the *Gaokao* which incorporates all their previous 12 years of education. If students make it to university their life is more relaxed than at high school. As Wei (IITS) explained, *"In China, high school is very stressful, but in college, it's a time for you to relax."* Therefore changing from that type of college environment to a more challenging one in the U.S. can be difficult as expressed by three of the four IITS interviewed. In addition, learning is primarily through memorization, and assignments are usually exams. Gang (IITS) explained the difference between the academic workload here, and in China, saying:

I can feel here students are more involved in academic work. I think basically, one of the main reason is that the assignments is a lot. My previous college [in China], we don't have that much assignment ... so here I can feel it. Everybody's preparing for either

presentations, or group assignments, or papers ... writing papers all the time, so the atmosphere is really, really different.

Another issue that surfaced is Americans individualism which is different from the Confucian ideal of collectivism common in Asian countries. Min (DITS) explained: "*In America people care more about themselves... [so you] need to use your own ability to complete something. In China, we usually cooperate or something*". Yang (DITS) expressed a similar feeling:

Well, sometimes I still got uncomfortable with Americans ... It's just really something that you can't adapt to because even though you know it's just American culture. Their individualism, but somehow you still feel that they are somehow arrogant in some way."

Hyo Jun (IITS) also stated:

I think Americans they care about themselves, not how others think. That's really different from Korea. Like in class I found some students asking some, I think that they shouldn't be really something they ask, but maybe because they didn't understand, so they just ask an easy question. But in Korea we don't really ask question, even though we don't understand something because we don't want to bother other students' time.

Language proficiency interfered with understanding and assignments. Like many international students who speak English as a second language, international transfer students found their language skills added another layer of difficulty to their understanding of the material, both the readings and the lectures, as well as written and oral work they had to produce.

This was more pronounced for the IITS having spent less time in the U.S. Yang (DITS) said:

The expectations for the quality of your work like sentence structure, the structures for the whole essays, the phrasings. In my previous school, basically I can get an easy A for every class. Even though I'm not native speaker, but I can write essays that just totally

stun the teachers. But here, that's not going to happen ... Writing is particularly a hardship for international students, especially those that have never been to a American high school. I think when I was in the high school, the classes that I took really helped me to prepare for the expectations of the amount of writings and the expectations for those writings

Gang (IITS) stated:

I find it hard to give a speech in front of a lot of people, like presentations... That's a big challenge for me.... I'm a little bit nervous about that.... I'm not very good at talking in front of people, especially a lot of people."

Wei (IITS) told me:

There are a lot of materials to read and lots of terminologies that I never heard before so ... sometimes it's very difficult for me to understand those articles so it's very hard.... Sometimes I just cannot read all of them. Just too much to read. Sometimes one day you need to read about 15 or 17 pages and that's just for one class and other classes have reading as well. It comes together, it's really hard to finish all of them.

Realizing the classes here were harder partly is due to his language skills Hyo Jun (IITS) decided to use the strategy of studying harder. He said. *"Since it's not my native language I have to put more time studying on it; for example, for chemistry class I know the word in Korean but I have to translate it and try to match the two word together."* Unfortunately he stated that although he used writing tutors he felt, *"It was helpful but since writing has to be done by me, she's just editing, she edited but I think the basic paper wasn't good enough."* He ended up using the strategy of dropping out of his English class as he felt it was too difficult. He didn't use other

resources such as office hours or tutors in other subjects because *"I think I didn't try because I don't know them and I had never done it before."*

Min (DITS) added another dimension explaining subjects that are difficult in her native language become even harder in the U.S:

I'm not good at Physics even when I'm in China. Even if teacher is speaking Chinese, I still can't get Physics, so when I came here I feel like somehow the concept maybe easier in China, but I still can't get it.

While IITS tended to speak mostly in their own language outside the class; for example Hyo Jun (IITS) still spoke Korean 90% of the time even after his second semester here, the good news for international transfers, and indeed all international students, is it gets easier with the amount of time spent in the country. Seung Hoon (DITS) and Yong (DITS) who had been in the U.S. for about six years before coming to College T both said they spoke English 90% of the time outside of the classroom. According to Yang (DITS):

My language ... I think I can make conversations with people right now and that's a huge change before. The first year I came here I couldn't speak. I couldn't even articulate my thought ... even during class..... Every time I talked to people, I felt ... not that confident because of my language barrier, but now, after four years in here, I think I've become much more confident about it.

Lack of cultural background knowledge hindered understanding. Seung Hoon (DITS) explained that one reason some classes were challenging for him was that he lacked the background knowledge for some topics as he had not been at school in the U.S. He said,

History class, I hated that class in the beginning because the class is about black history in [this region] and a lot of students were African American so I found it really

challenging for me because I don't have background.... I was really stressed out. I used to think I was a good writer, then that really made me think maybe I'm not.

Fang (IITS) explained after the first semester:

I maybe feel frustrated at the beginning of the semester in the philosophy class. During that time I was so nervous, the class. I don't know how to talk. Even if I read the readings carefully and I try to understand it, but there is no ... I haven't accumulated much knowledge as my classmates did.... I haven't learned something about the Western political philosophy before so it's like a totally new area for me. It's a tough semester.

She stated this problem continued into her second semester, *"the problem still exists, but it's a fact that I cannot ignore it or eliminate it. I have to accept it and try to learn more about American culture."*

Although Yang (DITS) felt comfortable in the U.S. at the time of the interview he explained what it was like for him upon arrival in an American high school:

It was a huge blow to me.... I really don't like people ask me, 'Who is your favorite movie star?', or 'Who's your favorite singer?', because I like singers they don't know. I liked Chinese singers, for example. They don't know the name. I can't really translate the name. Though I may know some American singers but ... I'd only know them by their Chinese names. You have to do the research. I remember I did a lot of research just to make conversations with people.

Social Isolation for Transfer Students

Often transfer students do not feel they belong in the new institution as can be seen in the findings below. About half the students in both fall 2016 and fall 2017 cited finding friends to have been one of their main challenges since arrival. When splitting out the numbers for those

that took the transition class and those that did not in fall 2017 we can see this is slightly less of a problem for those that took the class. There were 6/10 (60%) students, who did not take the class, found it to be a challenge, and 13/29 (44.83%), who did take the class, found it to be a challenge. Typical comments from fall 2016 were, "*Other students seem cold and don't want to make new friends.*" Several students in fall 2017 said the class had been a good way to meet and connect with other transfer students and also to make friends. One transfer said, "*I really enjoyed this class because I was able to make my first friend here at College T.*" Group seating was assigned so students would bond with those students, but some wished we had changed the groups each week so they could have met other students. One stated "*I think it would be really good to change up seating every day. There are still people in the class I haven't really talked to.*" This was a really good suggestion which will happen in future classes.

Unfortunately many transfer students live off campus or on College T's satellite campus which makes attending meetings or participating in other social activities difficult. In fall 2016 25/40 (62.50%) reported living on main campus, 6/40 (15%) on the satellite campus and 9/40 (22.5%) off campus. In fall 2017, 19/39 (48.72%) reported living on the main campus, 8/39 (20.51%) on the satellite campus, and 12 (30.77%) off campus. A fall 2016 transfer stated:

College T has a great social life and co-curricular activities, it has just been difficult for me to be a part of the ones I'm really interested in because a lot of the meetings are held later at night and I live an hour off campus.

Transfer students themselves recognized the importance of joining an organization. A spring 2016 student said it was, "*key*" to making friends who are a support. The international student Point Person explained the problem with doing this:

I think getting involved ... is a uniquely transfer student issue, because most clubs are very welcoming of freshman because they want people who can be with them for three or four years. But if they see you as a sophomore or, God forbid, a junior, you know, you're too old. Your shelf-life is too short and they don't want to invest in you.

Being a part of a team (especially a varsity team), member of a religious group or part of Greek life is greatly beneficial for some students in giving them a sense of belonging and people to help guide them (support). A student from the spring 2016 survey said, *"As a member of the swim team, I felt I had a great support group. But if I hadn't been on a sports team, I would've felt lost and alone."* An incoming TS in spring 2017 local to the area stated:

I am feeling great as a transfer student. I obviously do not have the same network of friends that I would have if I had come in as a freshman, but the swim team and my family have filled in those gaps.... I would for sure agree that having a team makes the transition easier. Coming in with a group of people who I constantly work with and see on a daily basis has helped me be myself, and make great friendships!

A student in fall 2016 explained that being a part of Greek life allowed her to make many friends for which she was very grateful. Similarly a transfer student in fall 2017 stated *"joining Greek life has helped a lot with [making friends]."* One Resident Advisor (RA) told me of a transfer who was *"flourishing"* because she got involved in a church and found community there. She added:

That made all the difference to her. She had people she could always go to. Then just snowballing. She met more and more people through them. Some of them were taking the same classes. A lot of them are her age. It was a really nice change for her. I think she went from feeling alone to feeling like part of the College T community.

One transfer student in fall 2017 stated being happy that we had required outside activities in the transition class which forced people who lived off campus to participate in things they may not have otherwise done.

Additional Social Challenges for International Transfer Students

Additionally international transfer students feel a lack of connection to American students and tend to stick together in nationality clusters due to language and cultural issues. This is often commented on as being a negative thing by College T staff and faculty.

Lack of connection to American students. International transfer students explained that while it is difficult to make friends in the same way the domestic transfer students experience this, it is especially difficult to make American friends, and that friends they did make were rather superficial. This they felt is mostly due to cultural and language issues. Hyo Jun (IITS) stated "*I think it's because of language problem and culture problem so it wasn't easy to make American friends.*" He mostly socialized with other international students as his support "*they're all international students. I think it's because they are also out of their home town so they feel lonely and we share many similar things.*" Although Yong (DITS) used a good strategy and joined lots of clubs he only got to know friends from his own culture, as far as American friends were concerned:

It's not like the friendship that we have ... because English is not our first language, so sometimes, it is hard for you to express yourself correctly in a manner American does.... I believe almost many of the Chinese students cannot develop deep relationship. Like your true friends who can talk whatever you want to their friends. At least for now, it's hard for a Chinese student to develop a deep relationship with some American guys.

Fang (IITS) was not at all shy but in the beginning she stated "*I hardly talk to the foreign students because, not because I'm nervous or something like, or shy. I'm just afraid I cannot express what I mean correctly.*" Similarly Na said, "*it's just not that easy to make friends when you are speaking with an unfluent language. Sometimes ... I'd rather not say anything.*"

Tendency to remain in nationality clusters. These issues often led to international transfer students clustering together in the same way the old proverb tells us "birds of a feather flock together." On arrival to her first institution Min (DITS) explained, "*my personal experience when I came here, I don't really want to talk to American people. I just want to talk with Chinese people, but sometimes I have no choice. I need to talk to some and I need to practice English.*" She further stated the difficulties of finding friends even of her own nationality at college T, "*it's like you still have just a little bit of Chinese friends. Because I'm a transfer student and the Chinese students here already know each other.... Right now, I feel like it's really hard.*" Seung Hoon (IITS) threw a slightly different light on the matter explaining:

I know that there's not as much association between internationals and domestic students just because they don't find a need to. A lot of Koreans, they are more fun and they are always there so why do we need to go to them, be friends with them or associate with them.

Fang (IITS) after her first year here had indeed made more friends and explained she had:

Expanded from Chinese transfer students to all the Chinese students.... I had a chance to get to know some foreign friends. Maybe we're not that close, but we are say hello when we met in campus. But still no American friends.

Emotional Hurdles for Transfer Students

Some transfer students reported that they missed their old institution and the support they had there. In the spring 2016 survey 62/82 (75.61%) transfers stated they chose to come to College T as they wanted a higher ranked college, and 13/82 (15.85%) as their parents wanted them to come. This shows that it does not necessarily mean that they were unhappy at their old institution as Catherine, the Associate Dean had assumed. A spring 2016 student said, *"I love my old school, it's just it's ranking is too low."* Another in fall 2017 stated, *"It's been a rough transition. I really miss my old school, but I know I can't go back.... I would be unhappy with the academics. But I don't love it here and I feel I'm stuck in limbo."*

Seung Hoon (DITS) sadly stated:

I was sad that all friends I made, like I was really sad. One of my friends visited me last week from [my previous institution]. So it was nice just talking to him, and we were talking about other people that we knew, and the people, because even if I would keep talking to them, I won't be there, so it's not gonna be the same.

Fang (IITS) had a similar feeling,

Yeah, I think the most things I was sad about is leaving my friends. I made a lot of friends there. They're really warm-hearted person. They offer me a lot of help even I'm in American now, just a few days ago when I have my birthday, they send me their wishes and, you know, it really warms me and let me know that someone is still supporting me. So, they're the most sad things for me when I leave that college.

