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THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE FOR CONDITIONALLY-ADMITTED STUDENTS USING THE LENS OF SCHLOSSBERG'S TRANSITION THEORY

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THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION FROM
HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE FOR CONDITIONALLY-ADMITTED STUDENTS
USING THE LENS OF SCHLOSSBERG'S TRANSITION THEORY

by

Samantha E. DeVilbiss

A DISSERTATION

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Under the Supervision of Professor James V. Griesen

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THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION FROM
HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE FOR CONDITIONALLY-ADMITTED STUDENTS
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Samantha Elizabeth DeVilbiss, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2014

Adviser: James V. Griesen

Higher education in the United States is both a public good, providing educated, critical-thinking, prepared, and productive citizens; as well as a private good, giving individuals opportunities to improve their financial situation and possibly their statuses in society. In order for these goods to be earned, students need to be retained by colleges and complete their degrees. However, many students, especially conditionally-admitted students, are not retained by colleges and universities. Further, there is a lack of qualitative research on the transitional experiences of conditionally-admitted students as well as a lack of studies utilizing Schlossberg's transition theory to make sense of these students' experiences. When colleges better understand the experiences, coping assets, and coping liabilities of their students, they will be better able to assist these students and retain them.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology was to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United

States through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. Using Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) as the theoretical framework and the phenomenological data collection and analysis process presented by Moustakas (1994), six themes characterized participants' transition experiences: (a) increasing independence, (b) intensifying demands and difficulty, (c) learning what works and what doesn't, (d) leaving loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life, (e) uncovering support, and (f) finding one's place. Additionally, textural descriptions and structural descriptions of each participant's transition experience are presented along with a composite textural-structural description of the transition from high school to college for this group of students. These findings could be used to help colleges and universities to understand more fully the transition experiences of traditional age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students. They could also help to inform student affairs professionals, university administrators, and faculty as they make policy and programming decisions related to conditionally-admitted student populations.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Throughout the years, many different purposes have been attributed to American education and to the attainment of a college degree, ranging from viewing educational institutions as warehouses for surplus workers and places to train future employees to places to foster personal empowerment and healthy social development (Apple, 1982; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Boyer, 1987; Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982; Cusick, 1992; de Lone, 1979; Fullan, 1991, 1993; Goodlad, 1979, 1984; Gutmann, 1987; Kozol, 1991; Labaree, 1997; Paris, 1995; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). One author who, to me, summarizes and categorizes the far-reaching purposes of higher education is Labaree. Labaree discusses what he views as the three goals of higher education in the United States that have competed for prominence throughout history: 1) democratic equality, 2) social efficiency, and 3) social mobility. Labaree explains the goal of democratic equality as a public good, where colleges prepare students to be productive members of a democratic society. He describes the social efficiency goal as another public good, where colleges are places that prepare students for the various careers we, as a society, need to have filled. The third goal of social mobility is viewed as a private good, where colleges assist individuals in a climb up the social and financial ladders through the attainment of a college degree and the professions that can be procured with such a degree.

While many might argue the specific purposes or goals of a higher education, the idea that a college education is important has become more and more prevalent in our society. This is illustrated by articles discussing the idea of “college for all”

(Rosenbaum, 1997) as well as President Obama declaring it a national priority to increase college attendance. Included in the president's rationale are filling the increased number of jobs that require a college degree, allowing degree-earners to earn a higher income, and returning the United States to the top of the list of higher education degree earners among other countries (White House, 2013). In fact, research has shown many private and public benefits to college degree attainment (Hess & Squire, 2007; Perna, 2005; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Paulsen, 2001; Perna, 2005; Perna, Steele, Woda, & Hibbert, 2005).

When people think of the benefits of a college education, they often think in terms of money. An individual who earns a Bachelor's Degree will, on average, earn more than individuals with only a high school education or even with an Associate's Degree, certificate, or some college completion without degree. In fact, on average, those who earn baccalaureates will earn one million dollars more than individuals with only a high school education over the course of their lifetimes (Hess & Squire, 2007). However, there are other personal benefits as well. In the short-term, these individuals will experience pleasure from things like learning new information and skills, participating in extracurricular activities, and attending cultural events (Perna, 2005). In the long-term, these individuals will enjoy benefits including higher lifetime earnings, participating in a more fulfilling work environment, enjoying better health and a longer life, and experiencing lower rates of unemployment, among other benefits (Perna).

Additionally, college-educated individuals provide a great amount of benefits to society. A college education positively influences the following.

- receptivity, inclination, and adaptability to change
- the development of attitudes in support of public programs
- increased awareness and involvement in political affairs
- a citizenry with greater cognitive, emotional, and moral development
- increased participation in voting
- greater involvement in public service and volunteer work
- increased charitable giving
- lower unemployment
- a reduction in criminal activities
- improved health for both educated parents and their children
- lower public expenditures for unemployment, welfare, Medicaid, incarceration, etc., which would save the government great amounts of money
- lower poverty rates

(Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Paulsen, 2001; Perna, 2005; Perna, Steele, Woda, & Hibbert, 2005). Further, according to Paulsen, a citizenry with higher education leads to innovations on the job that lead to increased productivity, an increase in the number of jobs available, and general economic growth. Meanwhile, based on their review of research on economic growth, Leslie and Brinkman (1988) found that 15-40% of economic growth in the United States can be attributed to investments in education.

Statement of the Problem

Due to all the individual and societal benefits a college education produces, it is clearly important for citizens to earn degrees and for colleges to retain these students

once they are accepted and enrolled. However, many students leave college without ever earning a degree. According to the National Center for Higher Education Management System (NCHEMS, 2013), only 55.5% of students earn a baccalaureate degree within six years of starting their college education. NCHEMS further reports that only 77.1% of students return for their second year of college. This means that of the 44.5% of students who fail to earn a college degree within six years, over half of them, 22.9% are lost within their first year. This indicates that more needs to be done to retain these students in their first year.

This study is not the first to point out the need to increase retention in the first year. In fact, a search in *Dissertation Abstracts International* using the keywords “first year experience” and “college” produces over 2,000 results. Further, there is a plethora of articles and books devoted to the first year experience (i.e. Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005; Colella & Schweitzer, 2004; Seidman, 2005; Ward-Roof, 2010; and many more). Additionally, the University of South Carolina hosts a National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition that holds conferences every year and produces publications including *The Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*.

However, while much work has been produced on the first year in general, there is a lack of deep qualitative research on the transition experience of today’s student, as well as a lack of research on different subsets of the population. One subset of the college population that is consistently retained at rates lower than the general student population is the set of conditionally-admitted students. According to Noel-Levitz (2013), just looking at retention rates from first semester to second semester, rates for

conditionally-admitted students were markedly lower than for non-conditionally-admitted students for all types of four-year institutions, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Persistence Rates from Term 1 to Term 2, 2011-2012 Academic Year

	Four-Year Private Institutions		Four-Year Public Institutions	
	Conditionally-Admitted First-Year Undergraduates	Non-Conditionally-Admitted First-Year Undergraduates	Conditionally-Admitted First-Year Undergraduates	Non-Conditionally-Admitted First-Year Undergraduates
25 th Percentile	66.7%	85.4%	75.4%	85.9%
Median	78.4%	90.8%	84.4%	89.5%
75 th Percentile	88.9%	95.1%	90.9%	93.0%

Note. Percentile ranks describe the selectivity of the institution. Institutions with the lowest selectivity, at the 25th percentile, have a median ACT for their entering freshmen class of 21 or below. Institutions at the mid-range of selectivity have a median ACT of 23 or above. The most selective institutions, those at the 75th percentile, have a median ACT of 24 or above.

Heaney and Fisher (2011) state that provisionally-admitted students feel less confident in their ability to succeed in academic settings and need additional help in developing habits of mind and behavior conducive to college success, while Cohen and Brawer (2003) assert that at-risk students are less likely to persist than traditional students when faced with obstacles. Further, the population of conditionally-admitted students includes a disproportionately high percentage of minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, making the increased retention of conditionally-admitted students important to the retention of these other groups and to guaranteeing access to a higher education (Knopp, 1995; Hrabowski III, 2005; Arendale, 2001; Boylan & Saxon,

1998; Dalaker, 1999; Heaney & Fisher). As a result, Larin and Hyllegard (1996) and McCabe and Day (1998) assert that failing to retain these students can harm the economic prosperity of entire states and regions. These data indicate an increased obligation to understand the characteristics and needs of this population and to produce programming to better fit their experiences and needs.

Additionally, educators and authors striving to ease the transition and increase retention of first year students, have drawn from a number of different student development theories, including, but certainly not limited to, psychological development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Sanford, 1967), cognitive development (Perry, 1970; King & Kitchener, 2002), moral development (Kohlberg, 1976), holistic development (Keegan, 1982; Baxter Magolda, 2001), typologies (Myers, 1980; Holland, 1985; Kolb, 1976), campus environments (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Strange & Banning, 2001; Astin, 1993; Astin, 1984; Schlossberg, 1989), and student success (Tinto, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). However, one theory that has not been systematically integrated into an understanding and a way to improve the first year experience and first-year retention is Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Due to its creation with "adults" in mind, Schlossberg's transition model is generally used to understand adults transitioning between careers, relationships, education, etc., but is not usually applied to 18 or 19 year olds transitioning into college. In fact, taking the *Dissertation Abstracts International* search discussed above, which yielded over 2,000 results, and adding the search terms "Schlossberg's transition theory" or "Schlossberg's transition model", only twelve results remain. These results include examinations of community colleges, nontraditional/older students, transfer students, and

some specific populations including veterans, students with learning disabilities, and those in certain degree programs. It is my belief that a deep understanding of the transition experience for traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students attending a four-year institution viewed through the lens of Schlossberg's transition model will greatly increase our ability to aid these students through their first year of college and retain them into their second year.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology was to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United States (to be referred to as Southeastern University or SU) through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory.

Theoretical Base

The theoretical base through which I set out to view and make meaning of the data I collected for this study is Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1985b; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). Briefly described, Schlossberg views transitions in an integrated way. As she understands it, we are all involved in a transition at any point in time, whether we are moving in, moving through, or moving out of a situation. Sometimes we can even be in different places in various transitions at one time. For example, if I accept a job and move to another state with my partner, I would be *moving in* to my role in the new job and my new state, possibly moving into new friendships and coworker relations as well.

I would be *moving out* of the role I had at my last job, possibly moving out of friendships and relationships with coworkers, established routines, and expectations. Because I am moving with my partner, I would be *moving through* my relationship.

While the moving in and moving out positions are typically easy for most to understand, it sometimes takes individuals a little more effort to understand what moving through involves. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) describe this time as one of groping for new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions; a neutral zone or period of emptiness and confusion; a cycle of renewal; and a time of hope and spirituality. So essentially, when one is not moving in or out of a situation, Schlossberg views this as a time when we are revitalizing our situation or getting bored with it. Because students transitioning from high school to college, are inevitably involved in multiple stages of various transitions, I chose to listen for cues to tell me if they focused more on one part of the transition cycle, such as moving in or moving out, than the others.

In order to assist someone in successfully navigating through a transition, Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) envision three steps: 1) Approaching Transitions – This involves identifying the transition and how much it will change a person's life as well as where the individual is in the transition process. 2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System. 3) Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources. The resources that Schlossberg describes fall under four categories, and in any given situation, can be viewed as assets to a successful transition or liabilities, depending on how they are viewed by the individual and how they assist in her transition or make the transition more difficult.

The 4 S System includes examining the situation, the self, support, and strategies. An understanding of the situation includes an examination of elements such as the trigger for the transition, the timing, the source or level of control over the situation, whether a role change is involved, the duration of the transition, previous experience with similar transitions, concurrent stress, and one's assessment of the transition as positive or negative. An understanding of the self in terms of coping assets and liabilities includes an understanding of one's personal characteristics and psychological resources, including socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity/culture as well as psychological resources, including ego development, outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience. Support can be varied and can include family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, strangers, organizations, institutions, etc. Lastly, strategies can vary greatly as well, but can be viewed in three categories, according to Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012). Responses that modify the situation to alter the source of strain include negotiation, optimistic action, self-reliance versus advice seeking, and exercise of potency versus helpless resignation. Responses that control the meaning of the problem to cognitively neutralize the threat include positive comparisons, selective ignoring, and substitution of rewards. Finally, responses that help the individual manage stress once it has occurred include emotional discharge, self-assertion, and passive forbearance. The ratio of assets to liabilities helps to explain “why individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times” (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 57).

Grand Tour Question

How do traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students experience the transition from high school to college?

Research Questions

1. What coping assets do traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students describe?
2. What coping liabilities do traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students describe?
3. On what phase(s) of the high school to college transition do traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students focus: moving in, moving through, or moving out?
4. In what ways do the students describe the university as helping or hindering their transition?
5. How can institutions of higher education better assist traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students in their transition from high school to college, taking into account their coping assets and liabilities?

Definitions of Terms

Access – Access means the accessibility of higher education, the ability to gain admittance, especially for minority students and students of low socioeconomic status.

At-Risk Student – An at-risk student is a student considered to be at risk of leaving an institution of higher education without completing a degree. Students can be termed at-risk for a number of reasons, including the following statuses: low socioeconomic, first generation, minority, conditional-admit, remedial, and more. Because different

universities classify students in different ways, the terms conditionally-admitted, remedial, developmental, underprepared, and even at-risk are used in different universities and different studies to discuss comparable groups of students. For this reason, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Attrition – Attrition is the process of losing or failing to continue to enroll students at the same institution from one semester to the next and from one year to the next. Attrition can be viewed as the opposite of retention.

Conditionally-Admitted Student – A conditionally-admitted student is a student who is admitted to a college or university, but on a conditional basis, because he or she fails to meet all admission standards. Conditional admission status means different things at different institutions and could be the result of the student having a low high school GPA; class rank; and/or SAT, ACT, or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. The student could also have failed to take a class in high school, or failed to take the proper number of classes in a certain subject, that is a standard for admission at the university. In the context of this study, a conditionally-admitted student means a student who failed to earn a minimum of 440 on each sub-section of the SAT or a minimum of 17 for English on the ACT, 18 for Reading, and 19 for Math. Because different universities classify students in different ways, the terms conditionally-admitted, remedial, developmental, underprepared, and even at-risk are used in different universities and different studies to discuss comparable groups of students. For this reason, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Coping Assets – Coping assets are any resources as described by Schlossberg under the categories of situation, self, support, or strategies, which assist an individual in coping with, or successfully managing, a transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Coping Liabilities – Coping liabilities are any resources as described by Schlossberg under the categories of situation, self, support, or strategies, which inhibit an individual's ability to cope with, or successfully manage, a transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Developmental Class– A developmental class is a course a student is required to take before he or she will be allowed to take related college material. Students typically test into developmental classes through standardized tests where students fail to score at a level that would qualify them for college level coursework.

Developmental Student – The term “developmental student” is a way of referring to students required to take remedial/developmental classes before they will be allowed to take some or all “college level” coursework. Status as a developmental student is typically based on standardized test scores that demonstrate the student needs further growth in a certain subject before he or she will be able to successfully complete related college material. It is seen as a more positive term than “remedial student.” Because different universities classify students in different ways, the terms conditionally-admitted, remedial, developmental, underprepared, and even at-risk are used in different universities and different studies to discuss comparable groups of students. For this reason, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this study.

First Year Experience – The first year experience is a term that has been widely used to discuss the experiences of first-year college students and the programming designated

specifically for them. In some institutions, the first year experience is the title of a series of programs, an office focusing on the needs of first year students, or a seminar class designed specifically for first-year students.

First-Time, Full-Time – This descriptor of students indicates a discussion of students who are attending college on a full-time basis for the first time after graduating high school.

In order to be full-time, students must be enrolled in at least 12 credit hours during a fall or spring semester. In order for this to be students’ “first-time;” though students can already have college credit through devices such as dual enrollment (DE), Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Advance International Certificate of Education (AICE), etc.; the student must be in his or her first semester of full-time coursework after graduating from high school.

Persistence – Persistence is the process of continuing through college until a degree is earned.

Programming – Throughout this study, the terms programming and programs are used to discuss any interventions performed by the university, outside of classroom experiences, intended to produce educational or developmental benefits and/or increase retention of students.

Remedial Student – A remedial student is a student who is required to take remedial/developmental classes before he or she will be allowed to take some or all “college level” coursework. Status as a remedial student is typically based on standardized test scores that demonstrate the student needs further growth in a certain subject before she will be able to successfully complete related college material. Because different universities classify students in different ways, the terms conditionally-admitted,

remedial, developmental, underprepared, and even at-risk are used in different universities and different studies to discuss comparable groups of students. For this reason, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Remediation – Remediation is the process of removing the condition under which a student was conditionally admitted. Depending on the situation, remediation can involve taking and passing one or more certain classes, earning a required score on a placement test, or something else, as determined by the university.

Retention – When discussed in this study, retention is the process of retaining or continuing to enroll students at the same institution from one semester to the next and from one year to the next. Retention is often discussed in terms of the percentage of students who were enrolled at the institution during their freshmen year, who enrolled at the same institution for their sophomore year. Retention can also be discussed looking at the percentage of students who continue onto their junior and senior year as well as students who are retained from one semester to another.

Student Affairs – Student Affairs is a professional field of individuals working in staff roles in institutions of higher education with a focus to support the academic mission of the institution and encourage the holistic development of each student.

Traditional-age Students – Traditional-age students are students who are the “traditional” age to graduate from high school, and move directly to college. Often, a traditional-age student is considered to be a student who is below the age of 25. However, because this study focused on first-year students coming directly from high school to college, in this study, traditional-age students primarily means 18 or 19 year olds who graduated from high school between May and June 2013 and began college enrollment in August 2013.

Transition – In this study, the word transition will mean a process, not an action or occurrence. As described by Schlossberg, the term “transition” will be understood as an integrative process, involving moving in, moving through, and moving out of the changes one experiences throughout life.

Underprepared Student – A student who is described to be underprepared is typically remedial in one or more subjects; has low standardized or placement test scores; or has a low high school profile in terms of courses completed, GPA, or class rank. Because different universities classify students in different ways, the terms conditionally-admitted, remedial, developmental, underprepared, and even at-risk are used in different universities and different studies to discuss comparable groups of students. For this reason, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions from which I entered my research are those associated with Constructivism. From this perspective – comes an understanding that instead of one ultimate reality existing, multiple realities are constructed by each individual based on his or her own life experiences and understandings. Due to the constructed nature of knowledge, the truth and knowledge lay in the experiences and understandings of the participants. In order to gain this knowledge, I needed to get close to the participants and truly work to comprehend their own understandings. With this in mind, while I used Schlossberg’s transition model as a lens through which to view and understand the data, I worked to pay attention to individual voices and the comprehensive whole of the data and note when the theory did not seem to fit the situation. Lastly, in terms of purpose, while I do hope that this study will open the door for more research and

additional considerations in programming for the first year experience, my primary goal was to describe and understand the experiences of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students and to try to pass that understanding along.

In addition to constructivism, there are other assumptions with which I entered this research. One such assumption is that college is a worthwhile endeavor and that it should be a goal of colleges to retain students, for colleges' own purposes as well as for the benefit of individual students and society as a whole. Another assumption underlying this study is that student characteristics as well as their experiences in college affect whether they will be retained and persist to graduation. A further assumption is that all students struggle with the transition from high school to college, though to widely varying degrees. As a result, an additional underlying assumption is that colleges should do everything reasonable to better understand their students and their experiences and to produce appropriate programming to assist these students with the transition as well as possible. The unspoken assumption here is that when we better understand our students, we can create programming that is more directly applicable and, therefore, more beneficial. Lastly, I approached my research with the assumptions that my methodology would address my research questions, that I would ask the right questions and interpret the participants' experiences appropriately, and that the participants would be honest and insightful.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that address how the study will be narrowed in scope (Creswell, 1994), so as to preclude the author from asserting that the findings of the current study are true for all people, in all times, and in all places (Bryant, 2004). Due to

the narrow focal point of my study: traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted college students, making the transition from high school to college, there are a number of ways in which the study was directed so as to not focus on all students seeking a college education. First of all, each student participating in this study was “traditional-age.” Because each of these students were 18 or 19 years of age at the beginning of the study and graduated from high school within the time frame of May 2013 to June 2013 immediately preceding beginning college at SU in August 2013, the experiences described could be different from those of older (or younger) students, students who have taken a year or more off between high school and college, and students who transfer in from another institution of higher education. Further, because all students who participated in the study were conditionally admitted, their experiences may be different than students admitted without conditions or qualifications. Also, I only recruited students who were in-state residents and who had moved away from home to attend college. Students living at home with parents or guardians and out-of-state students might experience different transition issues. Additionally, students attending a private institution, a two-year institution, or one that varies in size from the mid-sized institution where this study took place may experience different transition experiences than those described in this study. Students attending school outside of the southeastern region of the United States may also experience different things. Furthermore, students attending schools that differ from the case study school in institutional climate, programming, and available resources may also experience their transitions differently.

Limitations

Limitations, on the other hand, are the factors that limit the ability to generalize the findings of the study completely as a result of the methodology the author chooses to use (Bryant, 2004). This study, by collecting data through interviews, relied heavily on self-reported data. Because these individuals may view and make meaning of their experiences, their resources, and even various words differently than others going through similar transitions; the experiences and meaning this study produced might vary if different participants were included, even different participants at the same institution, filling the same general student characteristics. Relatedly, the small number of students who participated in this study also limits the range of experiences and understandings, and the ability to generalize the findings of this study to other students. Additionally, the time of data collection could have an influence on the data and on the themes produced. Because data collection took place during the students' first fall semester on campus, the transition was a very fresh experience, in which little was forgotten. However, the students' perceptions and understandings of their transitions did not have the benefit of hindsight or the lessons learned later in their college careers. Further, in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument, making meaning of the data. For this reason, my own assumptions and understandings affected the themes this study produced. Lastly, other modes of data collection, including participant observation, and other forms of qualitative research designs could produce other results.

Significance

The goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of the transition experiences of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted college

students. With a better understanding of these students' experiences, their coping assets, and their coping liabilities, institutions of higher education can do more to meet these students where they are, to capitalize on the resources with which students enter college, and to assist students in strengthening these and other resources. With a better understanding of these students and a stronger ability to program with their assets and liabilities in mind, as well as with Schlossberg's transition model in mind, students may be better retained and more likely to persist to graduation. Not only will students benefit from an easier transition, but with intentional programming, they can be better equipped to navigate future transitions, including the transition from college into the work world. Further, instructors and administrators interacting with students who are able to navigate the transition from high school to college in a healthy way will likely find students more able to engage in their classes and other college experiences. Additionally, with increased degree attainment, both the individual students and society as a whole will reap the benefits discussed above. Colleges will have more happy alumni, and students will gain many transferrable skills. While the current study focused on conditionally-admitted students, it is likely that some of the themes discovered will apply to non-conditionally admitted students as well, or will, at the very least, provide a starting point for future research into ways higher education professionals can use Schlossberg's transition model to understand and assist traditional-age students in their transition from high school to college, and ultimately increase their retention and persistence.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United States through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. This chapter discusses related literature necessary to give the reader a background on which to understand the current study. The chapter touches on the purpose of transition programming in higher education; student transition issues; applicable related theories, including Chickering's Seven Vectors of Development, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes model, and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure; the place of developmental/remedial education in higher education; elements of developmental/remedial education; outcomes of developmental/remedial education; select related research, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches; and the need for the current study.

The Purpose of Transition Programming in Higher Education

Gardner and Jewler (2001) make their stance on the purpose of transition programming, and the actions of a college or university in general, clear when stating, "All students should be able to succeed in their first year of college. As educators and scholars, it is our responsibility to provide dedicated support, customized to a variety of students' unique needs" (p. vii). This stance indicates that the responsibility to increase student success rates during the first year, as measured in terms of grades and GPAs, course completion, and retention, as well as personal growth and development; lies with the faculty and staff within institutions of higher education. Further, Gardner and Jewler

make it clear that it is not enough to create transition programming for some college students, but rather we must create effective transition programming that can reach all the students an institution allows through its doors, including conditionally-admitted students, remedial or developmental students, and at-risk students – labels that are used differently from one institution to another and from one research article to another to describe the same group of students. Smith and Brackin (2003) continue this sentiment by stating that the primary goal of a college orientation program is to facilitate the adjustment and success of entering students. For this reason, it is important to understand our students in terms of their strengths and needs in order to program for them most effectively, demonstrating a need for the type of research reported here.

A number of sources make it clear that college student success is largely determined by experiences during the freshmen year (Wolcott, 2009; Smith & Bracken, 2003; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Gardner (2001) goes so far as to say that students decide within the first few weeks of school whether they will pursue higher education seriously. This idea makes it that much more important that we understand our students and their needs so as to make the most of their first few weeks on campus. Gardner and Hansen (1993) as well as Twale (1989) assert that by giving students a “good start” to college, residual benefits will include enhanced retention, a positive atmosphere for new students, and key skills students will need to begin their studies and new lives. As a result of the understood connection between the first year experience and retention, more schools have begun working to improve the transition experience for students. For example, two surveys conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), entitled *Campus Trends*, found that 37% of institutions of higher education in the

United States were “taking steps to improve the first year” in 1987 (El Khawas, 1987). However, through the course of the first year experience movement, that percent had increased to 83% by 1995 (El Khawas, 1995).

Further, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2006) lays out standards for orientation programming to function, including the following student learning and development outcome domains: intellectual growth, effective communication, enhanced self-esteem, realistic self-appraisal, clarified values, career choices, leadership development, healthy behavior, meaningful interpersonal relationships, independence, social responsibility, collaboration, satisfying and productive lifestyle, appreciating diversity, spiritual awareness, and personal and educational goals. Clearly orientation and transition programming is tasked with a lot, and the better colleges and universities can understand their students, including their strengths, weaknesses, and where they are in their transition process; the better the institution can create programming to fulfill these outcomes.

Student Transition Issues

With so many institutions focusing so much on the first year experience, it is fair to wonder about what transition issues orientation and transition programming are meant to assist students. Those of us who work regularly with first year students can run through a list of such issues. Additionally, a number of books have been written to help students work through these issues, whether on their own or as a text in a transition course (i.e. Nist-Olejnuk & Holschuh, 2011; Downing, 2011; Cohen, 2011). These sources cover topics such as defining success; accepting responsibility; working towards interdependence; developing self-awareness and life-long learning; gaining emotional

intelligence; managing alcohol and drugs; maintaining health; managing money; asking for help; developing relationships with professors and understanding their expectations; getting involved on campus; managing time; finding and maintaining motivation; selecting a major and choosing classes; finding oneself and one's place on campus; grappling with homesickness; meeting people and making friends; managing friends and relationships back home; living with roommates; managing stress; and succeeding in class: using a syllabus, concentrating, understanding one's learning style, discovering appropriate study strategies, evaluating sources of information, note taking, active reading, committing material to memory, researching and presenting, and preparing for and taking various types of tests. These are all issues with which students are dealing for the first time or in a very different way than in the past – all issues that could limit students' abilities to successfully complete their first year and return for their second.

Much research and many articles have addressed the transition issues of first-year students as well. Robotham and Julian (2006) list such stressors as exams, time demands, financial pressures, new responsibilities, increased academic workload, new relationships, career decisions, fear of failure, and parental pressure. Hoyt (1999) expresses that these competing demands on students' time and attention, such as conflicts between work, personal, and family issues, can lead to a lack of academic commitment and social participation in education, ultimately leading to attrition. Extreme homesickness and separation anxiety can also lead to problems including nightmares, refusal to go to class, headaches, stomachaches, nausea, vomiting, stress, anxiety, depression, obsessionality, and loss of memory; which make it more difficult to cope with normal transition issues, when students lack effective coping strategies and do not

seek help (Claborn & Kane, 2012; Fisher & Hood, 1987; Flett, Endler, & Besser, 2009; Ollendick, Lease, Cooper, 1993). As a result, support systems are very important, including families (Dominick, Stevens, & Smith, 2006; Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, Dale, & Pipkin, 1994; Arulrajah & Harun, 2000; Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, Boswell, 2006) and precollege as well as college friends (Bonner, 2001; Ranney & Troop-Gordon, 2012; Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, Boswell; Norris & Mounts, 2010). In fact, in Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, and Madsen's study (1999) the biggest predictor of attrition was social isolation. Komives and Woodard (2003) as well as Tinto (2006) also support this idea by arguing that the risk of student departure increases if students do not have the skills necessary to become socially integrated nor does the institution create or promote policies and programs to foster social integration. Relatedly, Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington (1986) state that both academic and social integration consistently have positive effects on retention and completion of degree.

Applicable Related Theories

With all of the above in mind, it is important to include a brief discussion of a psychosocial development theory related to college students and many of the transition issues they experience as discussed above – Chickering's Seven Vectors of Development, as well as Schlossberg's Transition Theory and two theories related to retention: Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes Model and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. These last three theories are not only linked to the above discussion, but also served as underlying background for this study.

Chickering's Seven Vectors of Development.

In the second edition of *Education and Identity*, Chickering and Reisser (1993) discuss the goals of their psychosocial development theory, Chickering's vectors of development, as well as the goals of the current book in stating that the piece "argues for policies and practices to create higher education environments that will foster broad-based development of human talent and potentials" (p. xi). The authors' stance after reading widely on the purpose and outcomes of higher education is that the unifying purpose for higher education is "human development, in all its complexity and oneriness" (p. xv). As a result, the authors relied heavily on Pascarella and Terenzini's synthesis (1991) of more than 2,600 research studies on the impact of college on students as well as other literature to identify and describe the different elements of development through which they see students moving and through which institutions of higher education can assist.

The vectors are not traditional stages of development where one needs to be tackled before the next can be addressed. Instead, students could grapple with several, or even all, of the vectors at one time, though one or a few are usually more salient than the others to a student at any particular point in time. The seven vectors Chickering and Reisser (1993) discuss, each with their own direction and magnitude are as follows: (1) developing competence (viewed in three dimensions – intellectual, interpersonal, and physical), (2) managing emotions, (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (5) establishing identity, (6) developing purpose, and (7) developing integrity.

This theory is a favorite of the college student affairs community, as student issues can usually be classified into one of the above categories, legitimizing the struggle for the student and the appropriateness of faculty and staff aiding students through the developmental process. As such, issues that students go through during their transitions, including those listed above can be classified into Chickering's vectors, especially into the first three vectors. All issues related to learning how to study and do well in a class are related to developing intellectual competence. Learning how to interact with faculty and staff and meet new people are related to developing interpersonal competence. Concerns about physical health such as the freshmen 15 and drugs and alcohol are related to developing physical competence. Issues related to stress and homesickness are related to managing emotions. Things like managing money and managing time are related to developing autonomy, while asking for help is related to moving towards interdependence. Considerations of forming relationships with others are related to developing mature interpersonal relationships. Meanwhile, concepts related to discovering oneself and one's place on campus as well as getting involved on campus are related to establishing identity, while selecting a major and identifying career goals are related to developing purpose. Developing integrity might be the hardest to spot in transition issues, but can be related to academic integrity and standing up to friends, among other things.