Some students were also under parental pressure to transfer. Jing (DITS) stated:

The most significant reason for me to leave is my father. My father, he want me to pursue the better—to be a better person, and he wants me to join the better college. He wasn't

satisfied with my original college, so he wants me to transfer. So this is the original reason. I don't—actually, I don't think [my previous institution] is bad, so—because my father wants, so I want to satisfy him.

Min (DITS) never wanted to come to America in the first place. She explained, *"It's not my personal decision to come to America, my mother wanted me to come here. They think America has much better education here."*

In the spring 2016 survey a student complained there was a *"lack of emotional and social support for transfer students"* at College T. The same student complained, *"If you want students to love this university and respect it, YOU need to respect students and love them as well. We don't feel it. We don't see it. If you're trying, we don't believe you."* Sadly, only 14/79 (17.72%) of transfers in spring 2016, who completed the survey, said they felt very welcomed on arrival to College T. Negative comments were numerous and quite vocal. A typical comment was, *"The way the transfer students are handled is terrible. My first day here, I had to look for my orientation group because no one knew where it was. Not so great to feel abandoned on your first day."* Improving both the welcome and support for transfer students was a real focus for the AR team in Orientation 2016. Transfer student Orientation Leaders (OLs) and staff working before and after orientation made a concerted effort to reach out to the students. This was obviously appreciated as can be seen by the fact that 25/40 (62.50%) felt very welcomed in fall 2016. Many positive comments included, *"I was really not expecting everyone to be so kind, welcoming, and supportive. Instantly I adored this school because of how welcoming everyone was."* However, there were still complaints, one student stated, *"Transfer orientation was very welcoming, but when the year started I felt/still feel like an outsider."* By fall 2017, after the second round of interventions, 38/39 (97.44%) of survey respondents felt somewhat to very

welcomed. Ten students made positive comments including, *"I think the orientation programs and the transition class has helped integrate students into the community and feel welcome and educated about the opportunities"* and *"The orientation was wonderful and absolutely integral to my acclimation to the school."*

Transferring to a new college can be very unsettling and make someone feel like an outsider and this was certainly evidenced from the data collected by these surveys. In the spring 2016 survey 36/84 (42.86%) said their main identity was still as a transfer student and 39/84 (46.43%) said they felt like a College T student. One student stated:

I always have felt like an outsider to College T. In my experience, a 'College T student' is a traditional student that goes straight from high school to college. I had many life experiences before starting College T at age 22. This diversity of experience did not set me apart, but the way people treated me because of it did.

Another mused *"I don't really feel like I belong at College T but I know it's a good school so I hope it will all work out in the end."* For the fall 2016 survey we modified the question so students could check "all that applied" as to their identity as opposed to choosing only one identity. Staggeringly 38/41 (92.68%) said they felt like a transfer student still and 21/41 (51.22%) a College T student. About 22% stated they did not feel like a College T student at all. One of the academic advisors who was interviewed, a graduate student in sociology, seemed to have really thought deeply about the issue. He explained that if we see College T as a big circle, transfer students are coming from other circles into the circle but they are not all coming from the same circle. Students coming from our two year sister college already have a group, and international students tend to bond by nationality but:

The transfer students don't have that. When they come in it is 'I am a transfer student just like you're a transfer student, but my frame of college is not your frame of college. I can't bond over, we both lived in China and now we both live here. We both have a shared language.... It's not the same kind of instant connection.... We can't call transfer students an identity or group.... We're treating the transfer students as all the same thing when we need to think of it as "This is a student who transferred."... They're individuals that need to be brought into the larger College T bubble.

Fang (IITS) reiterated this idea stating, *"We don't want to be divided into a transfer student group. We want to be regarded as just a common student in College T."*

For any student it would seem important that their contributions to the learning community are valued. When asked if there was a staff or faculty member at College T with whom the transfer students felt connected (that is someone who gave advice or support about academics or other matters) the students were split 50/50 in all three surveys. Positive experiences in spring 2016 included, *"Instructor—Advise and checks on me like a son" and "My counselor/therapist is amazing. I am able to tell her anything and she helps me manage my anxiety."* However, there were also negative experiences: *"I've been disappointed with the professors. I expected them to be more engaged with the students, but in reality they are more focused on their research."*

There is a counselling center at College T. Almost 60% of transfer students answering the survey in spring and fall of 2016 stated that they had not used the counselling center and 80% had not used it in fall 2017. In fall 2016, of those who reported using the counselling center (16/38, 42.10%), 6/16 (37.50%) said it was very helpful, 4/16 (25.00%) said it was somewhat helpful. 2/16 (5.26%) not very helpful and 4/16 (25.00%) said it was not at all helpful.

Additional Emotional Hurdles for International Transfer Students

While surveys showed transfer students feel a lack of connection to staff and faculty this is exacerbated for the Asian international transfer students in this study due to cultural norms. In addition, the interviews revealed they were at various stages of culture shock.

Cultural norms distance international transfer students from connecting with staff/faculty and seeking emotional support. As shown above schools and colleges are very different in Asian countries. The idea of hierarchy is still strong and the teacher is still generally viewed with great respect. Although some comments were made about teaching at College T being good, and office hours being helpful, the international transfers overwhelmingly said they did not have a faculty or staff member they felt connected with. Seung Hoon (DITS) said he liked his math professor and that she had given him her phone number in case he needed anything, but he had not followed up on that as he felt it was "*kind of odd.*" Gang (IITS) agreed that it's a "*a little bit strange to just swing by and say hi to a professor or something like that.*" Jing (DITS) strongly felt, "*I can't contact them with family problems.* Min (DITS) stated: "*Maybe it's traditional Chinese thinking because I feel like American people usually think professor is their friend, but for me, I feel like a professor is always a professor.... I feel like there is a distance between students and professor. You need to respect that.*"

Out of the 10 international transfers interviewed only one reported using the counselling center. He was an exception to the rule. International students, particularly, Asian students, tend not to use counselling services as again, this is not a cultural norm. The worrying thing is the one international transfer student who used the services said:

Actually almost 95% of Chinese international student I know feel sad or depressed. Like maybe not that frequently, but they do feel that feelings when they first got to College T. And for like 10% to 20% of the person I know, they got a depression.

Another international transfer said:

Maybe it's my personal feeling or misconception ... [but] I feel like every international student, at least Chinese students here, is not that happy. Some are concentrating only on their academic stuff. I just feel like they lack, including me, lack a sense of belonging.... When I chat with a friend, a transfer student, she's like, "We just feel like ... everyone we meet here is not that happy.

Transition through culture shock phases. Findings from the international transfer students interviews reflected that these students did indeed experience various stages of culture shock (Oberg, 1960), and as the year progressed most of them moved through to more advanced stages of adaptation/integration. The IITS, understandably, tended to be at the earlier stages at the beginning of the school year having just arrived in the U.S. for the first time. However, interestingly, some of the IITS had actually moved more swiftly through these stages than some of the DITS by the end of the school year. Fang (IITS) was already in recovery, whereas, Min (DITS) remained in frustration. While cultural transition is a highly individualized process, we can see some themes across those students interviewed for this study.

In Table 5.3, I charted where the students were in their cultural transition at different points during their first year at College T. Interview one was taken just after arrival in fall 2015, interview two at the end of the first semester December 2015, and interview three at the end of the first year April 2016. I figured this out by looking at the students' comments and determining which stage seemed to be most reflected during each interview. This proved not to be as

straightforward a process as it sounds. For example, Yong (DITS) stated in interview two that he was only "*kind of*" homesick, but by interview three he was more homesick as he was not as happy having split up from his girlfriend. However, overall his comments characterized him as in the recovery stage. In addition, although some students expressed frustration with America and Americans, many appreciated the opportunities afforded by this country. As Hyo Jun (IITS) said "*I hope I can be good at English. That's I think the most different thing graduating from Korea. And also, if am good at English, and I think I can get a job anywhere in the world, so that's what I'm hoping.*" Regarding the DITS, Na and Yong had been in the U.S. for a year on arrival at College T, Min had been here for two years, Yang and Seung Hoon had been in the U.S. for five and six years respectively. Jing's length of stay was not determined but it must have been at least a year. Na was not present for interview one.

Table 5.3

ITS Stages of Culture Shock (Oberg, 1960) During Period of this Study

	Name	Intv. #	Honeymoon	Frustration	Recovery	Adaptation
International International Transfer Students (IITS)	Gang <i>New to U.S.</i>	1	██████████			
		2	██████████	██████████		
		3		██████████	██████████	
	Fang <i>New to U.S.</i>	1	██████████			
		2	██████████	██████████		
		3		██████████	██████████	██████████
	Hyo Jun <i>New to U.S.</i>	1	██████████			
		2	██████████	██████████		
		3		██████████	██████████	
	Wei <i>New to U.S.</i>	1	██████████			
		2	██████████	██████████		
		3		██████████	██████████	
Domestic International Transfer Students (DITS)	Yong <i>In U.S. 1 year</i>	1	██████████	██████████		
		2	██████████	██████████	██████████	
		3		██████████	██████████	██████████
	Na* <i>In U.S. 1 year</i>	2	██████████	██████████	██████████	
		3		██████████	██████████	██████████
	Min <i>In U.S. 2 years</i>	1	██████████	██████████		
		2	██████████	██████████		
		3		██████████	██████████	
	S. Hoon <i>In U.S. 6 years</i>	1	██████████	██████████		
		2	██████████	██████████	██████████	
		3		██████████	██████████	██████████
Yang <i>In U.S. 5 years</i>	1	██████████	██████████			
	2	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	
	3		██████████	██████████	██████████	
Jing <i>In U.S. 1 year minimum</i>	1	██████████	██████████			
	2	██████████	██████████	██████████		
	3		██████████	██████████	██████████	

Note. (1) Interview 1 was just after arrival to College T in fall 2015; interview 2 at the end of the first semester, December 2015; interview 3 at the end of the first year, April 2016. (2) Na did not complete interview 1.

Honeymoon stage. In the first interview it can clearly be seen that all four IITS were in the honeymoon stage. All the IITS were all excited to have the opportunity to be in the United States and were enjoying being at the college. Gang was clearly in awe of the opportunities

afforded by the college seeing it as much better for his future. In addition, he was impressed by the small classes and facilities such as the computer rooms. He even pointed to the fact that supermarkets have more choices than in China and he found the people he had met to be "warm". Fang also felt the school was "fantastic" and loved the huge basketball court. She went as far to say, "*I think it is the best decision I have ever made. I have spent two years in Chinese universities and I am not saying that Chinese university is bad, or something like that, but I am not kind of fit in that community.*" Hyo Jun was especially happy with the weather and stated:

When I walk to my class, I feel happy because I'm at the campus where I dreamed for year, and taking classes is really fun. When I study in library, other friends study, so I get like motivated. Like every day, it's happy. I like the meal, so I changed to unlimited meal plan, and I like the shuttle system, except the weekend.

Wei enthusiastically said College T was "*Amazing... It's very free, I mean you can do what you want and lots of activities. The people are nice here so it's pretty good.*"

Frustration stage. The DITS, on the other hand, in interview one, were all still in a period of frustration. Yong, after one year here, was struggling with the food stating "*American food sucks.*" Min, after two years, was struggling with the culture, "*For me I feel like I'm still a Chinese person. I miss my food, I miss my hometown. I hope to back to Shanghai.... Yeah, sure [I'm homesick]*". Seung Hoon, after six years, was able to reflect saying "*I never really missed home when I was in high school. It was so much fun.*" Showing clearly at that point he was in the honeymoon stage, yet now he realized:

I'm just like well my parents are really getting old. My sister is going to get married so I can't really experience what I did when I was younger ... so a lot of transitions of my family just makes me sad that I can't be in that change because we have a Facebook ...

and they would update their status like their house, their photos when they're eating together and I'm just like, 'Oh they're eating together. I'm studying in the library.'

Yang, after five years, was frustrated with the lack of public transportation as "*International students often do not have cars in freshman or sophomore years, so it's really hard for them to get around and that happens to me too, that's why I got a bicycle.*"

By their second interview all the DITS had moved on from these feelings of frustration except Min who continued to feel frustrated right through the school year. Min's frustration seemed to stem mostly from the fact that she had never wanted to come to college in America in the first place (situation). She had taken the Gaokao university entrance exam in China; however, her results showed that she was not going to get into one of the best universities there. Min felt content with that. Nevertheless, she explained that her mother who is "*sometimes intimidating*" insisted she go to a "*good*" university. The institution she attended previous to College T is not well known in China, so after two years there she was persuaded to transfer to College T for its stronger reputation, which should help her when she needs to find a job. It was clear through all three of her interviews that Min was very homesick. She repeatedly stated she missed China, Shanghai, her parents, her friends and the food and often felt very lonely. In her second interview she told me she was still only speaking in Chinese outside of the classroom. She went on to explain that she found it hard to even mix with the Chinese students here as they come from wealthier families. She asserted, "*When I'm in Shanghai, the friends I made were studying the same high school, I feel like we're in the same levels and we understand each other. That's why I miss them.*" In interview three she admitted her self was holding her back.

I think the problem is myself because I don't want really to talk to [Americans].... I don't believe that American will really treat us as real friends, like the really, really good friends.... I just have myself.

By interview two we can see that the IITS were over the honeymoon stage and also moving into the period of frustration. The frustrated IITS were having issues with missing home, having problems with the food and language. Gang stated:

Yeah, I miss home. I'm actually are going back during the winter break.... [I miss] food ... and family ... and I actually miss a lot of the traditional holidays, so I need to get back and reunion with them, and do something together.

Fang stated she was, "a little bit afraid of my spoken English I really want to practice my English and ... have the courage to talk to [American students]." Hyo Jun dropped out of a required English class, but said "I think dropping out of English class really helped.... This is challenging for me because it's in my second language." Sadly he also said, "I don't think I really like America.... There are certain things I'm uncomfortable with." Wei felt "I still need to improve and find more chance to talk with others to practice." He also had issues with the food saying, "I don't like the food here because I only like hamburger and French fries and some other foods are just ... blah!"

Hyo Jun and Wei were still feeling frustrated by the third interview. Hyo Jun said, "I miss my family all the old friends. Also, just food and everything." But he had strategies to deal with this: "Since I go back to Korea every break I can bear it.... Whenever I think I'm feeling down, I call my mom to do Skype with me and I feel better." Wei was just "okay" he could understand the lectures better but still spoke Korean 90% of the time outside class. He said, "I'm

still a little bit worried about my language, so sometimes it's difficult for communicating with others." He said he was going back to China soon and was excited to *"Eat, eat, eat."*

Recovery Stage. By interview two, four of the DITS appeared to be in the recovery stage, Yong, Na, Seung Hoon and Jing. Yong said he still missed his parents, but used the strategy of connecting with them frequently on FaceTime. He stated *"I believe everyone needs time to adjust to the new environment. I think for now, it's not that bad, you know what I mean. I think after I already adjust to the new environment, I think I can make it better and do it better."* Na also acknowledged she had *"a harsh time"* in the beginning especially with the language, food and the way people interacted with each other. Nevertheless, she stated *"I feel like it's natural. I would feel the same if I'm in another place. It's just a transition time.... I think I'm adjusting."* Seung Hoon stated he was speaking English most of the time outside of class and had joined a leadership program (strategy). Although he was afraid at the beginning he wouldn't be good enough as he was international, he stated he had moved from being an introvert to an extrovert (Self). Jing was talking in class more and had gotten over feelings of homesickness. She said, *"I feel quite comfortable and I have more confidence for the next semester."*

By interview three Yong, Na and Jing were at the end of the recovery stage and Yang appeared to have regressed from adaptation to recovery. Yong said:

Every time when I go back to China, I go to the university with my friends who are in Chinese universities and very good Chinese universities, I would say the first thing, the campus is not beautiful, because the weather in China is not good. You can never see the blue sky. For most of [smaller] Chinese universities ... it's not that good. The campus sometimes small and the construction, the buildings are old and equipment is not pretty fancy and pretty old fashioned.

Na explained, *"I'm getting a liberal arts education. I'm taking interesting classes here. I think it helps me to think more, to plan more for my future here. It's like a process of growing up, which was a bit harsh at the beginning, but now I'm used to it."* Jing was continuing to speak out more in class and said this was also helping her to make more friends.

By interview three two of the IITS were also in recovery: Gang and Fang. Gang stated: *I feel pretty comfortable living here compared to my previous college. This year is totally different, both inside classroom and outside. I have more access to more resources than before. Most of my time is devoted into research or study. Besides that, I tend to play basketball, exercises. Sometimes I will like to hang out with my friends, like playing. It's a wonderful experience here.*

Fang explained she was speaking Chinese less now, about 50% of the time. She showed a strong sense of self stating, *"Homesick always exists, but I won't let this bother my life or restrict myself."* She realized herself that she had experienced a honeymoon period that soon disappeared. She was aware that *"at first everything is new to you and you are excited, you try to try everything, but you find out that life always have some problems that you have to overcome."* But she was able to see beyond that:

It's another lifestyle. People here, I think they enjoy their life a lot. The food here, I love the Chinese food much better than American food, but some of them is great because I have tried American brunch last week and it's really delicious, omelet. I think those are two different lifestyles, but I can accept both.

Adaptation Stage. In his second interview Yang (DITS) seemed to be in the adaptation stage. He stated that he had been in the U.S. for five years and was so used to speaking in English he sometimes forgot his Chinese, he explained, *"I study those things in English, so*

sometimes I forgot the terms in Chinese." He no longer missed home much and had a strong network of friends in the U.S. He said:

I guess most of my friends, actually, is come to America, so I can meet them during break, the winter break or Thanksgiving. My parents, because I've been away from them for a really long time and I got used to that distance, so I think that's the reasons I don't miss them very much, but I do miss them.

However, he regressed from these feelings of adaptation in interview three. Although, after five years he felt confident in his English and no longer "*exiled and anxious*." He still said he felt uncomfortable with Americans and found them to be "*arrogant*." By interview three Seung Hoon (DITS) said he was speaking English 95% of the time out of class and he showed his comfort with the language saying "*I think I write a lot better in English because the vocabulary I use is a lot more eloquent. Spoken language-wise, I don't have difficulty speaking it, but I think I am more proficient in Korean. I think it's getting there.*" In addition, he said "*I think I see myself living here.*"

Administrative/Practical Frustrations for Transfer Students

One of the academic advisors explained that he felt the biggest struggle for transfer students are the "*administrative hurdles*" of adjusting to a new institution. He explained, "*It's a primacy effect, the first thing you experience will color how you view the rest of it. It seems like a lot of transfer students become disillusioned, because their first semester was so challenging.*" Orientation is the first chance the students get to meet other students and staff face to face. Of those students who completed the surveys in spring 2016 only about half felt College T and the orientation had been at least somewhat helpful in the transition. In fall 2016, after the first round of interventions, it was gratifying to see that 34/40 (85%) felt orientation was helpful; 33/40

(82.5%) felt the advisors were helpful or very helpful; 33/40 felt the orientation team was helpful or very helpful; and 34/40 (83%) felt the new transfer student OLs were helpful or very helpful.

Several students highlighted issues with registration and the transferring of credit. As the academic advisor explained, the first semester is "*incredibly challenging*." Late transfer of credits, or the transferring of fewer credits, gives students a later enrollment time so classes they may want are often already full. In spring 2016 a student complained, "*Enrolling in classes was the biggest f***ing nightmare*." In fall 2016 one student complained, "*There was over a month of struggling to have my last semester credits evaluated, and I almost lost part of my financial aid because admissions gave me contradicting information several times*". An international transfer mentor explained:

I think there's always the frustration of what credits College T accepts and that whole process. It's cumbersome, it takes time, I think it's frustrating. If your class isn't accepted initially you have to go through the appeals process. There's just a lot of hoops they have to go through. I think that sometimes leaves people with a bad taste, because that's one of the first things that gets done when you come to College T.

Although the issue of transferring credit continued, students taking the transition class in fall 2017 were given time each class to ask questions about the transfer of credits and were given information on deadlines.

Other administrative challenges centered on getting to know the college and its resources and the lack of support in doing so. One student in spring 2016 wrote "*[my last institution] was a small liberal arts college where I was taken care of by the administrators there. I had a personal relationship with the Dean and all my professors*." Another stated "*The administration*

can be frustrating to deal with.... They also don't really want to help you out if they don't have to." A third complained:

College T is a big campus with many bureaucratic nuances. There are "offices" for everything, such that it can be unwieldy to try to navigate. Coming from a small liberal arts school, most resources were consolidated. I could go to my Dean and be directed and personally guided to my next step. At College T ... ultimately one is re-directed to another office. That is particularly unwelcoming, when a student is constantly re-directed. It can feel like 'we don't want to deal with this, go over there.'

Additional Administrative/Practical Frustrations for International Transfer S

No additional administrative/practical problems emerged for international transfer students in this study.

Learning

The first AR team met on a monthly basis between summer 2015 and fall 2016. The second team met on a monthly basis spring 2017 through fall 2017. All members were interviewed at the conclusion of the meetings in order to reflect on our time together and what we had achieved. Everyone on the AR team expressed that they had appreciated being a part of it and felt they had learned a lot.

Learning about Self and Group

The first learning came from the team learning about themselves as individuals. In addition they learned about their peers and their roles in the college.

Personal insights. Many on the team felt they had had some personal insights about themselves. Mary acknowledged her "*internal reflection [was] the frustration I experienced.... I'd find myself wanting to go rogue (better to take initiative and ask for forgiveness later?), and it*

really tested my patience for meeting in that group, so it's a reality check for me when I find myself losing patience or getting easily flustered." Catherine, who had caused most of this frustration and been the most resistant initially to the idea of a new class, learned two incredibly important lessons: First she said, *"Sometimes I re-play the record in my head of 'we've heard this before' or 'we've tried this before' and nothing makes a difference. Sometimes revisiting old things-or confirming what you know over time is helpful for moving forward."* In addition, *"I don't have to be in charge of everything. It's totally fine to give it away.... I learned more, people were interested in this group, because I often felt like they were on my plate, and my plate alone. It was nice to share this group with other people and turn that over."* Thomas, who was fairly new to the campus when he joined the team enjoyed the intellectual stimulus and happily stated, *"I would say it made me reflect on the possibility of pursuing doctorate education (still undecided)." Bessie felt empowered, stating "I learned that the ideas one can incubate with a team of colleagues who have knowledge in an area of work and the resources to put our collective research into action is actually quite empowering."*

Henry, on the other hand, was the one member of the team who felt no personal growth. He stated, *"I'm not sure I learned anything about me in particular. I was reminded that I view students differently than some of my peers do, but that wasn't new."* Henry has worked on campus for many years (over 20) and completed his own doctorate four years previous to this study. It would seem difficult to argue that the process of AR would not have provided a space for an individual to learn more about themselves. As Argyris (2000) cautioned us:

If learning is to persist, managers and employees must also look inward. They need to reflect critically on their own behavior, identify ways in which they often inadvertently contribute to the organizations problems and then change how they act. In particular,

they must learn how the very way they go about defining and solving problems can be a source of problems in its own right. (p. 279)

Learning about each other and the power of collaboration. One thing that every team member mentioned was the fact that all the team members already knew each other, but being on the team gave them a greater awareness of their colleagues' roles and responsibilities and what their part was in the whole student experience. Margaret stated:

I really enjoyed [being a part of the AR team] because I think that the group was really thoughtfully chosen and they're all individuals that I really respect and know that I learn from every time that I interact with them, so in terms of ... a professional, it was great for me because we were addressing a lot of issues that I don't see day-to-day, and the student experience that I don't necessarily see day-to-day ... so getting insight from team members as we talked about the issues related to the study, was really insightful and it was something that I could take back to my role in my office. I could be a liaison between the two.

Bessie stressed, "*I learned more about the dynamics of how different units...do their work, what is and is not possible given the structures that exist.*" Thomas stated the AR meetings were "*a really great collaboration, and learning from that was really beneficial.*"

Mary explained that she really enjoyed being a part of the team saying:

I'm a very collaborative person ... I'm just a life-long learner. I'm curious about everything.... When you're in a committee setting like that, it literally forces you out of your area to be aware of other things that are happening.

Margaret said:

I just really respected all the team members. I thought everyone worked together and was very respectful of one another's opinions and we kind of built off of each other.... [I]t was really nice to be able to kind of get in a room, and the way it was set up to brainstorm things.

Learning About Transfer Students and International Transfer Students

The point of forming the AR team was to understand the transfer student population, especially the international transfer students. The team discovered transfers have their own unique identities and needs, we need to be strategic in the help we give, and we need to recognize the importance of peer support and tap into this as a useful resource.

Understanding transfer students' unique identities and needs. The team realized we talk about students as a group and we talk about transfers as a group. The work of the AR team helped to show that even this subgroup of students has unique needs and identities. We focused in on IITS and DITS, but came to understand even that is too generic. We need to see each student as an individual with individual needs. Elizabeth explained:

It had never occurred to me. We think about transfer students but we lump them together. 'Oh, transfer students. Okay.' And then we go 'International Students'. But it was so incredibly helpful for me to be like, well, even within these cohorts, we have subcohorts that also have different needs. So it was a great reminder. Okay, so here's the transfer student—well, not just transfer student. This is an international transfer student. Okay, but that's not where they end. This is an international transfer student transferring from another domestic institution—Okay, so this is somebody who maybe doesn't need as much US culture. But this is somebody who is going to need a lot of College T culture.... And that was the most eye-opening thing, to me, because it not only applies to that

particular group, of international transfer students, but to all our students—“Oh, you're first-generation student? Great! You're first generation minority student? You're a first generation, minority student with a documented disability?” So, it really helped me think holistically about the students we serve and what their needs potentially could be.