A discussion of this model is included here because it does coincide with the transition issues presented above, and did serve as an underlying background when interviewing study participants. Because this theory is one that comes to mind when working with students on a regular basis as a student affairs professional, it is important

that readers have an understanding of it as a theory and its relation to the field as well as the current work.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory, typically categorized as a theory of adult development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) and initially targeted towards counseling professionals, "provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time" (pp. 212-213). Schlossberg (1984) identifies a primary goal of her theory as operationalizing variability, or rather, developing a framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they need to cope with the "ordinary and extraordinary process of living" (p. vii). Schlossberg's theory (1981) represents a conceptual integration of, and expansion on, existing theory and research and drew heavily "on the work of others" (p. 3), including D. J. Levinson (1978), Neugarten (1979), and Lowenthal and Chiriboga (1975). Over the years, Schlossberg's model has continued to develop as she integrates the ideas of other theorists and researchers as well as the critiques of her own theory.

In Schlossberg's earliest extended description of her conceptualization of her theory of transition (1981), Schlossberg described her model as a vehicle for "analyzing human adaptation to transition" (p. 2), stating that adaptation is affected by the interaction of three sets of variables: (1) the individual's perception of the transition, (2) characteristics of the pretransition and posttransition environments, and (3) characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition; where each set of variables could include components that might be considered assets, liabilities, a mix of the two, or neutral in

their influence on the ability of the individual to cope with a particular transition. By the time Schlossberg introduced her first book on the topic, *Counseling Adults in Transition* (1984), she had reconceptualized her model as dealing with the “response to transition” because “adaptation” might not always be achieved. This work placed her theory in the context of other transition theories, provided programmatic examples for application, and linked the theory to Egan’s (1982) helping model.

A few years later, Schlossberg released a popular press discussion of her theory, *Overwhelmed: Coping with Life’s Ups and Downs* (1989b), which integrated significant modifications to her theory. At this point, Schlossberg began presenting the transition process as having three components: approaching change, taking stock, and taking charge. Within the section on taking stock, Schlossberg introduced the 4 S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies as a reframe of her previous discussion of coping resources characterized by the transition, individual, and environment. Additionally, the taking charge section introduced the terminology of “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out.” All of these modifications presented in *Overwhelmed* were also incorporated into Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman’s second edition of *Adults in Transition* (1995), along with a section linking the theory to Cormier and Hackney’s (1993) counseling model, as opposed to Egan’s (1982) model. The third and the fourth editions (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) continue to discuss the theory in the context of other transition theories and to discuss application of the theory, while also noting an increased importance of the global community, the continuing impact of technology, and the importance of understanding cultural diversity and spirituality.

In their discussion of theory related to the field of student affairs, Evans, et al.

(2010) says the following about Schlossberg's Transition theory:

The framework is comprehensive in scope, highly integrative of other theoretical contributions, and conceptually and operationally sound. The authors have taken a vast array of writings and gleaned the most important concepts from them, added their insights, and created a dynamic model that can provide a solid foundation for practice that is responsive to both commonalities and idiosyncrasies. Schlossberg's openness to criticism and her willingness to revise and extend her theory since its inception have resulted in a practical resource for assisting college students in dealing with change. (p. 225)

However, while the authors note a handful of studies that have applied Schlossberg's Transition Theory to groups such as men who lost their jobs at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) (Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980), university clerical workers (Charner & Schlossberg, 1986), transitions related to geographical mobility (Schlossberg, 1981), and even adult college learners (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989); Evans, et al. (2010) assert that "research studies supporting its validity are scant, particularly in higher education" (p. 225) and that "until further research is conducted, however, it is impossible to affirm that the transition process occurs in the manner in which Schlossberg and her colleagues have outlined it" (pp. 225-226). Evans, et al. declare that both quantitative and qualitative studies on Schlossberg's transition theory are needed, but caution that quantitative work might be difficult due to the lack of measurement tools available to assess the variables Schlossberg discusses related to transitions. They state that "qualitative research might present a better place to start in that transitions could be viewed holistically, as perceived by individuals experiencing them" (p. 226). Evans, et al. also call for more research related to marginalized student populations "to increase our understanding of, and ability to assist with, various

transitions that these students experience while moving into, through, and out of our higher education settings” (p. 226). This is exactly what this study set out to do.

Astin’s Input-Environment-Outcomes model.

The Input-Environment-Outcomes model, put together by Alexander Astin to serve as a conceptual guide for studying college persistence, is regarded as one of the first attempts to explain student persistence (Crissman Ishler & Upcraft, 2005), and is based on data initially collected from undergraduates during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Astin, 1993). Astin set out to correct for the methodological and data limitations he saw in publications on college impact to that time that relied primarily on limited-term data collected at one site, by relying on multi-institutional, longitudinal data for his study (Astin). Astin put out his first book on the I-E-O model in 1977. By 1993, Astin described his study as the “largest ongoing study of the American Higher Education system, with longitudinal data covering some 500,000 students and a national sample of more than 1,300 institutions of all types” (p. 4). The purpose of this model is to “assess the impact of various environmental experiences by determining whether students grow or change differently under varying environmental conditions” (p. 7) and is based on the commonsense principle that student success is a function of who students were before college and what happened to them after they enrolled.

Astin’s model hypothesizes that students enter college with a pre-established set of characteristics that influence their views and how they experience college. Astin terms these characteristics *inputs*. Astin (1993) identifies 146 possible input, or precollege, variables including high school grades, admission test scores, race, ethnicity, age, gender, marital status, religious preference, income, parental level of education, and reasons for

attending college, among many other things. “The consideration of input characteristics when assessing student retention helps to understand the influence of students’ backgrounds and characteristics on their ability to persist” (Crissman Ishler & Upcraft, 2005, p. 30).

Astin (1993) also identifies 192 environmental variables related to the second premise of his model that might influence student success. Astin organizes these variables into eight categories: (a) institutional characteristics (including elements such as type and size), (b) student peer group characteristics (such as socioeconomic status, academic preparation, values, attitudes, etc.), (c) faculty characteristics (including teaching styles and values), (d) curriculum, (e) financial aid, (f) major field of choice, (g) place of residence (i.e. residence hall, apartment living, Greek housing, living at home), and (h) student involvement (including hours spent studying, number of classes, participation in extracurriculars, and more).

The final component of Astin’s (1993) model is outcomes. Outcomes represent the effects of college, by examining student characteristics after exposure to the college environment. Astin identifies 82 outcomes and classifies them into five categories, including (a) satisfaction with the collegiate environment, (b) academic cognition, (c) career development, (d) academic achievement, and (e) retention.

While Astin’s model is obviously one based on and supporting quantitative research methodologies, it influenced the current study in a number of ways. First of all, Astin’s work has highlighted a plethora of student and college characteristics as well as outcomes to which all college researchers, should be attuned. Many of these characteristics, especially the personal characteristics, are addressed in Schlossberg’s

Transition Model as well. Secondly, Astin's model has served as the basis for a number of studies that have informed this work as well as the work of many others. Lastly, the premise for Astin's I-E-O model, that the characteristics with which students enter college combined with their experiences during college produce the outcomes with which they leave college, is in line with my personal beliefs and assumptions as well as with Schlossberg's Transition Model. Schlossberg's model focuses a lot on the characteristics and experiences with which individuals enter a transition; however, her model was designed to better enable counselor's to help individuals take stock of and strengthen their resources. As a result, the integration of Schlossberg's model into intentional programming, already utilizing Astin's model, would more completely enable colleges and universities to tailor the environment to students in an effort to increase desired outcomes.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure.

According to Crissman Ishler and Upcraft (2005):

While Astin's model was helpful in explaining the variables that influence student persistence, it was Tinto (1975), building on the work of Spady (1970), who delineated the nature of the interrelationships between and among these variables, ultimately resulting in direct, indirect, and total effects of each factor. Tinto was also the first to address the reasons for, magnitude of, and mediating aspects of persistence that Astin's model did not explore. (p. 30)

Instead of Astin's three-component model, Tinto's model (1993) focuses on at least five categories which lead to the outcome – either to persist until graduation or to depart college prior to completion of degree: (a) pre-entry attributes (including family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling), (b) goals/commitments (intentions, goal and institutional commitments, external commitments), (c) institutional experiences

(incorporating academic performance and faculty and staff interactions into the academic system and incorporating extracurricular activities and peer group interactions into the social system), (d) integration (both academic integration and social integration), and (e) goals/commitments for a second time.

According to Tinto (1993), if a student has the ability to make the initial transition to college, staying in college is dependent on the incorporation of the student into the intellectual and social communities of the institution. Tinto asserts that while some departures are involuntary, most are initiated by what the student views as an insurmountable problem, which is often related to the student's perception of not belonging to or not being involved with the institutional community. Tinto argues that both intellectual and social integration are essential to student retention and that the institution shares the responsibility for helping first-year students achieve academic and social integration.

Tinto (1993) theorizes that students enter college with certain characteristics and skills that affect their initial commitment to their educational goals and the institution. This commitment is then increased or decreased based on the quality and quantity of their academic and social experiences. If students experience positive and rewarding academic and social experiences, they will be integrated into the institution and be more likely to be retained. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) extend this idea, stating that "negative interactions and experiences tend to reduce integration, to distance the individual from the academic and social communities of the institution, promoting the individual's marginality and, ultimately, withdrawal" (p. 53).

To accompany Astin's Theory of Student Departure (1993), he also developed three principles of effective retention to guide institutional practices and to reduce student rates of departure: (1) Effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve. (2) Effective retention programs are first and foremost committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students. (3) Effective retention programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members.

These principles and Astin's theory in general, like Tinto's model, were also integral to the current study. While much research, theory, and practice related to integration, retention, and other forms of academic success focus on the mainstream student, it can be easy to forget specific segments of the population and the characteristics, strengths, and needs of these groups. For this reason, research like the current study, which focus in deep ways on subgroups of the overall college population, are very important in the effort to increase our understanding of our students' characteristics and experiences in order to more effectively partner with students to assist them in their integration, retention, and ultimate growth and development through their college experiences and attained degrees.

The Place of Developmental/Remedial Education in Higher Education

Through the retention figures, transition model, retention models, transition issues, and psychosocial development model discussed thus far, it is clear that retention figures are not at optimum levels and that the first year is a time on which faculty and staff need to focus in order to assist students through the transition and retain students from year one to year two. For students classified as underprepared, conditional admit,

remedial, or developmental, however, the first year is even more critical as students falling under these classifications are even less likely than the traditional student to persist when faced with obstacles (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Unfortunately, this student is difficult to identify or describe across the board because the terms and criteria to identify them vary from state to state and from institution to institution (Koski & Levin, 1998). Van (1992) alludes to the difficulty in classifying these students by saying:

The academic abilities of [underprepared] students are broad: They may exhibit deficiencies in the basic skills of reading, writing or mathematics, or they may be competent in content areas, but lack the necessary study and learning skills to succeed in a collegiate setting. The students may also have poor self-esteem, high anxiety associated with learning or testing, and score low on standardized tests. Such students need development of the skills which were never learned or which were mislearned, and should not be confused with the incapable or uneducable student. (p. 27)

However, while the literature may not present a comprehensive picture of the criteria used to identify a student as remedial, Koski and Levin identify four general selection criteria present in the literature: (1) inadequate coursework and/or performance in secondary school; (2) poor performance on college entrance examinations, such as the ACT and SAT; (3) poor performance on subject matter placement tests; and (4) self-selection for remedial courses.

In addition to noting remedial students' academic preparation, other demographic elements of this group are noteworthy as well. Women and men are about equally represented in remedial education (Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999; Boylan, Bonham, and Bliss, 1994; Knopp, 1995), while many developmental students are older students who have been out of high school for longer than five years. Results from the National

Study of Developmental Education (Boylan, Bonham, and Bliss) indicate that approximately two-thirds of remedial students are white and one-third are minorities, with the largest minority groups in developmental education being African-American and Hispanic. The ACE Research Brief's findings (Knopp) are in line with the above report, indicating 65% of all students enrolled in remedial courses in the 1992-93 academic year were white, 15% were African-American, 13% were Hispanic, 7% were Asian-American, and 1% were American Indians. However, because the majority of students participating in higher education are white, the numbers still indicate that a disproportionate number of minority students are found in remedial education, as 11% of all white students were enrolled in a remedial course, while 19% of all African-American students, 19% of all Hispanic students, 19% of all Asian-American students, and 15% of all American Indian students were enrolled in such a course (Knopp).

Further, Koski and Levin (1998) note that while the most comprehensive studies on remedial education, those performed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), do not provide statistics regarding racial make-up of students in remedial courses, they do report data regarding remediation at schools with a majority population of students of color and majority white schools. Koski and Levin report that the 1991 NCES study found that at institutions with a predominately minority student body, 55% of first-year students enrolled in at least one remedial course, while at institutions with a predominately nonminority student body, 27% of first-year students did so. Because a disproportionately high percentage of developmental students are from minority groups, the support of developmental students could also be viewed as important to retention of minority students as well, making the success of remedial programming more important

to institutions (Hrabowski III, 2005) and as some would argue, essential to guarantee access to institutions of higher education (Arendale, 2001).

However, remedial/developmental education is not simply an issue for minority-serving institutions. In fact, Boylan, Bonham, and White (1999) indicate that “practically every college and university in the United States provides some sort of service for students who are not quite ready to take a particular course, pass a particular test, or enroll in a particular major” (p. 87). And Spann and McCrimmon (1998) assert that “helping underprepared students prepare themselves for college has been a feature of American higher education since Harvard opened its doors in 1636” (p. 39). As developmental education has always been a part of American higher education, it continues to hold an importance. Habley (2006) notes that as college enrollment increases through the college-for-all mentality, so will the numbers of students who are less academically prepared. Heaney and Fisher (2011) further this idea when they state that as the number of students enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities grows (which it has, 25% over the past 20 years), the number of underprepared students has also increased, meaning that we need to do better to connect access for these students with college completion.

Beyond demographics, Hardin (1998) developed a useful seven-category typology for describing the characteristics of developmental students on the basis of their reasons for needing developmental classes: (1) The poor chooser – a student who may not have planned to attend college, who did not take a college-preparatory track of classes; (2) The adult student – a student who has been out of school for some time and has forgotten what he or she previously learned; (3) The student with a disability; (4) The

ignored student – a student with a disability or some other difficulty that has gone undiagnosed and untreated; (5) The limited English proficiency student – whether the student is a U.S. citizen or not, this can include any student where English is not his or her first language or is not spoken in the home; (6) The user – a student simply attaining the benefits of attending college with no clear academic goals, objectives, or purposes; and (7) The extreme case – a student with severe emotional, psychological, or social problems that prevent him or her from doing well in school. This typology demonstrates that while outsiders might have a static and one-dimensional view or understanding of students needing remediation, there can be a number of reasons these multi-faceted individuals need extra assistance.

Further, developmental education is not an issue for only a small percentage of college-goers. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2003) reported that 28% of all entering freshmen took one or more remedial course during fall 2000. While this is more than one in four students, it likely does not inform us of all students needing remediation or developmental assistance. As Boylan (1995) points out, some students might have needed or chosen to wait to take remedial courses, or might have decided not to take them at all at institutions where remediation is only recommended and completion is voluntary. Boylan also points out that other students still might have taken advantage of less formal tutoring, supplemental instruction, or workshops even if they did not take formal remedial coursework. Even so, the NCES indicates that 76% of degree-granting institutions offered at least one remedial course, with 98% of two-year colleges offering such courses, 59% of private four-year colleges, and 80% of public four-year colleges.

The NCES indicates that these results have not changed much in recent years, and Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos, and Korn (2007), indicate the same.