Elizabeth felt she needed to do a better job of really listening to the students rather than assuming anything as they are all unique and deserve to be given time, attention, and targeted assistance.

Similarly, Margaret contended:

I realized I have a natural tendency to be fairly narrow-focused, in that when I do my work I think of international students, but I don't think of their place on campus holistically. This has challenged me, when working with my specific population, to view them from a more broad perspective—not just as international students, but as math students, as students in an organization, as students living off campus, etc. I think it has made me a better practitioner!

Margaret said:

I learned the most about the student experience ... a lot more about transfer students' identity. You think you know why students are coming here, and that they will probably be happier here. They've chosen this for a specific reason. That's not always the case. It was really interesting to see where some of their concerns lie. We can assume all we want about international transfer students and what kind of services we're providing and how well they're being served, but this was actual student feedback. It was the people themselves telling us what the experience was like, so that was really interesting.

There was a strong feeling that the team had helped the college to understand the needs of transfer students and international transfer students in a way that hadn't happened before.

Margaret stated the AR team:

shed light on this [international transfer student] population and just kind of gave them a voice that I hadn't heard before, and that most of us probably haven't to the degree that we did. It gave us some concrete feedback too, that we can use as we think about them and we don't have to base it on assumptions or what we assume that it's like for them to come into College T from somewhere else, whether it be international or domestic.

Mary agreed saying the AR team:

has really helped put some light on a very unique population that really deserve a little extra attention in some way. Because for any students who come here, I was talking with a first year ... from Alabama. And she was just talking about how different College T is. That statement, as short as it is, and as obviously as it is, it says so many things. So, for any student coming to this campus, it's like they're stepping into a different world. For an international student, having been literally from one side of the world to the other, going through that transition and then entering in the culture of College T, there's no word to describe it.

Grappling with issues of student participation. There was a strong feeling in the team that College T does offer a lot of services and resources for transfer students, but these are not always fully utilized. One issue that has been a concern to the staff and student workers alike is student lack of participation. Surveys indicated transfer feel forgotten, and yet when events and workshops were put on for them participation was very low. The Bubble Tea event just after orientation 2016 had 30 attendees including staff and OLs. All the incoming class of transfer

students fall 2016 had been invited (77) plus the 10 students who had been interviewed the previous year and all the TS OLs (7). Similarly previous international transfer students had asked for an informal conversation group and despite numerous attempts we were not able to get any of the incoming group to attend. In spring 2017 a series of five workshops was put on based on what transfers said they wanted in the fall 2016 survey. In that survey 16 students said they'd like to come to future workshops to meet the new students and help design a new class which would incorporate the workshops. However, only two students on the list showed up to only one of the workshops. All fall 2016 and spring 2017 transfer students (93 total) were invited to the workshops but attendance, as follows, was low: *Transitioning to College T* (7), *Getting Involved on Campus 1 Student Clubs and Activities* (4), *Getting Involved on Campus 2: Undergraduate Research and Internships* (6), *Academics at College T: Resources and Time Management* (1), *Life Balance* (1). Bessie from the AR team stated:

I thought that they were a good ideas. I thought they were creative.... I saw them as community building opportunities. They did bring up this issue of students having certain needs, expressing those needs, but then not participating in what's provided, and how do you get around that.... How do you get students to engage?

The incoming class of transfer students fall 2016 were asked at the end of the semester if there had been a special course for them (one credit, satisfactory/unsatisfactory) that would have helped continue their orientation to College T would they have taken it? Topics would include things like getting involved on campus, choosing a major, and academic support resources. Of the students who answered, 10/40 (25.00%) said yes, 17/40 (42.50%) said no, 13/40 (32.50%) said maybe. One student hit the nail on the head saying:

Honestly no way would I have taken it, but I should. I wanna know how to get involved (bc its intimidating), choosing a major, and academic support. Also wanna know more about resources like career center and what kind of track should we be thinking about given career goals . Also how to do better in classes. Also more about events College T is having and when so that i can go to them!!! like speakers and such.

This comment shows often students take advantage of given opportunities even when they know they should. In the fall of 2017 the new one credit class for transfer students was instigated. Out of the 72 students that enrolled that semester only 29 students took the class (40.27%) even after it was strongly recommended by their advisor. However, the feedback from the class was excellent. Of the students that took the class 27 (93%) were happy they took the class. The question is how can we, as an institution, encourage more student participation?

Deciding what help to give transfer students. The team felt we needed to provide more relevant and continued help for transfers. Anne stated:

I think as a team, we learned that we have tried a lot of different things for transfers that maybe had not been successful, but there is still a lot of work to be done.... I think the more targeted group stuff we can do.... [I]n the past we tried to focus on students one-on-one, but I think we need to bring them together as a group to kind of solidify the group dynamics. At the end of the day, they're all in the same boat and so if we can build their community first and they can build relationships there and then we can slowly integrate them to the wider College T community, I think that's great.

Anne went on to explain that she was very excited about the new class created by the second AR team as a good way to achieve this. Margaret also felt it was important for the team to re-evaluate the way we were doing things with transfers:

So number one was ... looking into how we're involved in transfer student orientation and how we can be most relevant during that time and provide the best information to them, based on what they're coming from, and then just providing continuing education for them. They're all at various stages of their educational career, they all have different wants and needs.

The team realized that you may need to either give incentives for students to do something they *should* do but maybe *won't* do given the option, or mandate they do it for their own good. The class being for credit is an example of an incentive which is helpful because all credits from the students' previous institution do not transfer to the new institution. The team felt that maybe we need to think more along the lines of giving them what they NEED as opposed to giving them what they want. It was decided to make this class mandatory in fall 2018. Elizabeth from the AR team said:

students never come to us and say they need something that we don't give them at some point and time. So, I think [this class] will be great because it will give students the regular contact. We don't give them any information they don't already have access to. And I remember thinking that when we were first going through the summaries, the survey responses. Transfer students are asking for things that have been offered to them, or provided to them, already. And so I think it's wonderful because they will get [with this class] regular communication and structure with College T College personnel, which will be very beneficial.

Henry echoed this idea:

I think [this class] is going to be really interesting.... I think students need more than just a week of orientation. There needs to be an ongoing thing, and so this class in particular

sounds great, because they need ongoing support. Because stuff comes up or, you know, we give them all this information at the beginning and it's too much. They forget a lot of it, and so things come back around later.

Recognizing the importance of peer support. One important thing the team learned is that often students prefer getting advice from peers rather than professional staff. The transfer student OL Captain said:

I think peer-to-peer interaction really is the best way to change things on a university's campus through student leaders [because] it's a power dynamic. First of all whenever you go into a meeting with a staff person, especially if you are unfamiliar with the campus, you are an underclassman, there is already some authority established and maybe you're afraid to ask questions, you don't want to look like you don't actually know anything for fear of judgment...but the benefit of the peers, is just because I think it's a lot more realistic with a peer-to-peer. It's like, "This is my experience" ... I can provide that information.

She also said:

I think the best way for, at least transfer students to adjust is when there is some sort of role model student or a peer that they either become friends with or have as a resource, it's sort of seen as a mentor.... I do think that's effective. Even in my Orientation Leader group, I felt like I got really close to many students in my group and I don't even feel like I was necessarily friends with them and that I was going to hang out with them all the time, but I would see them a lot and we would get lunch, or we'd get coffee, or they'd want to just ask me questions, they'd feel comfortable reaching out.

She mentioned that students responded best to informal methods of communication such as Facebook, Messenger and texting but she felt *"that would be uncomfortable with an administrator. I think there's boundaries that [another] student can transcend."*

A graduate student academic advisor felt the same and explained:

The biggest thing that I hear from students is that they never want to go where the deans are.... They don't want to deal with them, because deans mean trouble. Especially the younger students, they think the dean is the principle, and I don't want to go to the principal's office. When we would do [academic advising] events...when then deans were there, students would be less comfortable. Visibly less comfortable, or they wouldn't want to talk to one of the deans.

Further he added:

I've been trying to have the RA's [Resident Advisors] plan events and then I go to them. Because I find that if I plan an event, it's no. It seems that if [the office] is planning an event, the students are going to feel like it's homework or it's a school thing, whereas if the RAs are planning it's an RA thing. It's a different kind of beast.... [T]hey can give an insider perspective.... Also, if there are other students involved, it seems like there's a better turnout because their friends are there.... I think that we need to tap into student networks relying on students.

Learning About Organizational Change

Maybe the biggest, yet at the same time disappointing insight was about making change in the organization. Everyone needs to be onboard but it is extremely complex.

Comprehending it "takes a village." Although the team felt their work was good they felt that *all* staff and faculty at College T have the responsibility of helping these students.

Specifically regarding international transfer students Margaret felt that:

I think just getting more people on board to think about this experience and how ... to think about that group. I think it's really easy to group them in with the greater student population and not be aware of some of their specific needs, so I think that we'll start thinking in terms of how does this affect this specific population as we make decisions and do programming and develop policies and procedures and things across campus.

There was a feeling that the team had discovered that although our interventions were good the institution should not see this as a resolved situation. As Mary said:

*It's casting light on an area that still needs a lot of work. And, even though, people like me, who've been here, who have gone through several orientations and trying to revamp it and update it, it's still, I feel like more could be done, if that helps. I don't know....
More work needs to be done.*

She further explained:

Students in transition need support, and support comes in various forms. It really is a team effort. However, those efforts require collaboration and communication. I know this is challenging on some campuses (some people like their silos), but it is so important.

She also said:

I think that it just takes a village. Everyone with all of their different programs we can come together and make a more robust system for transfer students and just students in general. A lot of times, like I just said, everyone kind of does their own thing. Even if

we're in the same office, we don't know what the other person is doing and so yeah, just bringing everyone together.

Mary warned that:

I feel like if College T wants to admit transfer students and they have the two cycles, fall and spring, I feel like more work needs to be done. I feel like resources need to be increased.... I wish we had more in terms of a transition team.... I feel like there needs to be consistency over time.... If anything this is just casting light on an ever-present issue.

Awareness was raised by the team at College T via various campus presentations about the findings; for example, to the deans of the Office for Undergraduate Education (OUE) and the OUE staff as a whole, and also by involving staff and faculty from various offices and departments in orientation and as presenters in the new one credit class for incoming transfer students.

Realizing the complexities of making change in a system. The whole point of gathering the AR team was to make change. This was something the team felt proud of, but also at times felt frustrated that more could not always be done or done easily. Bessie stated:

Mainly what I learned, what I really liked, was that it is possible to gather together people around a particular issue and then work on it over time and actually make some change. So, rather than people gathering because they happen to be part of some office ... when we think about meetings, people getting together on a regular basis ... I think that issue-based collaboration can be really effective, and I hope that that continues beyond this research team.

However, Bessie also realized, "*given the difficulty of making structural changes, the presence of a dean might have been helpful to push some of the interventions through.*" We did

have an associate dean on the team but she was at first resistant to the idea of a new class, later she relented as we did need her help to get the class accepted. Bessie lamented:

the study was around international transfer students, I feel that the offices, units, that work with international students specifically do not have as much direct power within the larger Office of Undergraduate Education; so, whatever interventions that were proposed that would be helpful for international transfer students were sometimes kind of ignored, or it was said, "No, we can't do that." ... Then those ideas would be not really considered fully, and they mainly had to do with structural changes, more significant changes in how we engage international students.... Unless you're at the level of dean, it's hard to make structural decisions. You do end up hanging out in the events and workshops kind of realm.

Mary also expressed her frustration that the team had some good ideas that were initially sidelined by the person on the team with the most power within College T, when the rest of the team felt they were totally doable.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I explained the findings for research question one and two. For research question one I discovered that transfer students struggle academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically. In addition, international transfer students have additional struggles related to language and culture. For research question two I found there had been a lot of learning in the team mostly centering on our struggles to understand the unique needs of transfer students and international transfer students and how we can best support them. In the next chapter I will discuss my conclusions, implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: "MAKING THE EXTRA LEAP"

The purpose of this action research (AR) study was to explore and understand the difficulties and unique adjustments faced by transfer students, academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically, as they transition to College T from their old institution and implement interventions to smooth this transition. In particular, the experiences of international transfer students, coming from institutions both within and from outside of the United States, who speak English as a second language, were examined. The research questions were:

1. How is the experience of transition for international transfer students, both those transferring from institutions within the U.S., and those transferring from institutions outside the U.S., different to the experience of domestic transfer students?
2. What can an action research team learn as we help transfer students navigate their academic, social, emotional and administrative/practical transition?

In this chapter I will present a summary of the study, my discussion and conclusions, implications for practice and implications for further research.

Summary of the Study

This study examined the experiences of transfer students at College T over a two and a half year period of time. International transfer students, both those coming from another institution within the United States—referred to as *Domestic International Transfer Students*, or DITS—and those coming from an institution outside of the United States—referred to as

International International Transfer Students, or IITS—were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol three separate times during their first year at College T (2015-2016). In addition, three different groups of transfer students were surveyed in spring 2016 (before any interventions), end of fall 2016 (after the first round of interventions) and fall 2017 (after the second round of interventions). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with AR team members as well as staff and graduate/undergraduate students working with the transfer student population. These data were examined through the lens of a conceptual framework informed by Schlossberg's (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) and Bridge's (1980, 1991) theories of transition as well as Oberg's (1960) theory of culture shock. This study supports the previous research which shows that transfer students experience academic, social, emotional, and administrative/practical challenges, and adds to it by illustrating the additional challenges faced by international transfer students due to cultural and linguistic differences.

Discussion and Conclusions

Four conclusions can be drawn from the data represented in chapter five. The first relates to international transfer students specifically. The second offers a way of thinking about the process of transition that transfer students generally experience and their needs along the way, yet adds an additional layer for the further challenges international transfer students face. The third and fourth conclusions focus on the changes required of/at a university to more effectively support transfer students based on what was learned in this study.

Conclusion One

One of strongest, albeit perhaps not surprising, conclusions that can be drawn from this study is that issues related to language and culture make the transfer and integration experience of international transfer students uniquely challenging. This study showed that international

transfer students experience all the same challenges as domestic transfer students academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically. In addition, they experience the same challenges as other (non-transfer) international students, including issues with language proficiency, a lack of cultural knowledge, and the ripple effects of those two things (Andrade, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). These two different sets of challenges combine to make these students a particularly vulnerable population and in need of extra support from the institution--especially as related to language, cultural knowledge, and culture shock.

Language. Lack of fluency in English was clearly a challenge for students in this study. Carpenter (1991) stated the lack of language skills for international transfer students to be "an especially sticky problem" (p. 164). The current study helps to describe more deeply what some of the stickiness is. First, it clearly hindered or delayed their academic success. Lower language proficiency challenged these students academically in all four skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Lectures were hard to understand, materials difficult to read, papers hard to write, and presentations difficult to give. This clearly puts international transfer students at higher risk given the focus in the U.S. on the high quantity of reading materials and writing assignments. In a study of 179 syllabi in a university college in Canada, Graves, Hyland & Samuels (2010) found on average 2.5 writing assignments per class, these mostly being term or research papers. In addition, a lack of English proficiency also made friendships with American students difficult for many of the students in this study. This parallels findings from Sherry, Thomas and Chui (2010) who reported from their work that it is difficult for international students to form bonds with Americans so many of them prefer to isolate themselves in nationality groups for increased feelings of safety and familiarity.

Cultural knowledge. International transfer students, especially IITS, in this study also lacked the cultural knowledge expected to participate in an American classroom. The Association of International Educators (NASFA) produced a booklet in 2009 entitled *U.S. Classroom Culture* aimed at international students coming to study in the United States. It explains the difference between teacher-centered classrooms (common in Asian countries) and learner-centered classroom, (common in the United States). It explained:

Students coming to the United States to study find that their expectations, attitudes, and values sometimes conflict with those of their faculty and U.S. students. These differences can be sources of culture shock and cultural misunderstanding that inhibit adaptation and adjustment. (Eland, Smithee, & Greenblatt, p. 13)

Having come from a more teacher-centered system, the Chinese and Korean IITS in this study lacked the knowledge and comfort levels for how to behave in an American classroom, such as asking questions and participating actively in class. McMahon (2011) explained, "It seems clear that Chinese students are used to a teacher dominated classroom in which students take largely a passive quiet role" (p. 411).

Further, a lack of cultural background knowledge impeded these students' understanding in certain classes, often leading to additional work on top of the regular expected workload. Fang (IITS) explained needing to learn how to reach out to the professors for help, trying to learn more about American history and culture, and doing extra work outside of the class. This reflects the work of Chen & Graves (1995) who point to the importance of providing ESL students with a preview of material and/or background knowledge as well as the vocabulary that an author would expect a native speaking student to have.

Coming from another culture with different cultural norms caused additional problems for these international transfer students. They found the openness of some professors to be uncomfortable and most of the students felt they would not be able to open up to them about challenges they face. Additionally, some of the students in this study felt Americans come across as rude and too individualistic. These norms create a lonely space for international transfer students, further contributing to feelings of isolation and making it very hard to develop a system to sufficiently support them.

This study affirms what we know from the literature (Lee, Ditchman, Fong, Piper, & Feigon, 2004; Mori, 2000) that Asian international students are less likely to use counselling services. This can be due to differences in beliefs about mental health, issues of stigma, or lack of knowledge about the services offered (Mori 2000). Lee et al. (2004) studied Korean international students seeking mental health help and found that:

Results indicate that having traditional Asian values appears to increase one's perception of public stigma as well as self-stigma related to receiving mental health services, which, in turn, affects attitudes toward seeking mental health services.... [S]tigma about illness and seeking mental health services may be culturally rooted in values related to filial piety and conformity among Korean students. (p. 651)

Culture shock. The findings of this study also provide more evidence about the process of culture shock. Data from the international transfer students' three interviews over one academic year could be mapped to Oberg's (1960) four stages of culture shock. Students who had just arrived were clearly in the honeymoon stage, whereas the students who had already spent some time in the U.S. had progressed further through the stages. As the year continued it was possible to see eight out of the 10 interviewees had moved along this continuum. However,

Min (DITS), who had already been in the U.S. for two years at the start of the study, had stagnated in the frustration period. Two IITS Hyo Jun and Wei moved from the honeymoon stage into frustration in the second interviewed but remained there for the end of the academic year. Yang (DITS) who had been in the U.S. for five years at the start of the study actually regressed from adaptation to recovery. Fang (IITS) progressed far more rapidly than the other IITS and was already at the end of recovery by the end of her first year in the U.S. This aligns with Oberg's (1960) finding that not everyone will be affected by culture shock in the same way it is a messier process. Some people never adapt and remain feeling like an outsider: some will stagnant in one stage, others will regress, and some will pass through the stages relatively quickly. Oberg explained the way to get over culture shock is to mix with the natives and learn the language. And yet, we can clearly see from the above discussion that this is challenging.

It appears that Schlossberg's 4S system can contribute to managing culture shock more proactively. Overall, the international transfer students in this study who adapted better tended to have wanted the transition and saw this as positive move (situation). They were optimists who sought out opportunities (self). Social strategies they used, included joining clubs and living in dorms on campus rather than off campus. These things provided social networks and support for them. Academic strategies they used consisted of putting a greater quality of effort into academic work and using campus support resources such as ESL tutors.

Conclusion Two

The conceptual framework I began with needed to be adapted based on the findings of this study, as can be seen in Figure 6.1. Going back to the three theories used in this study we can see that Bridge's (1980, 1991) concept of the importance of endings was seen to be more important than I had originally thought as I saw in the data that many transfer students were

actually sad about leaving their old institutions, their friends, and the familiarity of the processes there. In addition, a few students did not want to transfer at all and were acting in response to parental and/or cultural pressures. Reviewing Schlossberg's theory of transition (1981, 1984, 1989, 1995, 2011) it can be seen that transfer students will still experience moving in, moving through, and, eventually, moving out of College T. However, we can view the 4S in a different light when considering insights from this study. Although we cannot influence the situation of a student's transition (the reasons they transferred), which remains in the top left corner of the model, we can influence the situation an institution allows them to transfer into (such as welcoming environment). The data clearly demonstrated how essential support is to a transfer student, both by the sending and the receiving institution, as well as throughout their time at the new institution. Therefore, in the new framework, this support is now shown as encompassing the whole process. The student self and what they invest in the transition process continues to be important as do the strategies they use. Finally, the stages of culture shock were shown not to be a smooth linear process for international transfers, as Oberg (1960) warned us. Three students in my study stagnated in a period of frustration as shown by the red circle in the middle of the stages of culture shock. One student showed regression from adaptation to recovery as shown by the reverse arrow. The large middle arrow moves from a darker color to white as adaptation and a successful transition were not proven one way or the other falling outside the timeline of this study. It is hoped that this conceptual framework might help other universities, and the broader field of study concerned with both transfer and international transfer students, to think more holistically and systemically about their adjustment and adaptation experiences and support them accordingly.

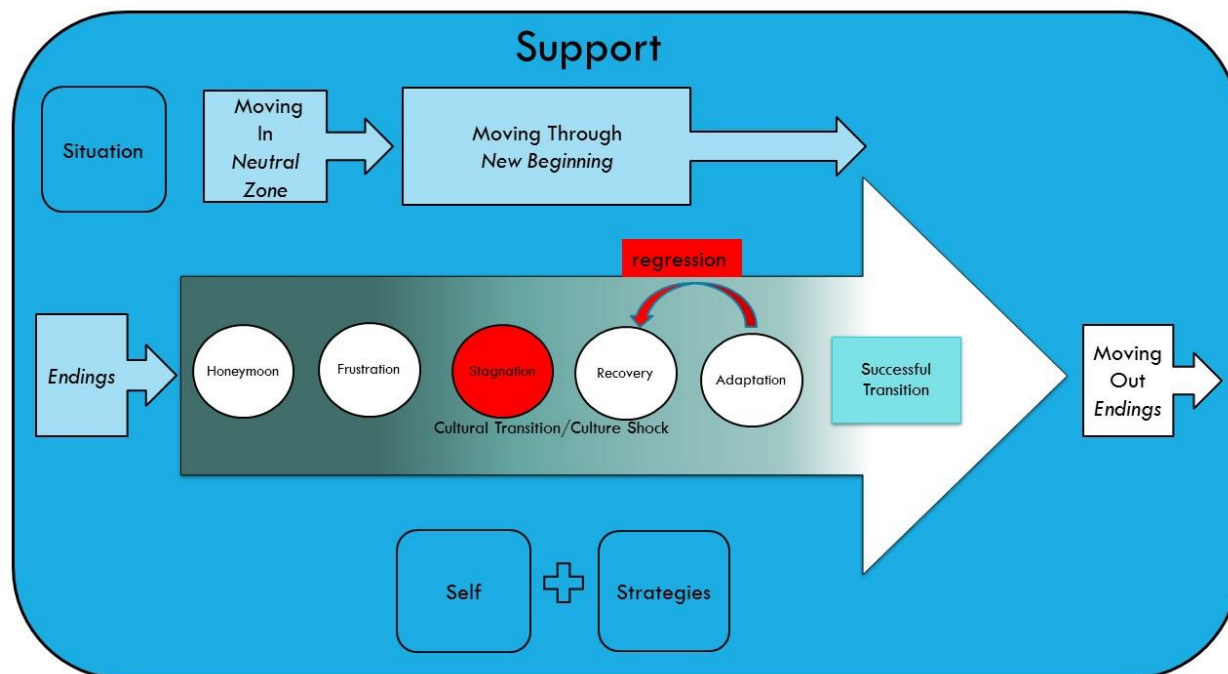


Figure 6.1. Conceptual framework 2: International transfer student adaptation to a new college and culture.

Conclusion Three

A third conclusion points to the necessity of institutions being open to making necessary structural changes to provide ongoing, sustained support for transfer students, especially IITS and DITS, to help them become an integral part of the college community and successful students and alumni. A critical element in Schlossberg's 4S system is support, which can come from family, friends, and an institution. Unfortunately, institutions often provide little specific help for transfer students beyond an orientation (if indeed there is one) leaving students feeling unwelcomed, lonely, and confused.

Despite the AR team's best intentions we replicated this tendency going through an entire cycle of AR without really scratching the surface of the issues faced by transfer students, all the while often complaining about the students themselves. The Associate Dean from the AR team

felt strongly that we spoon-feed students too much and that, ultimately, that does not help them in the long-run. She strongly suggested that it was not the role of the institution to help the students more than we were already doing, but that the students should be the ones helping themselves. While the AR team did try to counter that argument, we found it was all too easy to slip into this view of "blaming" the students for their lack of adaptation.