While the need for remediation is prevalent enough, Deil-Amen (2011) cautions that remedial students may have more in common with non-remedial students than one would presume from what has been highlighted in prior research. Calcagno and Long (2008) support this claim by stating that results of a regression discontinuity assessment indicate that enough similarities exist between students above and below “cutoff” placement scores on tests such as the ACT and SAT that such a distinction can be considered arbitrary with few differences existing in the short or long-term trajectories of these students. Deil-Amen further points out that while only certain students are labeled as remedial, developmental, conditional admits, or underprepared by an institution, many students who are not assigned such labels demonstrate that they also are not ready for college-level material by failing college-level courses, especially in math and science, leaving us to question the differences and similarities of students labeled as remedial versus those who are not, and where the separation really occurs. Functioning from a similar line of thinking, Higbee and Dwinell (1999) note that the role of developmental education must expand in order to meet the needs of all students, not just those labeled as remedial, developmental, underprepared, or conditional admit.

Critics argue that remedial courses for underprepared students weaken academic standards, are costly, and cover information that should have been learned during K-12 education (Dominick, Stevens, & Smith, 2006). However, Habley (2006), the director of American College Testing (ACT), reports that only 21% of high school graduates meet all four ACT benchmarks for college readiness in English composition, algebra, social

sciences, and biology. Furthermore, Boylan, Bonham, and White (1999) point out that while developmental education is widely debated, it is a fact that almost one-third of the nation's college students enter their institution without prerequisite knowledge and skills in one or more content areas, which is documented through a variety of assessment tests, and will not disappear due to debate. Further, they point out that developmental education is not simply remedial coursework, but also includes services like tutoring, supplemental instruction and workshops that are used by many students including those not designated as remedial. The authors assert that only two things might reduce the need for developmental education in colleges and universities – “a dramatic improvement in the quality of college preparation provided by public schools or a dramatic downsizing of postsecondary education” (p. 95). They go on to say that even during aggressive periods of school reform, the percentage of underprepared students entering postsecondary education did not decline and that they see no sign of further limiting college enrollment, which could disproportionately harm the opportunities for students from low socioeconomic statuses and minority families (Boylan & Saxon, 1998; Dalaker, 1999) and harm the economic prosperity of a state or region (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996; McCabe & Day, 1998). Further, McCabe and Day estimate that more than two million students would drop out of postsecondary education each year without participation in at least one developmental activity. With all this in mind, Deil-Amen (2011) states that “for researchers, it is less important to classify students as remedial or nonremedial, and more important to identify the college preparation options and postenrollment interventions that best promote learning and persistence” (p. 69).

Elements of Developmental/Remedial Education

While developmental education has been a part of higher education since Harvard opened its doors (Spann & McCrimmon, 1998), the first recognized college preparatory department was founded in 1849 at the University of Wisconsin and offered remedial coursework in reading, writing, and arithmetic (Maxwell, 1994). Growth in university sponsored preparatory programs continued through the nineteenth century as colleges and universities saw an increase in underprepared students due to the Land Grant Act. However, the scope, mission, and even name of this type of programming has undergone significant transitions over the years, changing from “remedial” to “developmental” at many, though not all, institutions (Higbee, 2005). Higbee explains that remedial education was based on a medical model, where students’ deficiencies were diagnosed and treated. This labeling, however, has the ability to stigmatize already struggling students. To Higbee, switching from a model focused on deficits to one focused on “talent development” (Astin, 1985), “recognizes that where students begin is not as important as how much students learn” (Higbee, p. 293). Though they address the same students and issues, the philosophy of the medically-modeled remedial education differs from the philosophy backing programming termed and understood to be developmental education. Boylan, Bonham, and White (1999), sum up developmental education, by saying developmental education:

Reflects an emphasis on the holistic development of the individual student and is rooted in developmental psychology. Professionals in developmental education assess student needs and make some judgment as to the type and duration of intervention needed in order to help students accomplish their academic goals. (pp. 87-88)

In Koski and Levin's (1998) review of literature related to remedial/developmental programming, the common interventions for remediation/developmental education they note include traditional repetition and drills with low-level skills; learning assistance centers and academic support centers, including tutoring; linking skill-building to content-based courses; linked or paired courses; supplemental instruction; learning communities; critical thinking programs; broadening conceptual background knowledge; and student-centered instruction/individualized learning. Boylan (1995) confirms the diversity of developmental programming, stating that targeted "developmental" services can range from learning assistance centers, supplemental instruction, basic skill development courses and workshops to first-year orientations and seminars as well as special curricular designs. Boylan, Bonham, and White (1999) express that developmental programming can include tutoring, learning centers and workshops as well as classes on study strategies, critical thinking, and the freshmen experience. However, they state that the most common developmental intervention is the remedial course, a course intended to get the students caught up in the content area(s) in which they are found to be deficient. Boylan, Bonham, and White say that these courses are the most common intervention because they are viewed as an efficient means of conveying needed information to a large number of students at the same time. Deil-Amen (2011), however, points out that these courses can be problematic for a number of reasons beyond a simple lack of individualized attention, stating that sometimes students cannot tell on their own that a course is remedial and might not count towards graduation requirements until late in the game. Deil-Amen states that things get even more complicated when universities accept students they deem to require

remediation, but “outsource” that remediation, requiring students to complete coursework at another institution in order to remove their remedial status.

The literature makes it clear that there is no one widespread model that applies to accepting or interacting with students designated as conditional admit, remedial, developmental, or underprepared. Boylan (2002), tells us that the wide diversity of developmental education “models is a result of different underlying learning theories, policies, funding formulas, student population characteristics, historical traditions, political decisions, and state and local stakeholder expectations” (p. 9). So Higbee (2005) tells us that “the institutional challenge is to provide developmental education programs that maintain academic standards, while providing the support necessary for underprepared first-year students to succeed” (p. 292).

In this vein, Boylan, Bonham, and White (1999), completing a review of literature, put forth six best policies and eight best practices related to developmental education. The best policies include (1) implement mandatory assessment and placement, (2) promote an institutional commitment to developmental education, (3) provide a comprehensive approach to developmental education courses and services, (4) establish a series of ongoing orientation courses and activities, (5) enforce strict attendance policies for developmental courses, and (6) abolish late registration for developmental students. The best practices Boylan, Bonham, and White identify include (1) provide a centralized structure for developmental education courses and services, (2) encourage professional development for those who work with developmental students, (3) implement classroom assessment techniques in developmental courses, (4) engage in regular and systematic program evaluation, (5) focus on the development of

metacognitive skills, (6) give frequent tests in developmental courses, (7) use a theory-based approach to teaching developmental courses, and (8) integrate classroom, learning assistance, and laboratory activities. McMillan, Parke, and Lanning (1997) also weigh in on best practices in developmental education, stating that research indicates that developmental programs that integrate placement testing, coursework, and counseling are most successful in retaining students and preparing them for academic coursework. And after looking at success figures, Boylan, Bonham, and White sum up their findings stating, “essentially the research indicates that developmental programs employing sound organizational and teaching strategies have been consistently linked to higher passing and completion rates in courses, better student grades, and higher rates of retention” (p. 94).

Outcomes of Developmental/Remedial Education

Boylan, Bonham, and White (1999) tell us that just as there is considerable variation in policies and practices related to developmental education, there is also considerable variation in the outcomes of developmental education, with programs following more sound policies and procedures experiencing more favorable outcomes. However, in Pascarella and Terenzini’s expansive literature review (2005), they found that with few exceptions (such as DesJardins, Kim, & Rzonca, 2002-2003; Hoyt, 1999; Zhao, 1999), evidence suggests that academic intervention programs for developmental/remedial students are at least modestly effective in helping these students overcome deficiencies in their precollege academic preparation along with the disadvantages associated with such deficiencies. In fact, Pascarella and Terenzini found that evidence of the success of remedial interventions is generally consistent whether the at-risk students who participated are compared with similar at-risk students who did not

participate or with students judged not to need remediation (i.e. Weissman, Silke, & Bulkowski, 1997; Schoenecker, 1996; Sinclair Community College, 1994).

The National Study of Developmental Education (Boylan, Bonham, Claxton, & Bliss, 1992) found that passing early developmental courses was related to higher student grade point averages, that students were more likely to pass their first curriculum course in the same or related subject, and that they were more likely to be retained than students who did not participate in developmental education. In a study of over 20,000 students sorted into categories of successful developmental course completers, developmental course non-takers, and students not recommended to take developmental courses, Schoenecker (1996) found that students who completed developmental reading, writing, or math coursework achieved significantly higher than both other groups in terms of credits earned versus those attempted, cumulative GPA, and persistence rate. A number of other studies have also found remedial interventions to promote underprepared students' academic adjustment and persistence in the short term, such as semester to semester and first to second year retention (Boylan & Bonham, 1992; Budny, 1994; Campbell & Blakey, 1995, 1996; Easterling, Patten, & Krile, 1998; Garcia, 2000; Hector & Hector, 1992; Illinois Community College System, 1998; Robbins & Smith, 1993; Weissman, Silke, & Bulakowski, 1997). While remediation for academically underprepared students seems to be particularly effective during the first semester (Pascarella & Terenzini), research suggests remediation efforts increase the likelihood of persistence from years two through six as well as degree completion (Braley & Ogden, 1997; Easterling, Patten, & Krile, 1995; Easterling, Patten, & Krile, 1998; Fullilove &

Treisman, 1990; Schoenecker, Bollman, & Evens, 1998; Sinclair Community College, 1994; Weissman, Silke, & Bulakowski).

Select Related Research

This section contains select research related to the current study. The research presented here is included because it informed the researcher in preparing to conduct the current study. The pieces cited go beyond typical discussions of “cognitive” characteristics and qualities of students, including elements such as high school GPA and class rank, standardized test scores, and core courses completed in high school. Instead, the research cited here focus on affective student characteristics, the elements more central to the current research, focusing on coping assets and liabilities of students. With the exception of one article presented here, each piece also focuses on groups of students designated as conditional admit, remedial, developmental, underprepared, or at-risk, making the relevance to the current study more direct.

Quantitative research.

While data on course completion, test scores, GPA, retention, and persistence can be useful, other student attributes and outcomes are worth noting as well, especially when focusing on the underprepared student population. Though labels such as “remedial” are most often affixed to students by colleges and universities based on standardized test scores, Hood (1992) and Wing (1998) found ACT composite scores to not be a significant predictor of academic success for this group. Further, in Hornberger’s (2010) quantitative study of 249 conditionally-admitted students, when performing statistical analyses to find correlations between earned credit hours and GPA after the first year of college with variables including ACT composite, ACT math, ACT reading, ACT English,

ACT science, class rank percentile, high school class size, high school GPA, number of core math units, GPA of completed college credit, high school core curriculum GPA, and number of core curriculum courses taken during the senior year of high school; the only predictors of credits earned during the first year of college were high school core curriculum GPA and number of core curriculum courses taken during the senior year of high school. The only variables found to be significantly related to GPA after the first year of college were ACT English and high school core curriculum GPA. However, when Hornberger looked into demographic data, he also found women to earn higher GPAs and earn more credit hours. He additionally found students classified as living in-state, but outside of the “24 county area” immediately closest to the university to earn higher GPAs and more credit hours. Hornberger also identified students who had participated in high school athletics as students who earned significantly more credit hours during their first year. These data indicate that there might be more in regards to student characteristics to which we should be paying attention, beyond test scores – elements that could indicate coping assets or liabilities with which students enter college, elements that the current study set out to identify.

Another way that researchers can examine the relationship between academic success and personal characteristics of students is by using the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ), a psychosocial instrument designed to predict the academic performance and retention of college entrants that asks questions related to eight variables: (1) realistic self-appraisal, (2) understanding and coping with racism, (3) preference for long range goals, (4) positive self-concept, (5) availability of a strong support person, (6) successful leadership experience, (7) demonstrated community

service, and (8) acquired knowledge in a field. In their studies with the NCQ, both Trippi and Steward (1988) and Fuyentes, Sedlacek, and Liu (1994) found that self-concept and realistic self-appraisal were the best predictors of academic success for white and African American students. Tracey and Sedlacek (1989) found community service and realistic self-appraisal to be the best predictor of academic success for Asians. In Adebayo's study (2008), he found realistic self-appraisal and coping with racism, as well as the cognitive factor of high school GPA to be the best predictors for academic success for a group of 143 conditionally-admitted students. Again, this gives us another idea of coping assets and liabilities students might bring to the table that could affect their transition and which are not often given a great deal of consideration by administration.

Heaney and Fisher (2011) demonstrate another way to learn about students beyond simple cognitive and demographic data. Using Astin's I-E-O model as a framework, Heaney and Fisher created a survey modeled after the College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ), designed by Hall Beck and William Davidson, which collects data around six factors: (1) academic integration, (2) social integration, (3) support services, (4) degree commitment, (5) institutional commitment, and (6) academic conscientiousness. The researchers completed this case study to examine the key factors that affect the persistence for 139 conditionally-admitted students by administering the survey at the end of the students' first semester. Their results show no indication that high school GPA or ACT score predict retention. Instead, they note connections between reasons for attending college, with students coming to college to continue their education or to pursue a career goal, being much more likely to persist than students attending for social reasons, because it seemed like the next step, or because they were following their

parents' advice. Heaney and Fisher also found a connection with the timing of the decision to attend college, with students deciding during or prior to their sophomore year of high school being more likely to persist than students who decided during their junior or senior year. Taking an advanced placement (AP) or college preparatory course in high school was also linked to retention. Students were also significantly more likely to return for a second year if they agreed or strongly agreed with the claim that faculty were concerned for student success; if they saw a strong connection between their courses and future lives; if they used support services, especially the math lab and supplemental instruction; if they missed home some or none as opposed to "a lot"; if they were more positive about their social experience during the first semester; and if they had a higher impression of the overall helpfulness of staff. Additionally, students who returned for their second year reported visiting home fewer times during their first semester (an average of 2.7 times as opposed to 4.04) and were more likely to discuss self-initiated actions than external forces when discussing their successes in an open-response item. Further, all students who reported extreme boredom in their classes departed before their sophomore year. Heaney and Fisher sum up the take-aways from their study when saying "this study emphasizes the value of gathering context-specific data about conditionally-admitted students to aid in planning both support and targeted interventions" (p. 74). This study, again identifies characteristics of students and speaks to potential assets and liabilities they carry into their transition; however, as a quantitative study, it is limited in its ability to examine the full context of the situation.

Before moving on to related qualitative research, two other quantitative studies are worth briefly noting here. Morrison (1999) used the College Student Inventory (CSI),

a multidimensional inventory of student motivation designed for incoming first-year students in a descriptive study focusing on conditionally-admitted students and found that conditionally-admitted students scored significantly below their peers on the measures for study habits, intellectual interests, academic confidence, desire to finish college, attitude toward educators, leadership, family emotional support, openness, career planning, financial security, and social enrichment. Bembenutty and Karabenick (1997), on the other hand, used the Academic Delay of Gratification Scale (ADGS) and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) in comparing conditionally-admitted African American students to their non-conditionally admitted African American and white counterparts. In their study, Bembenutty and Karabenick found that the conditionally-admitted group was higher in extrinsic motivation, organization, critical thinking, peer learning, and help seeking. Both of these studies continue to identify possible coping assets and liabilities conditionally-admitted students may bring.

Qualitative research.

In addition to quantitative research, there is also a small amount of applicable qualitative research. One such study by Wolcott (2006), with the purpose to explore the needs and experiences of college freshmen with the hope of informing universities on how to improve freshmen preparation and persistence, relied on a series of dialogues with six students who had successfully continued onto their second year of college. The study found that prior to the first semester, it is critical that students and their families experience programs and services that educate them about the transition to college, increase students' commitment to the institution, and help students develop realistic expectations about college. Wolcott states that “several factors were found to contribute

to college freshmen persistence, including support for social and academic integration, academic engagement, fostering student development, and promoting internal locus of control” (p. 19). Based on these findings, Wolcott recommends that institutions of higher education (1) view pre-enrollment programs as critical to student success, make them mandatory, and utilize current students trained on the issues of transition; (2) review placement testing with an eye toward change; (3) require a freshman seminar course and include elements of transition in the curriculum; (4) offer more programming throughout the first year to help students establish social support networks; and (5) as parents are positive sources of support, work to provide parents with an orientation and transitional support.