Our first round of interventions ending up focusing mostly on bolstering orientation and student feelings of being welcomed. By fall 2016, College T had added transfer student Orientation Leaders (OLs), advisors that reached out to students over the summer, a Point Person for Asian international transfers, and a great deal of concerted effort by the orientation team to be more welcoming. Although these changes were well received, after this initial welcome students still reported feeling lost and alone. Nevertheless, through sustained work in a second cycle of AR, we learned that we had to engage differently on the behalf of transfer students to support the transition for all of them, plus provide additional support for international transfer students through the culture shock phases. Therefore, in addition to a Point Person for all transfers, we created a semester long transition class that first ran in fall 2017. This class was optional and 29 out of the 72 incoming students chose to take it. The evaluation responses were very positive and revealed that the class was useful academically, socially, emotionally, and administratively/practically. Comments centered around the usefulness of learning about the resources on campus from the experts in that area, appreciating having a space to ask questions each week, and having a place to make social connections. Since not all incoming transfer students chose to take the class in fall 2017, the AR team decided the class should be made mandatory in fall 2018.

The AR team gradually learned to accept the advice of Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) who argued that if an institution accepts transfer students it is their ethical obligation to support their transition in an ongoing, sustained way. As Tobolowsky and Cox explained, "Institutions may do well to revisit their tendency to neglect transfer students ... [who] can play a critical financial role by boosting income through tuition (tuition replacement for native student attrition)" (p. 407). From their findings, as well as those of this study, it is clear that the assumptions an institution holds can hinder the work that can be done.

In summary, from this study, I found that higher education institutions need to provide ongoing structural support for transfer students and international transfer students to succeed, and if we don't we will continue to hear the same complaints year after year as the transition and culture shock processes are unnecessarily longer and harder than they need to be. In addition, this support likely needs to be mandated or many students simply will not follow through, especially the international transfers, given the language and cultural challenges described above that act like gravity pulling students towards isolation and not seeking help. As Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) explained:

By raising the profile of transfer students, an institution subtly encourages its agents (faculty and staff) to increase the amount of time, energy, money, and other resources earmarked for the facilitation of transfer student success.... [T]he reallocation of focus and resources would allow the university to reexamine and revise any institutional policies and practices that limit its ability to meet the needs of this important and sizable student population. (p. 408)

Conclusion Four

One of the key insights of (and challenges for) the AR team was how important it was to overcome the micro-orientation of staff to enact systemic change. As staff in a college system the AR team realized that we tend to focus on, and understand, our own small piece of the student experience in that system. We need to think more holistically about the whole student experience, collaborate and venture out of our individual offices and departments. This affirms the organizational literature which encourages us to take a system view of an organization and do some “boundary-hopping and silo busting” (Tett, 2005, p. 221).

Although the team was able to gain a better understanding of each other’s role in the system we also realized that this was not enough. Due to the positionality of the majority of AR team members in the system we had to get more powerful support to be able to enact change at the system level (macro-level change), or we needed to accept that micro-level change was all we could hope for. Bessie on the AR team expressed this frustration by stating that the majority of the team members did not have the power needed to do more than facilitate various events and workshops and were unable to make structural changes. It was therefore essential to convince the Associate Dean on the team, the only one who had the power to make structural change, that deeper and sustained change was needed. The way we were able to do this was by communicating the pressing need for change for this group from the data we had gathered. As Cohen (2005) stated:

To bring about significant change, an organization needs significantly more than the usual effort and commitment from its people. Everybody involved needs to believe that change is critical before they’ll feel motivated to contribute to the effort. In addition,

creating a clear sense of urgency around the needed change is crucial to gaining cooperation and sustaining the momentum of change. (p. 13)

Implications for Further Research

There is a wealth of research on transfer students. However, still more research is needed to help us more fully understand this population. Other researchers have called for the need to break the population of transfers into subpopulations and not look at them as a homogenous group (Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Laanan, 2007; Strahn-Koller, 2012; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). This study affirmed that all transfer students experience challenges academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically; but these challenges are greater for international transfer students, specifically IITS. More research on international transfers, (DITS and IITS), is needed to build upon this initial attempt to gain a greater understanding of this population. We know a lot about transfer students and a lot about international students, but very little about the intersection of the two. In addition, the international transfer students in this study were all Asian (eight Chinese and two Korean), being the two largest groups of international students at College T. It would be interesting to see if the experiences of international transfers from other countries are similar or different.

International students have been the focus of many studies (Andrade, 2006; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Kim, 2012, Lee & Rice, 2007; Newsome & Cooper, 2016; McMahan, 2011; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010; Tarry, 2011). To date I have found no empirical studies, other than this initial attempt, to understand international transfer students specifically. It would be useful to compare international students to international transfer students. Is the experience of culture shock the same for both groups or is it more acute for the international transfers? Do

international students feel the same lack of support from the institution? Is the conceptual framework (Figure 6.1) presented in this study useful to compare these two groups?

This study showed the person with the most resistance to change in the AR team had the highest position at College T. The other team members felt unable to challenge this resistance but expressed feelings of frustration. It would be informative to further analyze the effects of resistant leaders on subordinate members of a team of office and what strategies (apart from data collection as explained in this study) these members can use to change this resistance. As Cohen (2005) warned, "probably the most serious challenge to successful change comes when members of leadership and management—those you're relying upon to implement change—resist the effort" (p. 121).

It would be useful to study the transfer student experience for those who are engaged in varsity sports. The three transfer students who mentioned this in the surveys in this study said that being a part of a team helped them feel a part of College T. Travelling to athletic events together, wearing College T colors, and having a mascot helped them build a strong community early on. What about their educational experiences? Does the time spent in practice make them suffer more from "transfer shock"? Is there a way a similar "team spirit" could be fostered for transfer students as a whole?

There has been some limited research into transfer students who enter in the spring semester (Britt & Hirt, 1999; Peska, 2009). These studies showed that the social, academic and personal adjustment for these students was indeed harder for those that come in a fall semester. This study focused on transfer students and international transfer students who began in the fall semester, which is always a bigger group. Incoming transfers in the spring semester are a smaller group and there is even less time available for orientation before classes start. Additional

research on the different experiences between fall international transfers and spring international transfers would greatly add to the literature.

Implications for Practice

The learnings from this study have potential implications for practice. Institutions that bring in transfer students need to aid all those students academically, socially, emotionally and administratively/practically and give additional support for the extra needs of international transfers. Further this support needs to reach beyond the initial welcome and be sustained throughout their time at the new institution.

Supporting International Transfer Students

All transfer students need to adjust to a new institution. All international students need to adjust to college in the U.S., working in a different culture, and often another language.

International transfer students, who speak English as a second language, have to navigate both these things. Incoming international transfers, who speak English as a second language, should be contacted by an ESL specialist, and their language skills tested prior to arrival. This information should be used to guide these students to the best classes and resources for them. Some students may require classes taught by an ESL specialist to aid language acquisition, ideally this class can also help fill the gap in students' background knowledge, which is often taken for granted as known in other college classes.

In addition, there should be workshops that students can attend where skills not covered in classes could be addressed. For example, international transfers need to understand the requirements of being in a class in the U.S. and be able to practice those skills in a safe environment (such as practicing discussions and the language of discussion). In addition, culture

beyond the classroom needs to be addressed from day-to-day living in America to building background knowledge in areas of history and politics. As Carpenter (1991) stressed:

U.S. institutions of higher education are firmly committed to recruiting more and more international students. If we are going to continue to present ourselves as having something special to offer students from other countries, then we have the responsibility as educators to see that our international students get the services they need to make their experiences here successful and effective. (p. 166)

Support groups could also be a great source of emotional help. These could be student-led. Newsome and Cooper (2016) stated "in addition to being required to learn in the medium of a foreign language, [international students] are sometimes challenged at the level of deeply ingrained cultural and religious taboos, such as in relation to lifestyles, social rules, social behaviors (e.g. the consumption of alcohol), gender relations and sexual mores" (p. 196). Meeting and discussing social norms, challenges related to transition and cultural adaptation, and even practical concerns etc. would prove useful.

Supporting All Transfer Students

Help for transfer students should start long before they arrive on campus with initial connections made and advice given. Flaga (2006) called for advising prior to transfer stating "Overall, the more information students have, the easier the transition will be" (p. 12). There should be contact with an academic advisor during the summer to help them register for classes.

The initial entrance into a new college can leave a lasting impression on transfers depending upon how they are received. A friendly welcome on arrival to campus cannot be overestimated. Davies and Casey (1999) stated, "Campus and staff should be more welcoming and helpful.... All campus staff should be able to provide a positive greeting and willingness to

assist students" (p. 14). Many studies stressed the importance of a transfer student orientation (Austin, 2006; Berner, 2012; Flaga, 2006; Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Laanan, 2007; Lazarowicz, 2015; Owens, 2007; Peska, 2009; Townsend, 2008; Townsend, & Wilson, 2006). Orientation is usually robust for first year students and needs to be as robust for transfer students, not a mere afterthought. This is a time to get transfers connected to the new institution and learn about the resources available. In addition, it is a time for them to make initial bonds; as Flaga stated in her study, "connecting with fellow students at orientation laid the foundation for future friendships that carried over to the school year" (p. 13). However, as clearly evidenced in this study, orientation is not enough. Transfer students need to be much more fully supported during their first semester in the new institution at a minimum. Townsend and Wilson (2006) stated, "Some transfer students may need more of a hand hold during their initial weeks, particularly those accustomed to small campuses where it is easier to find out what to do and how to do it" (p. 452).

Several researchers called for some type of semester long transition class at the four-year institution (Flaga, 2006; Lazarowicz, 2015; Owens, 2007; Peska, 2009) and this is the strongest recommendation emerging from the current study. Such a class can help students in a variety of key ways. Academically they can learn about resources to help them such as tutoring and how to make appointments. Socially they can make bonds with other transfer students in the class whilst doing out of class group activities such as scavenger hunts or visits to places on campus. Emotionally they will feel better prepared for the journey ahead and know who is available to help them. Practically/ administratively they will learn about the different offices and have an expert in the room to whom they can ask any questions. This class needs to be mandatory as if it is optional students may feel they do not need it when in fact they do.

Closing Reflection

It can be seen that College T made some good changes which have helped address the challenges for both transfer and international transfer students at the institution. However, much more could be done and needs to happen in the future. This study opened our eyes to just how complex making change in an organization is for lower level employees; yet our team feels we have grown individually and we are open and ready for the next challenge. As Herr and Anderson (2015) stated:

Regarding the final write up of the action research dissertation is that it does not automatically mean that there was a "successful" change effort to document with a happy ending—although it might. Rather our goal as researchers is the documentation of working to understand and initiate change in the contexts being studied. Part of this documentation could include how the change process was obstructed or not seen as viable despite persistent efforts. These "failed" attempts are important to document in terms of increasing our understanding of the complexity of the change process (p. 162).

Taylor (2011) stated "Critical reflection, a distinguishing characteristic of adult learning, refers to questioning the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience" (p. 7). This AR journey has given me much to think about and space for reflection on my personal journey as a leader of change. Working with a group of people is at the same time rewarding and frustrating. The rewards come in the form of learning and developing beneficial change in an institution. The frustrations come from managing disagreements, power dynamics, and lack of action within the team.

As stated previously the biggest challenge for the team, and of particular frustration to me, was the resistance from the team member with most power in the group. It was tricky for

me, as leader of the AR team, to navigate and, due to my position in the system, I felt there was little I could do. It was not until after the first round of interventions that I was able to evidence from the data that although the small changes we had made were beneficial to the transfer students, more sustained support was still needed. I had to learn for myself, and grow to believe more of what the experts say about how even people with lower positions in an organization can lead change. As Burke (2014) stated, “Leadership is about influence, not command and control. To be successfully influential requires personal skills such as active listening, persuasion, empathy, and an awareness of how one as leader is affecting others and in turn how one is being personally affected by others” (p. 286). Through this doctoral journey I have learned that I can influence those around and above me for the good of the institution and its students--and that doing so requires leaders to stand up and make their voices heard.

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APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF MAJOR EMPIRICAL WORKS RELATED TO TRANSFER STUDENTS

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Austin (2006). A successful university-foundation partnership to assist nontraditional transfer women.	“To examine a comprehensive university academic and support services program for nontraditional female transfer commuter students in order to determine which supports were more successful in contributing to their academic and social integration” (p. 276).	Tinto’s (1987, 1993) model of student integration/persistence	TS aged 26-43 N=9 (average age 35) Admins N=2 (admissions office and academic services) Faculty/Staff mentors N = 10	7/9 students were interviewed using a semi structured 44 item questionnaire (7 out of the original 9 were interviewed). Administrators were interviewed using a 10 item semi structured questionnaire Faculty/staff mentors had a 21 item written survey	Financial aid, academic counseling, orientation, mentoring and peer support meetings can aid academic and social integration of nontraditional transfer women from community college to universities.
Berger & Malaney (2003). Assessing the transition of transfer students from community colleges to a university.	“To examine how pre-transfer experiences and preparation, along with post-transfer experiences, influence the adjustment of community college transfer students (as measured by academic achievement and satisfactions with various aspects of the university experience) to life on a four-year university campus” (p.1).	student characteristics, community college involvement, transfer readiness, university involvement, outcomes (satisfaction and GPA)	N= 372 community college transfers	Survey designed by the authors based on the literature plus The Cycles Survey (Kegan, 1978)	Students who are best informed and best prepared for the transfer are more likely to have higher grades and be more satisfied with the university environment. White students are more likely to get better grades and have greater satisfaction. Students more involved socially are more satisfied.

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Berner (2001). Transfer shock and the experience of community college students transitioning to California State University, Chico: an exploratory study.	“To better understand the transfer student transition experience. The overarching research question was: What is the experience of community college transfer students who exhibited transfer shock during their transition to Chico State?” (p. 8).	Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995).	N=13 community college transfers who experienced “transfer shock” aged 18-26, 6 females 7 males, 5 white, 5 minorities, 2 more than one ethnicity, 1 declined to answer the question	Semi structured individual Interviews	Classes harder. Social environment seen as welcoming. First time living alone brought life skills problems. TS reluctant to seek help.
Crisp & Nuñez (2014). Understanding the racial transfer gap: Modeling underrepresented minority and nonminority students' pathways from two-to four-year institutions.	To advance “research and theory regarding the racial transfer gap. Specifically... to identify student and contextual variables influencing vertical transfer that are both similar and difference among Whites and [underrepresented minority students] URM” (p. 292).	An extension of Nora’s engagement model (2004) with the addition of institutional characteristics influencing transfer experience	N=1,360 students from 260 institutions who began their postsecondary education at a community college in 2003-4, who reported that they intended to transfer. Age ≤ 24.	Student level data from Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS: 04/09). Institutional level data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) surveys fall 2003.	Racial transfer gap was shown 45% of white students successfully transferred and only 31% of URM. URM more likely to be first gen and on financial aid less likely to be working 20 plus hours a week. More URM in vocational programs.
Davis & Casey (1996). Transfer student experiences: Comparing their academic and social lives at the community college and university	To compare the academic and social lives of TS at community college and university	Not addressed	11 Groups with an average attendance of 6	11 focus Groups with students who transferred into the university all 1996. Average attendance = 6	Students experience “campus culture shock”

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Dougherty & Kienzl (2006). It's not enough to get through the open door, Inequalities by social background in transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges.	To examine "how the likelihood of transfer is affected by social background, precollege academic characteristics, external demands at college entrance, and experiences during college" (p. 452)	Not addressed	National Education Longitudinal Study of the 8 th grade (NELS:88) and the Beginning Post-secondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:90)	Analysis of these two national data sets	Students with high SES have greater transfer rates Older students less likely to transfer, Blacks have higher educational aspirations than whites of the same SES
Duggan, M.H., & Pickering, J.W. (2008) Barriers to transfer student academic success and retention.	To examine the barriers to persistence in a cohort of incoming transfers	Not addressed	N= 369 entering transfer students (33% of the incoming TS population) Mean age 23, 70% female.	Adapted Transition to College Inventory (TCI) names Transfer Student Survey (TSS)	TS do not fit into one general population but differ based on the number of credits completed before transfer. TS share the same characteristics and barriers to academic success and persistence but these vary between groups More research is needed about TS persistence and retention
Flaga (2006). The process of transition for community college transfer students.	"What is the nature of transition for community college transfer students during their first semester at a large 4-year university? How do transfer student experiences change between their first and second semester at the 4- year university?" (p. 5)	King Beach's (1999) Consequential Transitions	35 community college students	Longitudinal study. TS interviewed Jan 2001 during their second semester about the first semester experiences then in March/April about their second semester experiences	Students can help their own transition if they use initiative and seek out resources being responsible for their own education

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Ishitani (2008). How do transfers survive after “transfer shock”? A longitudinal study of transfer student departure at a four-year institution.	To investigate “departure behavior of transfer students at a senior institution. Particular attention was given to how entry at different times and semester GPAs affected transfer student departure” (p. 403)	Desjardins et al. (1999) Event history modeling	Three cohorts of (1999-2001) students who matriculated to a 4-year comprehensive public university in the fall semester (native and TS). N= 7631 (1347 TS). Of the TS 48.8% male, 51.2% female. 86.9% Caucasian, 13.1% minority	Institution data set	Native freshman students persisted more than freshman TS. TS at risk for departure is less with each passing semester. Over 6 semesters native students were retained at higher rates than TS freshmen. “Transfer shock” led to greater risks of departure
Keeley & House (1993). Transfer shock revisited: A longitudinal study of transfer academic performance.	“to quantify the phenomenon known as “transfer shock” and to investigate the effects of student characteristics such as student age, gender, class level, ethnicity, residence status, and having earned an associate degree or not on the grade performance of transfer students. In addition, transfers from four-year institutions were compared to those from two-year institutions, as were native students compared to those who transferred.” (p. 2)	Not addressed	Sophomore and junior TS entering Northern Illinois University fall 1989 – spring 1991.	Institution data set	Students did experience “transfer shock” An associate’s degree was an good indication of successful academic performance. Women did better than men. TS aged 25 + had little “transfer shock.” Minority community college students bought in lower GPAs and had more “transfer shock.” TS performance varied by major

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Laanan (1996). Making the transition. Understanding the adjustment process of community college transfer students.	To describe the Transfer Alliance Program (TAP) and the characteristics and experiences of the students enrolled in it.	Not addressed	2 nd year TS from CA community colleges to UCLA TAP N=49 Non TAP N=201. White = 50% TAP and 53% non TAP	104 item Transfer Student Questionnaire (TSQ) 4 parts Student background characteristics Community college experiences UCLA experiences Open ended questions	TAP students have lower levels of social and academic involvement at UCLA and have difficulties adjusting. Tap students have more interaction with faculty and more resources at the community college in a “protected” environment.
Laanan (1999). Any differences? Comparative analysis of white and non-white transfer students at a university.	“To understand and describe the extent to which TS differ in their academic and college experiences by racial/ethnic background.” (p. 9)	Pace’s (1980, 1984) concept of Quality of Effort (QE)	N= 330 non-white (47%) and 366 white (53%) TS	Survey 304 item Transfer Students Questionnaire (L-TSQ) (Lanaan, 1998) plus 4 Quality of Effort scales.	Experiences are different for white and non-white students at both the 2 -year and 4 year institution. Whites showed a higher QE with faculty and out of class work and higher GPA. Non-white students more likely to be first gen college students. Non-white group very diverse so difficulty to make generalizations across race/ethnic backgrounds (e.g. as in regard to language, QE and involvement) .
Laanan (2004). Studying transfer students: Part I: Instrument design and implications.	“To provide the theoretical framework guiding the development and design of the Laanan Transfer Student’s Questionnaire (L-TSQ). To discuss the instrumentation and psychometric properties of the L-TSQ. To articulate the benefits of the L-TSQ with respect to research and policy implications.” (p. 333)	Pace’s (1980, 1984, 1992) concept of Quality of Effort (QE). Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement.	N = 717 from 64 California community college to a large, urban public research university in Southern California between 1994 and 1995. White = 51%. Female 59.4%	Survey 304 item Transfer Students Questionnaire (L-TSQ) (Lanaan, 1998)	L-TSQ helps researchers understand TS social, academic and affective adjustment. Data can help 2 year college prepare students for transfer. Data can be used by 4 year college to help adjustment

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Laanan (2007). Studying transfer students: Part II: Dimensions of transfer students' adjustment.	"To investigate the experiences and performance of community college transfer students at a research university To move beyond the transfer shock concept by building on previous studies in an effort to establish new methods, concepts and frameworks to better understand and characterize the complex transfer process of community college transfer students." (p. 39)	Pace's (1980, 1984) concept of Quality of Effort (QE). Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement. Oberg's concept of Culture Shock (1960)	N = 717 from 64 California community college to a large, urban public research university in Southern California between 1994 and 1995. White = 51%. Female 59.4%	Survey 304 item Transfer Students Questionnaire (L-TSQ) (Lanaan, 2004)	Students will adapt well academically if they: Put QE into their learning/ approach faculty for help Students will not adapt well academically if they: have negative perceptions of 4-year environment, spend more time with academic counsellors and in academic workshops. Students will adapt well socially if they: are involved in clubs, spend more time socializing with friends, have more social confidence. Students will adapt less well socially if they: Introverted
Lazarowicz (2015). Understanding the transition experience of community college transfer students to a 4-year university: Incorporating Schlossberg's transition theory into higher education.	"This study sought to understand the experience that community college transfer students had in transferring to a large research university." (p.11)	Schlossberg's theory of transition (1984)	N = 12 TS moving from a two- year community college to a 4 – year college/ Mostly nontraditional students aged 21-41. Average age 25. 5 male, 7 female. 8 white.	3 semi structured, open-ended interviews and loosely structured student journals in which they wrote their observations about meetings with staff and faculty.	Funding issues. Transition takes time. Support is critical. Maturity. Personal Responsibility

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Owens (2007). Community college transfer students' experiences of the adjustment process to a four year institution: A qualitative analysis.	“This study sought to identify transfer student retention policies and practices that offer the most promising outcomes, as substantiated by the transfer students” (p.4)	Mitchell and Coltrinari (2005) e journal writing	57 incoming TS 42, 74% male, 15 26% female, 45 79% white	Data collection occurred very 2-3 weeks during the last half of fall semester 2006 and spring 2007. Probing questions were asked through email and students responded with eJournals	On entering the university students experienced marginality, struggled with the need for guidance combined with feelings of entitlement. Had to learn to navigate the university system. In the first 8 weeks support TS needed were personal attention, academic integration, social integration, technology.
Patton & Davis (2014). Expanding transition theory: African American students' multiple transitions following Hurricane Katrina.	To examine the experiences of African American college students who were displaced during hurricane Katrina and the multiple transitions they made.	Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman's (1995) transition theory	10 undergraduate African American students (7 women , 3 men)	Individual semi structured interviews	Institutions need to work together to help displaced students. Displaced students need help navigating the new institution e.g. a special orientation. Transition theory needs to be expanded to look at multiple transitions and the stressors these bring
Strahn-Koller (2012). Academic transfer shock and social integration: A comparison of outcomes for traditional and nontraditional students transferring from 2-year to 4-year institutions	“To examine whether differences exist for traditional and nontraditional 2-year to 4-year TS on transfer shock, academic integration and social integration” (p.8).	Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student integration	Data from Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS: 04/09) 2 year to 4 year transfers Nontraditional students N=700	T tests along with multiple regression	No significant differences found between traditional and nontraditional students in academic transfer shock, academic integration or social integration.

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Tobolowsky & Cox (2012). Rationalizing neglect: An institutional response to transfer students.	“To uncover the manner in which institutional agents shape the transfer student experience...[and] explores how the institution’s efforts and abilities to facilitate TS success are affected by: 1. institution structures and policies, 2. personal perceptions, and interventions, internal and 3. external environmental conditions” (p. 390).	Scott and Davies (2007) organizational theory	Faculty and staff N=17	Case study semi structured interviews about experiences with TS	Hard population to serve due to diversity and false assumptions about the institution
Townsend (1995). Community college transfer students: A case study of survival.	“To learn how students viewed the transfer process, including if and how both the sending and receiving institution facilitated the process, and what each institution could have done to make the process easier... to learn how students’ perceived certain aspects of each institution’s academic environment, defined in this study as a composite of (1) academic standards, (2) classroom atmosphere, including interactions between students and teachers and among students, (3) tests and assignments, (4) attendance policies, (5) faculty attitudes and behaviors, and (6) student attitudes and behaviors” (p. 177)	Tinto’s (1987, 1993) model of student retention	Full time students who transferred from an urban community college to an urban university. N=44 7 graduates, 21 still enrolled (9 agreed to be interviewed) 16 no longer attending (5 completed the surveys)	Qualitative, Interviews for 9 students still enrolled. /Surveys for 16 students no longer attending	Successful students tended to be self-reliant. Academic standard is higher. Community college does not prepare students well enough for transfer to university. Much more writing is required at the university. Community college faculty in general seen as more helpful than those at the university and teaching techniques made knowledge more accessible. Classroom atmosphere at university is more competitive and students are less willing to help each other. Native students feel number of international students at community college keep the level of education low.