Dominick, Stevens, and Smith’s (2006) qualitative study, which reviewed the reflective essays of 34 developmental students enrolled in an access program, set out to understand the nature of the transition from high school to college for these students and the kind of support they received during the transition. Results indicated that students struggled with the reality of college, which did not meet student expectations from media and college view books, telling students things would always be beautiful, they would make friends easily, and they would instantly grasp how to study. Results also showed that while the access program provided placement testing; a course to improve reading, study strategies, and metacognition; counseling; tutoring; and peer mentoring, students did not mention these elements of support in their transition. Instead, they mentioned the emotional support they received from family and friends. The results further indicated that adjustment to rigorous academic demands and the need to make new friends were also major transition issues. Based on these findings, Dominick, Stevens, and Smith

recommend that educators should (1) provide opportunities for new students to establish relationships with upper-class students; (2) “promote counselors, academic advisors, and faculty members as additional members of new students’ social support networks” (p. 28); and (3) inform families on ways to support their students to face challenges on their own.

Before moving on, there are two additional qualitative studies worth noting. Deil-Amen (2011) indicates that in her previous qualitative research in Chicago, there was very little evidence that students felt stigmatized by their remedial label, underprepared status, or reverse transferring from a four-year institution to a two-year college. However, during her research in Arizona, Deil-Amen did find the students experiencing a serious academic challenge upon enrollment and to feeling stigmatized by having to take remedial coursework at a community college. Students would express this feeling through resisting seeking help because they feared they were too incompetent to belong in college and that if they asked for help, others would perceive that. Deil-Amen believes qualitative research is necessary to reveal students’ social-psychological perspectives that inform their decisions and behaviors.

Beach, Lundell, and Jung (2002) also found qualitative research methodology to be necessary to their work as they relied on interviews and drawings by 14 students across their freshman and sophomore years to explore how students negotiated the borders and barriers between the worlds of high school, university, peer group, family, and workplace, utilizing their own cultural models, abilities, sense of agency, and institutional support. Beach, Lundell, and Jung speak of their research as a step to dispel inaccurate and one-dimensional stereotypes, saying the

Traditional conception of these students [those deemed not academically prepared to succeed at the college level] in the past have perpetuated deficit models and definitions focusing on their ‘lack’ of some kind . . . fueling primarily negative public stereotypes and myths about these students, equity of access, and the fundamental purposes of education (p. 79)

Beach, Lundell, and Jung go on to say that

Until recently, there has been little research conducted that effectively counters these perceptions with more accurate descriptions of developmental college students’ academic socialization. . . These students are often defined in reductionist terms based on institutional requirements such as high school rank and grade point averages, or by a university’s annually fluctuating admission standards (p. 79)

Need for the Current Study

This type of reductionist thinking is exactly what the current study strove to avoid, and one of the reasons it is a necessary addition to the body of research. A number of researchers cited above as well as others have stressed the need for qualitative research and understanding of the context and interconnections possible through hearing students’ voices, in order to understand the student experience and retention issues, especially as they relate to the transition from high school to college and to academically underprepared students. Because of their applicability, I will include several examples of these researchers’ words here:

Wolcott (2006) states that:

Studies on college student retention are typically quantitative and examine statistics such as preenrollment factors, grade point average, course load, and academic rank. Although these statistics may be important to gauge college freshman success at the institutional level, the studies using these statistics fail to capture student experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction. These studies either fail to collect information from students directly, or, for those that involve students, do not allow students to elaborate on their opinion in a descriptive way. (p. 7)

What Wolcott describes is exactly what this study set out to avoid. This study focused completely on student experiences and perceptions as well as students' own voices, opinions, and descriptions. Hutson and He (2011) also have a lot to say on what type of research has been done in the past on the transition from high school to college and what is needed now:

While much research has been done about [the] transition to college . . . the research generally can be placed into two different categories: (1) examinations of personal characteristics that students need to overcome in order to better transition to college; and (2) discussion of the ways in which institutions can assist students in improving in these areas. (p. 23)

However, Hutson and He (2011) point out that even with efforts to remedy the shortcomings, the concern over retention has only increased despite a history of research on student departure that has spanned over seven decades. They go on to say that:

Even though previous research has provided us insights into how students might need to develop to successfully transition into college and what institutions could do to better support students' academic pursuits, the skill set, strengths, and assets students bring with them to college tend to be overlooked . . . [the] attitudes, aspirations, abilities, and other assets students bring into college – and which could facilitate their transition are neglected. (p. 24)

Again, this is exactly what the current study set out to avoid. While there is a focus on student's coping liabilities, there is a bigger focus on their coping assets and how the institutional community can help make those assets even stronger. In addition to a broader understanding of the student, the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2004) stresses the importance of context in stating that:

Learning, as it has historically been understood, is included in a much larger context that requires consideration of what students know, who they are, what their values and behavior patterns are, and how they see themselves contributing and participating in the world in which they live. (pp. 9-10)

Again, this context-heavy understanding of individuals' experiences is exactly what a phenomenological study sets out to develop, and what this study has done here to fill this need.

The field of developmental education also calls for more qualitative research and contextually-based research. Heaney and Fisher (2011) support the collection of "context-specific data about conditionally-admitted students to aid in planning both support and targeted interventions" (p. 74). Further, Higbee, Arendale, and Lundell (2005) state that there is a critical need to link theory, research, and practice in developmental education, which this study set out to do. These authors also call for more qualitative research in their recommendations for future research, and make it clear why they believe more qualitative research is important to the field, stating that:

An educator might know quantitatively how a student is performing in a course based on traditional measures such as grade point average, specific exam grades, and other achievement markers. However, when a student arrives underprepared for college or is underperforming in a first-year course, learning more about the nature of this student's experience, including the influence of cultural background or peer and family communities, may produce further insights into improving performance. Because students' experiences are richly layered and complex, researching underlying causes and perceptions through listening to student voices can strengthen the work of developmental educators. (pp. 8-9)

Higbee, Arendale, and Lundell (2005) go on to explain further why qualitative research is important to the field:

Qualitative research brings a more nuanced view of the complexity of students' lived experiences and complements the more generalizable data that are gained through quantitative measure. There are three primary and highly significant benefits of using qualitative methods to assess developmental education. First, they can illuminate the multiple and shifting realities of students in transition. Second, they can decrease the stigma of developmental programs by demonstrating the richness and overlapping variety of both developmental and nondevelopmental students' experiences. Stigma results from a lack of

knowledge about the real lives of students and the realities of developmental education, and qualitative research can help supply that knowledge. Third, qualitative methods allow educators to explore more meaningfully the complexity of students' multicultural issues in developmental programs. (pp. 12-3)

Beyond a clear call for qualitative research that is contextually-based, that looks beyond academic indicators, and that focuses on assets in addition to liabilities; this study also has a place in the research because it is unique. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United States through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. By looking to understand the experience, this study is wider in scope than many others; however, by selecting conditionally-admitted students, the findings are more narrowed and focused in their application. Lastly, the use of Schlossberg's transition theory in this way to make sense of the transition from high school to college for conditionally-admitted students has not been done before, and the findings and implications presented here are an important addition to the literature related to the transition of conditionally-admitted students.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methods

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United States through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. This chapter discusses and clarifies the methods used to do this, including the assumptions of qualitative research, the rationale for using a qualitative approach, an explanation of phenomenology, my role as the researcher, the setting, the sampling method, the participants, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, verification procedures, and ethical considerations.

Assumptions of Qualitative Research

After discussing his struggle to locate usable definitions of qualitative research, Creswell (2007) provides his own:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (p. 37)

This definition provides a description of qualitative research from multiple angles that is still broad enough to encompass the multiple types of qualitative methodologies. In this section, I write in more detail about the underlying assumptions and characteristics of qualitative research.

The philosophical assumptions Creswell (2007) discusses include ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions. Ontological assumptions relate to the nature of reality and its characteristics. The ontological assumptions underlying qualitative inquiry hold that there are multiple, subjective realities, which are experienced differently by each study participant, researcher, and reader. As a result, the researcher uses quotes and themes stemming directly from the participants' own words, their own worlds, to provide evidence of different perspectives, though there are often common themes.

Epistemological assumptions are concerned with the relationship between the researcher and the individuals being researched. In qualitative studies, researchers attempt to lessen the distance between themselves and the people they are researching. Researchers can accomplish this by getting to know participants, while sharing information about themselves and about their research purposes; by interacting with participants in the field; by collaborating with participants; and by becoming an insider.

Axiological assumptions focus on the role of values. In qualitative reports, the researcher makes an effort to "position" himself in the study. Rather than striving for value-free or bias-free pieces, qualitative researchers acknowledge that research is value-laden and that biases are present. As a result, they discuss their own roles in the research – their histories, beliefs, and assumptions about the topic, as well as how these factors shape the narrative. The researchers present their own interpretations along with those of their participants, so the readers have an understanding of the context of the piece.

The rhetorical assumptions of qualitative research address the language in which the researcher will present the study. In qualitative work, the researcher is expected to

write in a literary, informal, narrative style. The writing is meant to be engaging and uses first-person pronouns in the personal voice, while employing terminology associated with qualitative work rather than quantitative work.

Lastly, the methodological assumptions address the process of inquiry a researcher uses to investigate her topic. With qualitative methodology, researchers use inductive logic – working with details before making generalizations, studying and describing the topic in context, and using an emerging design where questions are continually revised based on experiences in the field. The methodology is focused on gaining a holistic understanding of the topic.

While Creswell provides a thorough examination of assumptions underlying qualitative research, Merriam (1988) identifies six of her own. While there is some overlap between Merriam's and Creswell's lists, the assumptions highlighted by Merriam stress different ideas and help the researcher to gain a more complete understanding of the assumptions of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products.
2. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.
3. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.
4. Qualitative research involves fieldwork. The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behaviors in its natural setting.
5. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.

6. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details. (pp. 19-20)

Rationale for using a qualitative approach.

When comparing quantitative and qualitative approaches, Creswell (1994) defines a qualitative study as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1-2). He contrasts this type of study from a quantitative study, which he defines as “an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true” (p. 2). These two definitions show that while quantitative and qualitative research do have commonalities, they also differ in ways that might make one approach more appropriate than the other in varying circumstances.

Creswell (1994, 2007) goes on to list a number of reasons a researcher may choose to use qualitative research methodology over quantitative, including when we want to:

- Explore a problem
- Study a group or population
- Identify variables that can be measured
- Gain a *complex*, detailed understanding of the issue
- Hear silenced voices
- Empower individuals to share their stories

- Minimize power relationships between the researcher and the participants
- Understand the contexts or settings in which participants address a problem or issue
- Develop theories
- Amend theories

While quantitative research is based on deductive reasoning; testing and applying theories; evaluating distinct, pre-determined variables in numbers and statistics; showing cause and effect; etc., qualitative research focuses on inductive reasoning; collecting thick, rich description to infer theories and themes; understanding the what's and how's in complex, context-based, and holistic ways; and more.

A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because I was interested in how traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students experience the transition from high school to college. Because I was interested in their experiences, I needed to hear their own voices. I needed to learn from them what variables were important in their transition. I needed to learn about this complex process within the natural context. I needed to empower these students to share their stories. Ultimately, my goal was to be a first step towards developing or amending a theory in order to assist similar students in their transition. Creswell (2007) states that a reason, in addition to those listed above, to choose qualitative research methodologies over quantitative, is “because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not *fit* the problem” (p. 40). This was the case for this study.

Phenomenological Approach

The specific qualitative methodology I utilized in this study is the phenomenological approach, specifically transcendental phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994). The goal of a phenomenological study is to describe the meaning of a lived experience of a concept or phenomenon for several individuals (Creswell, 2007). In order to do this, a researcher first identifies a phenomenon of interest. Countless phenomena could be chosen based on the researcher's interest and could include topics ranging from experiencing grief to living with AIDS, from working motherhood to transitioning into college. Once a phenomenon of interest is chosen, the researcher must identify several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Often this is a small group of no more than ten. The primary form of data collection for phenomenology is a lengthy person-to-person interview, which may require follow-ups. The recorded interviews are then transcribed, repeatedly reviewed, and ultimately broken down to descriptions of what was experienced and how it was experienced as well as a composite description of the essence of the phenomenon. Creswell explains that a reader should come away from a phenomenology with a better understanding of what it is like for someone to experience the given phenomenon.

Phenomenology draws heavily from philosophical understandings and traditions, stemming in large part from the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician (Creswell, 2007), but also incorporating the works of Descartes, Kant, and Brentano (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas explains that:

Transcendental science emerged out of a growing discontent with a philosophy of science based exclusively on studies of material things, a science that failed to

take into account the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and the objects that exist in the material world. (p. 43)

As such, rather than viewing the material world as fact and the internal world of the mind as unknowable, phenomenology views the material world with uncertainty and internal perception as reality. According to Descartes (as cited in Moustakas), what is said to possess objective reality actually only exists through representation in the mind, indicating that “objective reality” is, in truth, subjective reality. What Descartes is saying is that we only “know” something to exist and understand its qualities through our own perceptions of it. As a result, Brentano (as cited in Moustakas) continues this line of thinking, by stating that we have no right to believe that objects really exist as they appear to us, and thus “only what we know from internal perception can be counted on as a basis for scientific knowledge” (p. 45). Due to this stance, Moustakas explains that “in phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). Moustakas further explains that “Husserl’s approach is called ‘phenomenology’ because it utilizes *only* the data available to consciousness – the *appearance* of objects” (p. 45).

There are a number of core facets of transcendental phenomenology in terms of principles, processes, and methods, which Moustakas (1994) lists:

1. Phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given, removed from everyday routines and biases, from what we are told is true in nature and in the natural world of everyday living.
2. Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved.

3. Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings.
4. Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses. Descriptions retain, as close as possible, the original texture of things, their phenomenological qualities and material properties. Descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible.

In descriptions one seeks to present in vivid and accurate terms, in complete terms, what appears in consciousness and in direct seeing – images, impressions, verbal pictures, features of heaviness, lightness; sweetness, saltness; bitterness, sourness; openness, constrictedness; coldness, warmth; roughness, smoothness; sense qualities of sound, touch, sight and taste; and aesthetic properties.
5. Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced. In a phenomenological investigation the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon. The puzzlement is autobiographical, making memory and history essential dimensions of discovery, in the present and extensions into the future.
6. Subject and object are integrated – what I see is interwoven with how I see it, with whom I see it, and with whom I am. My perception, the thing I perceive, and the experience or act interrelate to make the objective subjective and the subjective objective.
7. At all points in an investigation intersubjective reality is part of the process, yet every perception begins with my own sense of what an issue or object or experience is and means.
8. The data of experience, my own thinking, intuiting, reflecting, and judging are regarded as the primary evidences of scientific investigation.
9. The research question that is the focus of and guides an investigation must be carefully constructed, every word deliberately chosen and ordered in such a way that the primary words appear immediately, capture my attention, and guide and direct me in the phenomenological process of seeing, reflecting, and knowing. Every method relates back to the question, is developed solely to

illuminate the question, and provides a portrayal of the phenomenon that is vital, rich, and layered in its textures and meanings. (pp. 58-59)

Another core element of phenomenological methodology is a freedom from suppositions called the Epoche. Moustakas (1994) explains that:

In the Epoche, we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things. We “invalidate,” “inhibit,” and “disqualify” all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience. The world is placed out of action, while remaining bracketed. However, the world in the bracket has been cleared of ordinary thought and is present before us as a phenomenon to be gazed upon, to be known naively and freshly through a “purified” consciousness. (p. 85)

Essentially, through the process of bracketing, researchers attempt to declare all their previous knowledge of and experiences with the phenomenon, and work to remove this knowledge and these experiences from the lenses through which they listen to and understand others’ experiences. This attempt will both make it easier for researchers to focus on the understandings of others and also highlight the reader to possible biases, experiences, and values that might color the research and the report. While Moustakas indicates that the process of Epoche “requires unusual, sustained attention, concentration, and presence” (p. 88), and is rarely perfectly achieved, its pursuit is still a necessary element in phenomenology. Moustakas explains the usefulness of the Epoche as he sees it:

The Epoche process inclines me toward receptiveness. I am more readily able to meet something or someone and to listen and hear whatever is being presented, without coloring the other’s communication with my own habits of thinking, feeling, and seeing, removing the usual ways of labeling or judging, or comparing. I am ready to perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance and presence. (p. 89)

The Role of the Researcher

With the idea of bracketing and the Epoche fresh in mind, now it is important to discuss my role as the researcher, including my past experiences with the phenomenon, the setting, and the study participants. As with any adult, I have been through a number of transitions in my life. Some of these transitions have included moving to different states, starting and leaving jobs, establishing and ending relationships, and beginning and completing programs of study. I found some of these transitions to be relatively easy and others to be very difficult.