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
Townsend & Wilson (2006). "A hand hold for a little bit": Factors facilitating the success of community college transfer students to a large research university.	"To ascertain the perceptions of current community college TS about institutional factors that influenced their fit within the receiving institution, including the transfer process, orientation to the university, and social and academic experiences there compared to those in the community college" (p. 440).	Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention	N = 19, 9 male 10 female, 2 minority, 5 older (mid to late 20s)	Qualitative study relying upon generic qualitative interview methods	Frustratingly little help from sending institution. Orientation should have targeted sessions for TS. Faculty less concerned about them than at community college. Very difficult to make friends
Vaala, L. D. (1991). Making the transition: Influences on transfer students.	To explore "the satisfaction and success of students who transferred from 14 two-years college to a large Canadian university" (p. 305).	Not addressed	N = 258 surveys (111 males and 147 females) Semi-structured interviews (5 male, 5 female)	Surveys and interviews	Faculty more positive at college regarding interactions and teaching style). Faculty not seen as interested in students at uni and give less personal attention. Academics are harder at uni with a heavier workload. Difficult to locate buildings and resources at uni
Wawrzynski & Sedlacek (2003). Race and gender differences in the transfer student experience.	"To fill a void in the transfer student literature by investigating the expectations, self-perceptions, past academic behaviors, and attitudes of students who transferred to a doctoral extensive university on the East coast" (p. 491).	Not explicit but looks at goal setting, student attitude, academic behavior	N= 2, 492 TS 53% female, 14% African American, 14% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 6% Hispanic/Latino/ Latina , 65% white, 0.7% Other. Average age 21.8	Transfer Student Survey (Wawrzynski, Kish, Balon, & Sedkacek, 1999) a 68 item questionnaire	TS do not all have the same experiences and expectations. Students of color have more interest in working with faculty on research or interacting outside of class, meeting people from other cultures, joining clubs. African Americans saw college as a way to gain life and leadership skills. Hispanic students wanted to learn oral communication skills. Students of color are more

Title and Author	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Sample	Methodology	Key Findings
					<p>likely to study with other students. Students of color stated more positive academic behaviors. Asian Americans had more difficulty deciding what to study and speaking up in class. Males more interested in academic aspects of college, females more holistic and more interested in joining clubs. Oral and written communication skills more important for females. Females wanted to gain knowledge to both acquire and enhance academic interests. Females appreciated others ideas and cultures more. Males felt reasoning and leadership skills were important. Females more likely to have positive academic behaviors such as reviewing</p>

APPENDIX B

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER STUDENTS

Purpose: This guide is intended to provide direction for a semi-structured interview of international transfer students for the research study *Supporting the Unique Needs of International Transfer Students: An Action Research Study*. The interview will be conducted at the beginning of the journey international transfer students take here and as soon after orientation as possible to gather some initial data on their experiences so far.

Interviewer:

Thank you for coming to meet with me today. I'm very much looking forward to talking with you and getting to know you better. This should last about one hour but if at any time you feel uncomfortable and wish to stop the interview, just let me know.

Questions for incoming international transfer students:

Background Information

1. What's your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from?
4. What is your current academic standing?

Previous Institution

5. Where did you attend college before?
6. Can you describe your experience there both socially and academically?
7. What class were you most interested in in your last institution?
8. What class did you get your best grade in?

9. What was your GPA on leaving your last institution?
10. Did you use support resources there? What were they?
11. Were you part of any formal group there; for example, a student club?
12. Tell me a little about your friendship networks there?
13. Did you have a staff member or faculty member you connected with? IF so what was their role?
14. Tell me about your most positive experience at your previous institution?
15. What were you sad about leaving?

Transferring to College T

16. How did you hear about College T?
17. Did you apply to other schools?
18. Why did you chose to come to College T?
19. What do you expect from College T that you didn't get from your previous institution?
20. What was the easiest part of the transfer process?
21. What was the most difficult part?
22. What sources of support did you find to be helpful and how?
23. Did you feel welcomed at College T? Why or why not?
24. At what point did you feel you were a College T student?
25. Did you have any concerns about transferring to College T?
26. Did you encounter any difficulty at the Port of Entry when travelling between ending one program at your old institution and the new one here?
27. Was the timeline for the transfer reasonable?

The Future

28. Where are you living? (on/off campus)?
29. What are your plans for your time at College T?
30. Do you think you will need support services here?
31. What are you planning to do to be a part of the College T community?
32. What is your future goal? Do you want to stay in the U.S. or go home?
33. Is there anything you are concerned about at the moment?
34. Is there anything you feel College T should be doing for our transfer students that we are not currently doing?
35. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER STUDENTS

Purpose: This guide is intended to provide direction for a semi-structured interview of international transfer students for the research study *Supporting the Unique Needs of International Transfer Students: An Action Research Study*. The interview will be conducted at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the second semester to document their experiences over their first year.

Interviewer

Hello again. Thank you for coming to meet with me again today. I'm very much looking forward to talking with you again. This should last about one hour again but if at any time you feel uncomfortable and wish to stop the interview, please just let me know.

1. How are your plans for your time at College T working out?
2. What class are you most interested in?
3. What class are you doing best in?
4. What do you think your GPA will be at the end of this semester?
5. Are you using any support resources here? What are they?
6. Are you part of any formal group here; for example, a student club?
7. Tell me a little about your friendship networks here?
8. Do you have a staff member or faculty member you are connected with? If so what is their role?
9. Tell me about your most positive experience so far at College T?
10. Have you had any negative experiences at College T?
11. What are your plans for your time at College T going forward?

12. Is there anything you are concerned about at the moment?
13. Is there anything you feel College T should be doing for our transfer students that we are not currently doing?
14. What have you done personally to smooth your transition to College T?
15. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX D

SURVEY ITEMS

Description of Study

Researcher's Statement

You are being asked to take part in the research study "Supporting the the Unique Needs of International Transfer Students: An Action Research Study" conducted by Jane O'Connor, a student at the University of Georgia who is also the Director of English as a Second Language here at College T. Dr. Wendy Ruona her doctorate advisor, will supervise this study. You are being invited

to participate as a current transfer student and your insights and experiences will be hugely beneficial to the study and the College T community.

Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. You may ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information before making a decision.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this Action Research Case Study is to identify the challenges that transfer students may experience and implement academic and social support based on these issues.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, please click on the link and take the survey. It should take only 10 minutes of your time. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this research. However, if you feel any discomfort or stress at any time when asked to describe your experiences you can withdraw from the study.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit for participating in this study other than the opportunity to contribute your thoughts and experiences for the benefit of future transfer students.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The data collected from your participation in the study will be completely anonymous. These data will be stored on the researcher's personal drive on her computer which can only be accessed with a password known only to the researcher.

If you have questions at any point you can contact the researcher or her supervising faculty member.

Researcher Contact Information: Jane O'Connor

Supervising Faculty Contact Information: Dr. Ruona

Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to: The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board
609 Boyd GSRC
Athens, GA 30602
(706) 542-3319 or irb@uga.edu

Background Information

1. When did you transfer to College T?

Other (please specify)

2. What is your current academic standing?

3. Are you an international student?

No

Yes (where are you from?)

4. What is your gender?

Female Male Transgender Other I prefer not to answer

5. Which of the following do you most identify with?

Transfer student

College T student

Domestic student

International student

Other (please specify)

Previous Institution

6. What is the name of your previous institution?

7. Did you transfer from another institution in the United States?

Yes

No (please say what country you transferred from)

8. Did you feel a part of the academic community at your last institution?

not at all slightly moderately very much so

9. Did you feel a part of the social community at your last institution?

not at all slightly moderately very much so

10. How satisfied were you in the following areas at your previous institution?

not at all slightly moderately very much so

Academic life

Social life

Co-curricular activities (clubs etc.)

Any comments?

Transferring to College T

11. Why did you choose to come to College T? Please check all that apply

I wanted a higher ranked school

I wanted more challenging classes

I like the area

I have family and/or friends here

It's better for my field of study

I wanted to make new friends

I wanted a fresh start

My parents wanted me to come

Financial aid package

Other (please specify)

12. Which of these concerns did you have when transferring to College T? Check all that apply

very concerned moderately concerned slightly concerned not concerned at all

The academic work would be difficult

There would be too much work

I wouldn't find friends

I would struggle with English (for non-native speakers)

Other (please specify)

Transfer Process

13. How welcomed did you feel when you arrived at College T ?
 not at all welcomed not very welcomed somewhat welcomed very welcomed
 Can you explain why or why not?

14. How helpful was College T in the transfer process?
 not at all helpful not very helpful somewhat helpful very helpful
 Any comments?

15. How helpful was the transfer student orientation?
 not at all helpful not very helpful somewhat helpful very helpful did not attend
 Any comments?

16. When did you feel a "College T student"?
 When I got my acceptance letter
 When I got my log in information
 When I arrived on campus
 At orientation
 When I enrolled in classes
 When I started classes
 I don't really feel a "College T student" Other (please specify)

College T - General

17. Where do you live?

18. Do you feel a part of the social community at College T?
 not at all slightly moderately very much
 Can you explain why you feel that way?

19. Do you feel a part of the academic community at College T?
 not at all slightly moderately very much
 Can you explain why you feel that way?

20. How satisfied are you now about your decision to come to College T?
 very dissatisfied dissatisfied satisfied very satisfied
 Any comments?

21. Have you had any negative experiences at College T?
 No Yes
 Could you share that experience?

22. How satisfied are you at College T in the following areas?
 not at all not very much yes very much so

Academic life

Social life

Co-curricula activities (clubs etc.)

Any comments?

23. Are you a part of any student clubs and/or organizations?

No Yes

What clubs and/or organizations?

24. What have been your main challenges since coming to College T? Please check all that apply

Workload

Difficulty of courses and assignments

Finding friends

Time management

Living in the South

Language skills (for non-native speakers)

Other (please specify)

Academics at College T

25. What happened to your overall GPA when you transferred?

decreased a lot decreased a little increased a little increased a lot

Any comments?

26. Please rate the following support resources at College T:

not at all helpful not very helpful somewhat helpful very helpful have not used

Instructor's office hours

Academic Advisors

Writing Center

Subject Tutors

Religious life

Career center

International Student Services

International Student Life Center

Student Health

Counseling Center

Pre-Health Advising

ESL Tutors

Other (please specify)

Social Life at College T

27. How many good friends do you have at College T (people you spend time with outside of the classroom)?

no friends at all few friends several friends a lot of friends

Any comments ?

28. Who are your friends? (check all that apply)

Students from my own country

American students

International students

My roommate

I don't really spend time with anyone

Other (please specify)

Fit

29. Is there a staff or faculty member at College T with whom you feel connected (Someone who gives you advice or support about academics or other matters)?

No Yes

Please say what their role is and how they support you

30. In general, do you think College T has the kind of environment that is welcoming to a transfer student?

not at all not really yes very much so

Any comments?

Transition

* 31. How well do you feel you have adjusted to life at College T?

very badly somewhat badly well very well

Any comments?

General

32. Are you planning on completing your UNDERGRADUATE academic career at College T?

Yes No

Any comments?

33. Are you applying/have you applied for the Business School?

Yes No

Any comments?

Finishing Up

34. What programs and services could be added to ease the transition to College T?
35. Based on your experience so far at College T, what advice would you give to incoming transfer students to help them adjust to their first year successfully?
36. Please share your future plans.
37. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?
38. Please provide your name and email address if you would be interested in participating in a focus group to further explore your experiences as a transfer student. Again any information shared will remain confidential.

Name

Email

APPENDIX E

SUPPLEMENTARY SURVEY ITEMS

35. Did you take the transition class?

Yes

No

Transition Class "No" portion of survey:

36. Why did you choose not to take the transition class?

It didn't fit my schedule

I was not interested in taking the class

Other (please specify)

37. Do you now wish that you had taken the class?

No

Yes

Please explain your answer

Transition Class "Yes":

38. Are you happy that you took this transition class?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer

39. If you had not been enrolled in the class by the OUE would you still have chosen to take it?

Yes

No

Comments

40. How did the class help your transition to College T?

41. Please rate the usefulness of the following sessions

Not at all useful Not very useful Somewhat helpful Very helpful

Class 1: The 4S System

Class 2: Student Clubs and Activities

Class 3: Academic Resources and Time Management

Class 4: Research and Internships
Class 5: Research Library
Class 6: Degree Planning - Useful Tools on Your Path
Class 7: Majors, Minors and Careers
Class 8: Summer Opportunities
Class 9: College T Museum
Class 10: Scholarships
Class 11: Life Balance
Class 12 : Reflecting and Looking Ahead
Any other comments

* 42. Would you have done the outside activities if they had not been a requirement?
Yes
No
Maybe

* 43. Are you happy now you were required to do the outside activities?
Yes
No
Please explain your answer

* 44. How likely would you be to recommend this class to an incoming transfer student?
Not at all likely Not very likely Somewhat likely Very likely
Any other comments

* 45. MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION: Please give any other comments about the class positive OR negative so we can further improve our transfer students' experience.