One transition with which I struggled a great deal was my transition from high school to college. As the second child of two teachers, I do not remember it ever being a question as to whether I would attend college. The only questions to me or my parents were where I would attend and what I would study. After struggling through my entire childhood and adolescence stressing over every time someone asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, and never having an answer, I decided, during my junior year of high school, to major in history based on the passionate example of one of my high school teachers. During my senior year, while attending a campus visit day at the University of Iowa for prospective honors students, I decided to add a second major of Anthropology, after being completely fascinated by the explanation of the field by a current professor. Additionally, partially due to all the influential teachers in my life from parents to family friends and also due to my own interest in helping others to learn and grow, which was fostered through working as a kindergarten classroom aid throughout my junior high years; I planned to pursue a teaching license, though I doubted I wanted to teach in a traditional sense. These three courses of study, along with a program in Museum Studies

I found along the way kept me always interested and engaged in my studies and driven to do well in my classes. However, for me, choosing my programs and learning how to do well in them was the easy part. I had completed high school as a co-valedictorian and would go on to earn my BA with high distinction, but I still struggled with a number of issues during my first year of college.

Before starting school, I needed to decide where to attend. After sifting through numerous direct mailings, surfing the internet, and visiting several campuses; I applied to only two institutions and was accepted to both – the University of Iowa and Georgetown. My decision of where to attend relied partially on the fact that Georgetown did not have a full program in education and partially on the fact that my boyfriend of two years would not have been able to get in there and did not know his options in general. He could, however, gain acceptance at the University of Iowa, and we decided to go there together. It felt good to have someone with me who I already knew, with whom I could spend time, and on whom I could lean when I needed someone. However, because I spent so much time with him, I spent significantly less time than I otherwise would have with the other women on my floor and the other students in my classes and student organizations, failing to make any truly deep college friendships.

As a result, the only people I really felt I had for support were my boyfriend, my parents, and my friends from high school. However, my friends all went to other schools and had their own transitions to work through. My boyfriend, who had moved around regularly throughout his school years, had no problem adjusting to college and making new friends. Because of this, he did not understand my struggle nor did he know how to help me. My parents worked to be supportive, talking to me regularly on the phone and

occasionally driving the one-hour to me see on the rare weekends that I would stay on campus instead of driving home myself. However, I never really shared with them how hard things were. I thought I was being a baby and needed to just deal with it on my own. But the truth was that while I did fine in my classes, I felt depressed and overwhelmed for the majority of my first year.

I had never gone through a big transition like this in the past. I lived in the same house my entire life before leaving for college. My parents are still married. I attended one school from preschool through eighth grade and one for high school. While the transition to high school was an adjustment, it helped having my mother teach in the same building, some familiar faces from junior high and extracurricular experiences, and the fact that I was not really leaving many friends behind. Moving away to college was much different. Living in an honors learning community with a supremely caring and helpful Resident Assistant definitely helped, but it wasn't enough. I wouldn't really end up feeling connected to my university, happy, competent, comfortable, and more, until I started to really get a handle on my emotions, make friends, and get involved on campus in ways that made me love my university.

After college, I spent some time back in my hometown substitute teaching, supervising the school-age childcare program at the YMCA, employed in a museum, and working for a non-profit arts organization, before returning to the University of Iowa to earn a master's degree in college student development. During my last semester of the program in our capstone course, each student was required to choose a topic of interest to the class and lead class for a day. My topic was on transitioning from graduate school to our first professional jobs in the student affairs field. In preparation for my class session,

I searched for information on Nancy Schlossberg's ideas on marginality and mattering, which I remembered reading about during our first semester in the program. While searching for this information, however, I came across something that seemed to fit the situation much better – Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

I was shocked that I had never heard about it in the course of my program. We read and discussed a number of theorists discussing cognitive development, moral development, psychosocial and identity development, self-authorship, student environments, engagement, persistence, and more; but we had never studied this theory. It was even more surprising to me that I had never heard of this theory through my assistantship with orientation services, where I assisted each new student in their transition to college and where I co-led training for our undergraduate orientation leaders; in my preparation for teaching a transition class for first-year students; or through my connections and conference attendance with the National Orientation Directors Association. My classmates and I saw the utility of this theory for assisting ourselves through our own transitions, and I began to wonder about its utility in assisting undergraduate students with theirs.

Since completing my MA, I accepted a position at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, working with a large learning community and retention program, specifically for first and second-year students. With this community, I developed and led academic, life skill, social, and recognition programming; ran an orientation program; provided academic and personal counseling to our students; developed and supervised a peer mentoring program for our first year students; and created and implemented a program for students on academic probation. Through my work with this program, I became

intimately familiar with students from similar, but also different backgrounds than my own. All of our students were Pell Grant eligible. We had a high percentage of minority students. Approximately two-thirds of our students were first generation. And while many of them were quite ready and ultimately very successful in their college coursework, a number were also underprepared. My extensive work with first-year students, amplified by hearing more about their struggles as discussed with me by their peer mentors during our supervisory meetings, made me even more engrossed in the transition from high school to college and in the qualitative experiences of these students than I had been before. Further, my work with probation students at the University of Nebraska left me very empathetic and interested in the transition and experiences of struggling students, underprepared students, and at-risk students.

Since leaving Nebraska, I have been working at Southeastern University as a first-year counselor in the first-year advising office. In this role, I work with students during orientation as well as their first year of school, assisting them in planning and registering for their classes and assisting them with personal issues. This role has given me both an understanding of SU and its students and an inroad to complete research on site. While working at SU, I have been intrigued by the laws and policies that affect education that are different than the ones I have experienced in the past. Since starting this position, I have also heard about the struggles of a group of students assigned to another primary counselor in our office – “remedial students.” I have heard about this group of students struggling to meet their remediation requirements while working through normal transition issues. Due to my past experiences working with struggling students, I became fascinated with this group, and wanted to learn more. This led me to reach out to

individuals working with similar groups of students at SU and elsewhere, to conduct a literature review, and ultimately to decide to focus this study on them.

As a result of my experiences, I might be inclined to think that individuals who have not been through large transitions in the past and those who are away from loved ones for the first time will struggle more with the transition, possibly grappling with negative emotions and going home more often than they should, leading them to form fewer connections on campus, ultimately making their transition even more difficult. I may be inclined to be wary of large, personal life decisions that are made with a strong consideration to someone else. I may be inclined to think that students who do not make strong connections with friends and other support systems in their new environments will struggle to feel comfortable and at home, struggle to cope with their emotions, and struggle to ask for help. I may be inclined to think that supportive communities and people including parents, instructors, and RAs can ease the transition immensely. And I may be inclined to think that Schlossberg's Transition Theory will "fit" the transition of the participants in this study and aid in our understanding of this transition. With all this in mind, I entered each interview with the attempt to "hear" what each of the participants was experiencing and how they were experiencing it. If something they said touched on one of my potential biases, I attempted to listen that much closer, willing to prove my biases wrong, and focusing fully on the experiences and understandings of the participant in the room with me.

Setting

The setting at which I conducted this study is a mid-size, four-year, public institution in the southeastern region of the United States. To preserve the identity of the

study participants, I refer to the institution only as Southeastern University or SU, even changing references to the institution made by participants in interviews to these terms in the transcripts. The institution is primarily residential, with over 90% of students coming from within the state. Additionally, the institution is regionally-serving as well, with about half of the students coming from the five counties immediately surrounding the institution. Over one-third of undergraduate students live on campus, with a new residence hall currently under construction to meet demand. The university is primarily undergraduate, offering over 50 majors of study, but also offers over 30 graduate programs. Average SAT scores for incoming freshmen are 1528, when including the subscores for critical reading, mathematics, and writing, each awarded 200-800 points (for a total possible score of 2400) or 1029 when including only the subscores for critical reading and mathematics (with a total possible score of 1600). Average high school GPA for incoming SU freshmen is 3.35. Southeastern is an NCAA Division I institution with over 200 student organizations, fraternities and sororities, and club sports.

The university is unique in other ways as well. The institution was founded on a stated mission of sustainability, service, and diversity. The mission of sustainability is apparent through prevalent recycling; a course required of all students, which incorporates field trips and helps students understand their “place” in the environment; and preserved land, occupying approximately half of the university acreage; among other things. The mission of service is demonstrated through the 80-hour service learning graduation requirement and a number of courses, which include service learning. The mission of diversity is seen through a number of campus events and task forces. Additionally, the university has a more laid back feel than many staff familiar with

institutions in the Northeast and Midwest, like myself, are accustomed. While it might be normal on many college campuses for students to attend class in shorts or sweatpants and flip flops, at SU, it is also not unheard of to see students in class with no shoes at all or to see the university president wearing a Hawaiian shirt and khakis rather than a suit.

Skateboards are also a common campus sight. Another element that makes the university unique is its youth. At less than 20 years in age, the university has an ability to enact change more quickly than some comparable institutions; however, there are a number of elements Southeastern is still working through to find what works best for them. This includes technology issues, departmental make-up, and the continual growth of student services and programming.

However, while there are a number of elements that make Southeastern University unique, there are also a number of statewide laws and policies that affect the institution. Some of these policies include regulations about repeating courses, taking excess hours, summer coursework, and the general education program. Yet another state law refers to conditionally-admitted students at SU. This law requires students to demonstrate competency in math, reading, and English, by earning a minimum of a 440 on each sub-section of the SAT or a minimum of 17 for English on the ACT, 18 for Reading, and 19 for Math, respectively. Students who do not meet or exceed these conditions are required to complete a specific remedial course related to the area(s) in which they are deficient before they will be allowed to take any coursework requiring the related competencies. Under this law, students are required to complete their remediation within their first 12 credit hours of enrollment or continue to enroll in remedial coursework every semester in order to continue enrolling in college courses.

This law influences admission standards at SU. In order to be admitted, in addition to graduation from an accredited high school with specific academic coursework completed or completion of a GED, students are required to have GPAs and test scores within certain limits as well. Students with a GPA of 3.0 or better are required to have a 440 or higher on each subsection of the SAT or a 17 for English, 18 for Reading, and 19 for Math on the ACT, respectively. Students with a GPA of 2.5-2.99 also qualify for admission with a 460 or higher on the Critical Reading and Math subsections and a 440 or higher on the Writing section of the SAT or a 17 for English, 19 for Reading, and 19 for Math on the ACT, respectively. Students who do not meet these stated requirements may still be admitted after the review of personal statements and letters of recommendation, on the condition that they meet their remediation requirements. Of the first-time, full-time students who registered for the required orientation programs over the summer of 2013, 5.3% were considered remedial. This is the group I chose to focus on in this study.

Sampling Method

Before launching into a study, it was important to consider how decisions would be made in regards to recruiting and selecting participants. While quantitative studies often strive for random samples to increase the ability to generalize their findings, Creswell (1994) makes it clear that “the idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants . . . that will best answer the research question” and that “no attempt is made to randomly select informants” (p. 148). Creswell (2007) does, however, provide some guidance into a number of possible sampling strategies a researcher can use. The primary sampling strategy I used in this study was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling

is an appropriate sampling strategy when carrying out phenomenological studies because it is imperative that each participant has experienced the phenomenon the researcher is studying. As a result, each participant in this study needed to fit the requirements of being a traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted student transitioning into his or her first year at Southeastern University.

The participants were also selected using stratified purposeful sampling. This type of sampling illustrates subgroups in the population, and was achieved by selecting an even number of male and female participants. Lastly, homogenous sampling was used. Homogenous sampling is used to focus, reduce, and simplify variation and experiences among the participants (Creswell, 2007) in order to make it more likely to note commonalities among participant experiences. When selecting participants, I chose participants that were homogenous in the following ways:

- In-state residents – With over 90% of Southeastern University students classified as in-state residents, the majority of students meeting the criterion to be invited to participate in the study already fell into this category. Regardless, this additional condition was included in selection in order to focus the transition phenomenon on the transition to college, without it being muddied by a concurrent transition to a new state and increased distance from family and childhood friends.
- Moving away from home to attend college – Whether students move to attend college or remain at home is another element that would affect the degree of a student's transition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students who move to attend college are transitioning into college, while also transitioning into a new living situation with new

roommates, etc. While students who remain at home are transitioning into college, and might experience changing dynamics at home, their transition would be qualitatively different than individuals moving to a new community. Thus, I decided to focus only on the more traditional group of students who moved away from home to attend college.

- Students who have not yet met remediation – Some students will meet their remediation requirements over the summer prior to their first fall semester through taking remedial coursework or retaking various tests to earn a qualifying score. Because I was interested in the experiences of remedial students, I focused on those who were still considered to be remedial by the university at the start of the fall semester.

- Age of consent – I also only selected students who were 18 or older by the beginning of data collection so they would be able to sign informed consent documentation on their own.

In order to recruit participants, I first mailed and emailed information about the study to each student (See appendix A), including

- My contact information
- The central purpose of the study
- The procedures used in data collection
- The right of individuals to choose to participate and to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time
- An explanation of how confidentiality of the participants would be maintained

- A statement about the known risks associated with participation in the study
- The expected benefits to accrue to the study participants

I then called students who did not contact me to invite them to participate in the study. The incentives to participate addressed with the students included having their voice heard in a way that may potentially, at some point in the future, influence policies or procedures in a higher education setting, as well as financial compensation. Participants were compensated with \$5 for each one-hour interview completed, as well as \$5 for responding with any feedback on my analyses of their interviews, and all participants were entered in to win one of two \$25 university book store gift certificates in a drawing that took place at the completion of data collection. Participants were informed that their odds of winning a gift certificate were 1 in 5.

Participants

Dukes (1984) recommends studying 3 to 10 participants in a phenomenology. For this reason, I sought out ten participants. My assumption was that in choosing ten participants, I would likely not have so many viewpoints that I became overtaxed and experienced difficulties finding commonalities; on the other hand, if a couple students dropped out of the study along the way, I would still have enough material with which to work and finish a complete study. All participants were selected over the summer as student acceptance to the university and remedial status was confirmed. Several recruited students pulled out of the study prior to the first interview. While ten participants did complete the first interview, one student was removed from the study because he did not

meet the homogenous sampling criterion of moving away from home to attend college, continuing to commute 40 minutes to school each day from the home he shared with his mother and brother. Another student dropped out of the study after leaving the university mid-way through the semester. This left me with eight study participants, four men and four women. A brief description of each participant is below.

Andrew.

Andrew considers home to be a mid-sized city about two and a half hours from campus and has previously lived in a learning center for students with Autism and Asperger's as well as another mid-sized boarding school. His parents both have college degrees and are divorced, living in separate cities within the state. He has a younger half-sister that he thinks of as a whole sister. He describes his high school GPA as being below 3.5, but above 3.0. According to Andrew, he is financing college with a combination of grants, loans, and his parents. He is remedial in both math and reading and lives in a traditional freshman dorm. He did not come to college with friends or family members and is not a part of a sport or a fraternity.

Antonio.

Antonio is from a large city about two hours from campus. He describes himself as having seven siblings, some older, some younger, and four parents. While some of the siblings are step- or half-siblings, both of Antonio's parents remarried when he was quite young, and he thinks of them all as full siblings and parents. While three of Antonio's parents have some college education, only his step-mother completed a degree, though Antonio does have an older sibling in college and one who has already graduated. He also has a sister who is a freshman at SU as well, though she lives in a different part of

campus than him. Unlike most of the other students in the study, Antonio lives in apartment style dorms, more commonly inhabited by upperclassmen. He estimates the size of his high school to be about 3000 students and thinks he earned a 3.2 GPA. Antonio explains he is financing college with a scholarship and his father. He is remedial in English and math, and he is not participating in a sport or a fraternity.

Ashley.

Ashley is from a small town about three and a half hours from campus. At home, she lived with her parents, grandparents, and younger brother. Neither of Ashley's parents hold a college degree though her aunt does. Ashley describes her high school as having a graduating class of around 250 students and describes her high school GPA as a 3.2 or 3.3. Ashley says she is financing college through grants and loans. She is remedial in English, and lives in a traditional freshman dorm. She did not come to college with any family or close friends and is not involved in a sport or sorority.

Jackson.

Jackson is from a large town about three hours from campus. At home he lives with his parents, older brother, and two younger sisters. Jackson is very close with his brother who attends college elsewhere in the state. Both of his parents hold college degrees. Jackson describes his high school as having around 3000 students and describes his high school GPA as between a 3.1 and a 3.2. Jackson's parents are financing his college, and he is remedial in reading. Jackson did not come to SU with any family or close friends and is not involved with a sport. Though Jackson did pledge a fraternity, he was later dropped. He lives in a traditional freshman dorm.

Joshua.

Joshua is from a mid-sized town about one and a half hours from campus. Joshua is an only child who lives with both of his parents when home. Joshua explains that both of his parents received some post-secondary education, but does not think that either earned a full degree. Joshua estimates his high school graduating class to be around 500 students and states his high school GPA was a 3.9. Joshua's parents are financing his education, and he is remedial in reading. Joshua came to college with his best friend who later became his girlfriend. While Joshua does not participate in any sports, he did join a fraternity. He lives in a traditional freshman dorm one floor up from his girlfriend.

Kelsi.

Kelsi is from a mid-sized town about one and a half hours from campus. At home, Kelsi lives with her parents and has two older half-brothers who each lived with her family half time. Kelsi explains that her dad took some college classes, but only her mom earned a degree, including a master's. Kelsi estimates her high school graduating class to be around 400 and her high school GPA to be around 3.3. Kelsi is financing college through a pre-paid college fund and her parents. She is remedial in English and reading. While Kelsi started the process to join a sorority, she pulled out, citing a lack of time. Kelsi is on the cheer team and came to college with a friend from home who is also a cheerleader. She lives in a traditional freshman dorm.

Madison.

Madison is from a larger town about a half hour from campus. At home, Madison lives with her parents and her older sister. While Madison applied to live in campus housing, she was placed on a waitlist, and did not get in for the fall. She spent the fall

living with her grandmother who lives just off campus, and was not able to move into traditional freshman housing until January. Both of Madison's parents hold college degrees. Madison estimates her high school graduating class to be over 300 and her high school GPA to be around 3.5. Madison is financing her education through a pre-paid account, supplemented by a loan for spending money and her parents. She is remedial in reading. Madison is not a part of a sport or sorority, but did follow her sister to SU. Her sister is currently a junior.

Mariana.

Mariana is from a small town a little over an hour from campus. At home, Mariana lives with her parents and her younger brother. Both of her parents have college degrees. Mariana describes her high school graduating class as approximately 400 students and her high school GPA as approximately 3.5. Mariana is financing college through one loan and scholarships, and is remedial in English. Mariana is not in a sorority and did not come to SU with any relatives or close friends from home. However, she is on the soccer team and lives in apartment style dorms, populated more by upperclassmen, with her entire team.

Data Collection Procedures

Moustakas (1994) concisely summarizes the data collection procedures usually associated with phenomenology in the passage below:

Typically in the phenomenological investigation the long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question.

The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. Although the primary researcher may in advance develop a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon, these are

varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher [participant] shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question.

Often the phenomenological interview begins with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. Following this opening, the investigator suggests that the co-researcher take a few moments to focus on the experience, moments of particular awareness and impact, and then to describe the experience fully. The interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively. (p. 114)

Saldana (2011) also discusses the environment the researcher should create, stating “I advocate that the researcher always enter the interview with an attitude of courtesy and respect. The goal is to establish an atmosphere and working relationship of comfort, security, and equity” (p. 39). Saldana also points out that it is important to honor the contributions the participants make to the study, demonstrating to them that they are the experts on the phenomenon, not the researcher.

Data collection for this study included two long interviews for each participant. Interview length varied by participant, depending on how much the participant decided to discuss, what level of detail into which the participant entered, and the amount of follow-up questions the interview inspired. Ultimately, the interview length ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. Prior to the first interview, the researcher and each participant met up for a mini meeting of approximately 15 minutes in the student union to discuss and complete the informed consent documentation (See appendix B) and select a date and time for the first interview. The first interview was conducted during the third or fourth week of the academic semester, fall 2013. The second interview was conducted during the last two weeks of regular classes or during the finals schedule, fall 2013. The interview times were set for a mutually agreeable time and a mutually agreeable location. The locations forwarded by the researcher included study rooms within the students’

residence halls or conference rooms in the student union or administrative buildings. The students were able to select the location of their choice, including those not forwarded by the researcher, so long as the spaces were relatively free of ambient noise and conducive to recording the interview.

Appendix C shows the interview protocol I brought with me to each interview. As indicated above, the interview protocol was not explicitly adhered to, but rather used as needed. Each interview began with casual chatting, starting with me asking the students how things were going. We would then share information and stories briefly until the participant seemed relaxed. I would then ask the participant to describe the transition from high school to college. Whenever the participant was speaking, I would occasionally jot down notes and key words so I could remember to ask follow-up questions without interrupting the participant. I would then ask follow-up questions as needed. Some of these questions were inspired by what the participant had already stated. Other questions would come from the interview protocol, including:

- Before coming to college, how did you feel/what did you think about leaving high school and starting college?
- Why did you choose to come to college? To this institution?
- What transitions have you been through in the past? How is this experience similar? Different?
- Before you came here, what were you doing to prepare for the transition of coming to college?
- How has your transition to college affected you?

- Which incidents/events connected to your transition stand out for you?
- What changes do you associate with the transition?
- How have you changed as a result of your transition to college?
- What feelings/emotions have been caused by the transition?
- What thoughts have stood out for you?
- What people connected with your transition stand out for you? These could be individuals connected with your transition in positive and negative ways.
- What practices, beliefs, or thoughts have helped you adjust to college?
- What practices, beliefs, or thoughts have made it more difficult to adjust to college?
- In what ways are you connected to your life before college?
- How often have you gone home this semester?
- In what ways are you connected to life at college?
- What people or organizations at the college have made your transition easier? Harder?
- What people or organizations outside of the college have made your transition easier? Harder?
- So far in your transition, would you say it's been positive? Negative? Neutral? Something else?
- In what ways do you feel challenged or overwhelmed by the transition?
- Over what elements of your transition do you feel you have control?
- What resources have been available to you to assist you in your transition?

- What have been your sources of support, inside and outside of the school?
- Has anyone made the transition more difficult for you?
- What strategies have you used to successfully get through the transition? These could include things you've done, things you've thought, or things you've believed.
- Are there any strategies you've tried that have made the transition harder?
- When something bad or unexpected happens, how do you usually respond?
- Do you usually face life as more of an optimist or a pessimist?
- How would you compare your transition from high school to college to that of others?
- I noticed that you're noted as remedial in _____. What does being labeled as remedial mean to you? Do you think you are viewed or treated differently because of this designation?
- What advice would you give to students preparing to make the transition from high school to college, especially students considered to be remedial?
- Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your transition from high school to college? (some questions adapted from Moustakas, 1994)

After working through all necessary questions or reaching the end of the interview time, I thanked the participants wholeheartedly for sharing their experiences with me. At the conclusion of the first interview, we discussed when and how we would arrange to meet for the second interview. At the end of the second interview, we discussed how and when I would send them my analyses of their interview to provide feedback, as well as

answered any questions about the incentives or anything else. After each interview, I transcribed each digital file verbatim (excluding unnecessary fillers, such as ums and likes) to use in the data analysis process.

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to analyze the data, I utilized the “modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data” as presented by Moustakas (1994):

Using the complete transcription of each research participant:

1. *Listing and Preliminary Grouping*
List every expression relevant to the experience. (Horizontalization)
2. *Reduction and Elimination*: To determine the Invariant Constituents:
Test each expression for two requirements:
 - a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
 - b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience.
Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.
3. *Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents*:
Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.
4. *Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: Validation*
Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant. (1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcript? (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher’s [participant] experience and should be deleted.
5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Textural Description* of the experience. Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Structural Description* of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.
7. Construct *for each research participant* a *Textural-Structural Description* of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.

From the Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole. (pp. 120-121)

An Individual Textural Description is a passage that explains *what* has occurred in an individual's experience. This passage boils down the participant's interview transcript corpus, through the Horizons/Invariant Constituents, into just the meat, just the distinct ideas and occurrences, so the reader can understand what was experienced by that individual without reading all transcripts and stumbling over superfluous information. The researcher then takes the Individual Textural Description and engages in Imaginative Variation in order to develop the Individual Structural Description. Moustakas (1994) presents four steps of Imaginative Variation:

1. Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meaning;
2. Recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon;
3. Considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon, such as the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others;
4. Searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon. (p. 99)

Once the researcher participates in Imaginative Variation, she will produce an Individual Structural Description that explains *how* the phenomenon was experienced within context. The last step of phenomenological data analysis is creating the Textural-Structural Description. This final step is described by Moustakas (1994) as “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the [meanings and] essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). After reading the Composite Textural-Structural Description, developed from each participant’s Textural and Structural Descriptions, readers should be able to walk away feeling as though they now understand better what it is like to experience the phenomenon studied.

Verification Procedures

While reliability and validity are common concepts in quantitative studies, there is no consensus on terms or procedures that should be used in qualitative studies, partially due to the variability of methodologies and contexts (Creswell, 2007). However, Creswell does put forth eight validation strategies that are frequently used by qualitative researchers, including:

- Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field
- Triangulation
- Peer review or debriefing
- Negative case analysis
- Clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study
- Member checking

- Providing rich, thick description to allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability
- External audits

Creswell encourages qualitative researchers to use at least two validation strategies in any given study. In my study, I chose to utilize three.

Clarifying researcher bias should be automatically included as a validation practice in phenomenological studies, as it is directly in line with the idea of the Epoche and bracketing out one's experiences and understandings of the phenomenon being studied. I set out to include my own experiences and assumptions that might influence this study and my interpretations in the Role of the Researcher section, the Assumptions section of the Introduction, and in other locations. Additionally, it is another aim of phenomenology to provide rich, thick description of what was experienced and how it was experienced contextually, utilizing direct quotes from the participants. As a result, I have included thick, rich descriptions in my Results chapter, as well as other sections focused on the setting and participants. This attention to detail will allow readers to determine in what ways the study, and my conclusions, would be applicable in their own settings. Lastly, I participated in member checking while analyzing my data. After writing up the Individual Textural Description, I emailed each description out to the participant for whom it was constructed. I asked the participants to respond to me letting me know if the description seemed accurate or if there was anything they thought should be amended, added, or eliminated.

Ethical Considerations

Protecting rather than taking advantage of the participants who have helped me with this study was of the utmost importance. As a result, I took a number of steps to ensure the participants were not harmed through their participation. First of all, IRB approval was sought and granted both through the University of Nebraska and through Southeastern University (See appendix D for University of Nebraska, though Southeastern's approval has been held back to continue to conceal the location of the study). Additionally, each participant signed an informed consent document (See appendix B), having had an opportunity to go over the information previously, and having the opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns before signing. The consent form went over the nature, purpose, and requirements of the study, while also making it clear that participation was voluntary and that a participant could opt out of the study at any time. Also, while the informed consent documentation included a statement on risks to the participants, there were no foreseeable risks of harm to the participants as a result of the study.

Additionally, steps were taken to maintain confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants. In order to accomplish this, I choose a pseudonym for each participant. This pseudonym was used for every transcript and in this report. The only location of the actual names of the participants is on their informed consent forms, which are locked in a file cabinet in my personal office, to which only I have a key. The name of the institution which the participants attended was also changed to Southeastern University or SU in all transcripts and in this report. Further, the transcripts do not exist

in paper copy. They only exist in digital form and are kept on my own personal laptop, which is password protected.

Lastly, I made sure to treat the participants as fellow researchers, allowing them to have some control over the direction of interviews, not pushing them to share more than they were comfortable, and asking for their feedback on my understandings of their experiences. Participant feedback would have been included in the final analyses, but all participants who responded (six out of eight) expressed full agreement in my analysis. Beyond this, in order to demonstrate that the participants were valued, and to be sure they did not feel excluded from my final analysis, I sent each participant a thank you for their assistance and offered to send them an electronic copy of my final dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United States through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. This chapter will explain the process of data reduction and will include the emergent themes with representative invariant constituents, textural descriptions for each participant, structural descriptions for each participant, and a composite textural-structural description.

Data Reduction

The first step in data analysis in the modification of the Van Kaam method as presented by Moustakas (1994) is horizontalization. According to Moustakas, horizontalization is the "recognition that every statement has equal value" (p. 125). He explains that "a new horizon arises each time that one recedes" (p. 95) and continues to explain that:

Each horizon as it comes into our conscious experience is the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinctive character. We consider each of the horizons and the textural qualities that enable us to understand an experience. When we horizontalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence. (p. 95)

For this reason, my first step of data reduction included nearly the entire verbatim corpus of the participant interviews. I removed my words, to allow the participants words to stand on their own. This study is about them, their experiences and their words, not mine. As a result, I sometimes included bracketed words when necessary to clarify a participant's meaning or to assure anonymity of the participant, such as when a

participant would mention a name of a friend, the name of the school, or the name of particular groups or offices. Besides mine, the only words that were removed at this stage of data reduction included fillers such as “um” and “like,” when participants would stumble over words before coming to their coherent thoughts, and occasionally complete and acknowledged side conversations. If this were a study on language use, it would be important to keep these words as well. Yet, with the goal of paying attention to participants’ meanings and experiences, I believe this tactic allowed what is important to the participants to shine through.

The second step in data reduction in the modification of the Van Kaam method as presented by Moustakas (1994) is identifying the invariant constituents. During this process, the researcher analyses the horizons to judge whether they “contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it” (Moustakas, p. 121) and whether it is “possible to abstract and label it” (p. 121). Additionally, researchers are called to remove overlapping, repetitive, and vague descriptions or to present them “in more exact descriptive terms” (p. 121). For this reason, during this step, I skimmed out parts of the horizons that seemed repetitive, separated horizons I expected to classify in multiple ways, and added bracketed information to clarify participant meaning when necessary. This step involved a number of judgment calls, and I will say I erred on the side of maintaining more, rather than eliminating too much. While other researchers may have eliminated more due to its repetitive nature, I considered each phrase carefully; and if I felt that each new phrase added to increased external understanding of the participants’ experience, even in a slight

way – through small differences in tone, experience, and meaning, I maintained those phrases as invariant constituents. Moustakas explains that:

Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses. Descriptions retain, as close as possible, the original texture of things, their phenomenological qualities and material properties. Descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible. (p. 58-59)

For this reason, I felt it was important to keep more, rather than less data for ultimate analysis.

Clustering and Thematizing

Another important step in data analysis in a phenomenological study is clustering and thematizing. During thematizing, the researcher is asked to “cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). These themes could be unique to the individual participant, but are often used as a framework within which to understand the experiences of all participants. By pouring through the participants words during our interviews, while transcribing, through preparing the horizons and invariant constituents, and by reviewing these data, I jotted down themes that stood out to me through the participants’ words and experiences. Once I had a list of potential themes, I combined ones that were similar and seemed to cover the same ground. Additionally, if a theme I had jotted down only seemed to apply to some of the participants, I worked to develop new ways to conceptualize the concept under another existing theme or under a new theme that would apply to each participant. After developing the themes, I went line by line through each invariant constituent of

each participant and classified every one into one of the identified themes. Through the classification and review process, I continued to tweak the themes until they could be used to classify every invariant constituent and could be observed in the transcript corpus of every participant.

Through careful and repeated review of the participants' transcripts, horizons, and invariant constituents; I identified six themes that were apparent across each individual participant, and within which each invariant constituent could be classified: increasing independence, intensifying demands and difficulty, learning what works and what doesn't, leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life, uncovering new support, and finding one's place. Included in this section is a list of the content elements that I coded and included under each theme. Following these lists is a section for each of the six themes with a selection of representative invariant constituents from across all participants.

Within the theme of **increasing independence**, I included invariant constituents dealing with:

- Feelings of independence and freedom
- Making choices on one's own, including:
 - With whom to spend time
 - What to do
 - When to do it
 - What to eat
 - What to wear

- Increased responsibility, including:
 - Managing one's time
 - Turning in assignments
 - Attending class
 - Managing finances
 - Managing household tasks
 - Creating one's own success

Within the theme of **intensifying demands and difficulty**, I included invariant constituents dealing with:

- Increased demands on time, including:
 - Academic demands
 - Social demands
 - Household demands
 - Sports for athletes
- Increased feelings of stress, disappointment, and being overwhelmed
- Grades dependent on high-stakes elements, including:
 - Tests
 - Papers
 - Quizzes
- Increased household demands, including:
 - Preparing food
 - Doing dishes

- Cleaning
- Doing laundry
- Changes required in studying, including:
 - More challenging classes
 - Studying earlier and at an increased volume

Within the theme of **learning what works and what doesn't**, I included invariant constituents dealing with:

- Preparing for college by:
 - Testing out the waters with community college classes
 - Talking to others, especially parents, about college
- Learning how to be successful academically, including:
 - The amount of studying required
 - The type of studying required
 - Where to study
 - Where and how to get academic help
 - Avoiding procrastination and slacking
 - Managing time and priorities
 - Getting organized and focused
- Learning how to be successful socially, including:
 - It's ok to say no to social activities
 - There will always be someone to hang out with and something to do
 - Get out of one's comfort zone to make connections

- Get involved to make friends
- Make friends to avoid homesickness and loneliness
- Developing a philosophy and outlook towards life, including:
 - Family philosophies
 - Bible study and church groups
 - Meditation
 - Positive mantras

Within the theme of **leaving loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life**, I included invariant constituents dealing with:

- Missing family and friends
- Concern about losing the support of loved ones
- For some, not missing loved who are a relatively short drive away
- Letting the “only in school friendships” dissolve
- Staying in contact with family and close friends
- Relying on family and close friends for support and advice
- Loved ones making the transition more difficult, including:
 - Parents expressing greatly missing students and asking them to come home often
 - Friends expressing concerns about losing the relationship
 - Friends regularly telling students what fun they are missing back home
 - Significant others expressing concerns about losing the relationship and concerns about the student cheating

- Significant others requesting the student come home frequently or talk on the phone constantly

Within the theme of **uncovering new support**, I included invariant constituents dealing with:

- People, including:
 - Friends, classmates, roommates, floormates, teammates, upperclassmen
 - Fraternity brothers
 - RAs
 - Desk staff
 - Professors
 - Office staff
 - Coaches
 - Advisors
 - Counselors
- Organizations, including:
 - Church groups and Bible study
 - Greek life
 - Student organizations
- Offices, including:
 - Counseling center
 - Students with disability services
 - First year advising

- Center for academic achievement
- Writing center
- Library
- Wellness center
- Programming, including:
 - Leadership programming
 - College transition class
 - College success class
 - Welcome week events
 - Therapy groups
 - Supplemental instruction

Within the theme of **finding one's place**, I included invariant constituents dealing with:

- Reasons to come to college
- Reasons to come to SU
- Getting involved
- Feeling inspired by coursework
- Feeling at home

Below is a section for each of the six themes with a selection of representative invariant constituents from across all participants.

Increasing independence.

- I feel independent, I feel kind of free, and I have a lot of choices I can make on my own. I feel like I can make the friends I want and I can do the things I want, think the things I want, say the things I want, without, maybe, so much pressure behind it, without all the feedback I'd get from my family. ~Andrew
- You're really nurtured in high school, they basically give you everything. Like if you don't have something in, your teachers will basically ask you for it. And I feel like here it's the complete opposite. It's independence. You can not show up a single day, and the professor won't care. ~Antonio
- I think [the transition has] made me become a more independent person. Even though I'm not fully there yet, I feel, because I'm still dependent on my parents, like they pay for everything. It's just living by yourself, I feel just washing your own dishes, like becoming somebody. Basically just feeling independent because you have to do stuff for yourself. If I don't do something, nobody else is going to do it for me. ~Antonio
- It's not like you're in high school, and you're like, "Hey mom, can I go out?" You can go out if you want, I mean, it's up to you. If you're gonna fail, that's either your parents' money or you're gonna have to pay for that later on.
~Jackson
- Being on my own, the responsibility, I like it, but then I don't like it. I like being free and going out but then, I go out too much. And that's where, it gets bad, and I get behind. ~Madison

- [The transition has] affected me in a positive aspect I think because you kind of figure out who you are, which is really nice, because you're making your own decisions. You choose whether to go out or not. To stay home and do work. So it's kind of made me more responsible, but I'm kind of, I need to get better at it, of course. And time management. ~Mariana

Intensifying demands and difficulty.

- The beginning of the semester is just very hard. I was being pulled, like I didn't know which way to go. It was like I was just entering the pool, the arena, and there was so much socials going on, but somehow I knew there was a self-reflection due Wednesday. ~Andrew
- I feel like college is basically just tests. I've had one homework assignment, and everything else has just been tests and quizzes. I'm used to homework, and you can maybe get an F on a test and it'll be fine, homework will make it up, but if I do it now, I feel like I'd fail the class. ~Antonio
- [Living away from my parents isn't] hard, it's just time consuming. Like things you're just not used to doing. I'm not used to cooking for myself. I'm just used to doing homework and coming to food. Now I have to prep it and everything. It's completely different. ~Antonio
- I have fewer classes than I had in high school, but they're like 10 times harder than they were in high school. So, it's stressful. ~Ashley

- The work load [is challenging/overwhelming], and it's a lot more studying than it was in high school. Like a lot more. You have to study *before* the test, not the day before the test. ~Ashley
- I haven't really had any experiences because I've been so busy with the cheerleading. I actually went through recruitment for a sorority. I was actually doing, I was in [a sorority], but I just dropped it last week because I don't have enough time. So it's like I don't have time to do anything. I've barely talked to my roommate. I've only gone to class and went to cheer practice. ~Kelsi
- It's not a walk in the park. It's not easy stuff. [In] high school they baby you, and they don't prepare you at all for college unless you take classes here, like the dual enrollment. That's the only way you're going to get prepared. I was not ready at all. I was not expecting, like where I am now. ~Madison
- [I feel challenged/overwhelmed] with exams, and schoolwork, and managing time. Being on top of your assignments and stuff, like not leaving them to the last minute, like right now, I'm doing. ~Mariana

Learning what works and what doesn't.

- I feel like I have control over the way I act and the way I behave, and the way I talk and the way I respond to different situations. And I do have control over a number of different things, like my time management and decisions I make. It's just how you manage your time, so you just gotta focus more, maybe in one area some moments and then another area some moments. ~Andrew

- I learned that [I need to study more from] my first test, I thought I was prepared. I went in there and I was like, “I’m going to get an A for sure.” Then I took the test and I was like, “Yeah, I’m still gonna get an A.” And then I saw the test, and I was like, “Maybe I don’t know this stuff. Maybe an hour of studying isn’t enough.” ~Antonio
- Actually just staying active [is a strategy I’ve used to successfully get through the transition], like basically whether it be physically going to the gym or kayaking and stuff or just anything active. I feel like if, sometimes my roommates went away for a weekend, and that was the only time I felt lonely. Like that kind of sucks or whatever, but as long as I’m doing something, I’m fine. ~Antonio
- Never give up. The only thing I can do is try to get better, so might as well stay positive and try different things. You’re not going to get anywhere by not doing anything, so might as well just start somewhere. ~Antonio
- I changed my notes style. Before I just wrote everything out, but now I organize it, like highlight a lot more, take out the broad topics. I’m a lot more organized than I was before. And we can take our laptops to class now, so I can type it out and have it be legible and neat. ~Ashley
- On my psych test a week or two ago, I thought I knew everything! But I didn’t, I guess. I studied so hard for that test too. [When I saw my grade], I was kind of aggravated and upset, and mad at myself. But you can’t take it back. So I studied harder for the final. So hopefully that brings up my grade. ~Ashley

- I actually did not do very well on my first quiz I had in my American Government class, because I decided to, I went home for the weekend. I wanted to see my friends. I wanted to do all this. I wanted to do all that. You know, then my parents sat me down, and they were like, “If you don’t really buckle down and start studying at least 2-3 hours a day, 2-3 hours at least, a day, reading notes, reviewing them, taking notes, highlighting stuff, reading, you’re not going to turn out to be the person, the student that you need to be.” So that really opened my eyes to see that it’s ok to say, “No, I’ll catch up with you guys later. I need to study for a couple hours.” And then go hang out, come back, and study a little more. ~Jackson
- I just gotta keep telling myself that there’s always going to be another opportunity for me to learn something new, to do something new, and to figure out more about myself. It’s not trying to guess the future, it’s trying to let it happen and go with the flow. ~Jackson
- I just feel like the transition is basically all on the individual and how they handle it. Even if it’s bad, you have to adapt to it. It’s just how you look at it. ~Jackson
- Talk to [your] parents, if they went to college, and have them tell you how it is, and don’t let it go in one ear and out the other, ‘cause I did that, and they weren’t kidding. ~Jackson
- Try and be more organized. Have a schedule of what you’re going to do and stick to it, ‘cause if you ever get off of it, it’s very hard to get back on. ~Jackson

- I don't want to get the freshman 15, because I'm a really bad eater, so I thought I was going to be like the freshman 50, because I'm terrible, but I've actually lost weight, so I was like, "Yes!" I go to personal training on Tuesdays and Thursdays. ~Kelsi
- Classes: you actually have to go. To learn. Seriously. I skipped a couple of my psychology classes because I'm a little tired at 8am, and I just had to learn a whole semester in like 3 days pretty much. So just, go to classes. ~Kelsi
- The learning experience is different. You actually have to read the stuff. And I never read my books or anything in high school. And I was like, "Oh, I'm failing. I have to read." So then I started reading and then I was doing better. So you actually have to do the work. ~Kelsi
- Get involved on campus because it's gonna help form relationships, and you need relationships in order to function properly. And just not having relationships, you're going to feel isolated. It's terrible. You're going to sit in your room all. The. Time. Which is kinda like what I'm doing now. And it's really bad. Just, getting involved on campus, forming relationships and everything. ~Kelsi
- I think there's been a few situations where I've missed something because I was out with friends, but recently I've been choosing school over friends, just because the conversation I had with my parents, I need to focus. I realize that I definitely need to start school everything, like don't even worry about friends or a job. Just get school done, and once you do good, then look for a job. Then once I get my

own money, hang out with my friends, instead of just friends, friends, friends, all the time. ~Madison

- I know partying, that's fun. But there are going to be parties every weekend. You don't have to go every weekend. Definitely focus on school some weekends and get your homework done before you do anything. Because that's what I didn't do, and then I got behind, and it's not fun being behind, because then you have to catch up on a lot. Just school, school, school. Nothing else until you're settled on an average grade, before you go crazy. School is important. Now you're paying for it and it's not cheap at all. ~Madison
- I've gotten to know myself better throughout the semester. I'm finding out what works best with studies, like which study methods work better. Because in high school, I did barely study. I just reviewed my notes. In college, you actually have to learn the stuff. ~Mariana
- I think they should make a schedule for their week, and go off that. Don't rely off your memory, like write out everything. I think that helps. ~Mariana

Leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life.

- I don't really feel sad or anything about leaving, because I know they're still there. It's a 2 hour drive. ~Antonio
- I'm not really connected to anybody else, besides family, [back home], and one friend. But I don't think that's a bad thing. It just shows you who your real friends are back home. ~Antonio

- My friends from home and my grandparents and my mom [have helped to make the transition easier], because they come down, and they always call me to see how I'm doing. So they haven't forgotten about me. I knew they wouldn't forget about me, but they still show they care. ~Ashley
- One of my best friends [has made the transition more difficult], because she's really lonely and she's always telling me how she misses me and how it's not the same – how she thinks we're losing our friendship. ~Ashley
- Definitely my older brother, who's now playing college basketball at [another college in the state], and he's been texting me every day, giving me positive feedback and all that. ~Jackson
- Of course my parents [have been helping me through the transition]. They'll tell me, "You can do it! You can do it." Knowing people are there is definitely a good feeling. ~Jackson
- At first when I got the acceptance letter, I was like, "Yes! My mom doesn't have to annoy me anymore!" And now it's just like, "Uh, why is my mom not texting me? What's going on?" ~Jackson
- There might be some people that have it rough. I'm sure that those are people that maybe if they came from the north, their parents are probably up there, they probably miss them or something. And so, they're probably struggling. ~Joshua
- My mom, I'm going home today after this class. She's like, "Can't wait to see you!" [The last time I was home was] about 3 weeks ago. That was only because she was like, "Come home." ~Joshua

- My mom's a teacher, so when I was at home, she would always help me with everything, and now, I was scared because I wasn't going to have anyone to help me. ~Kelsi
- The guy I was dating [made the transition more difficult for me]. He was like, "Do good!" But then he was also creating more stress in my life, because I went home every single weekend, and I only had class Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. So I was home from Thursday night til Monday night. So I never, I didn't take my work with me or anything. I did not study whatsoever at the beginning, really. And so, I would stay on the phone with him every night and just get no sleep and end up wanting to skip or something. It was terrible. And that's also a reason I don't have that many friends. Because at the beginning of the year, everyone was like, "Oh, I don't have anyone, let's all go mingle and everything." But then now they kind of have their cliques. Now I'm just like, "Oh, ok." I'm ready to mingle now, but... I know it's my fault but... I'm trying. ~Kelsi
- My family have helped me a lot, just like pushing me towards the right thing, and organizations. ~Madison
- My sister has helped me out. She's always on my tail about it. Like, "Make sure you sign up for classes. Make sure you get [an online wellness related program] done." I'm like, "Ok, mom." But it helped me out because I forgot. So I'm not complaining about that. ~Madison
- Even when, like with my parents when we're fighting, they're still always there for me. They're never going to like put me all the way down. They're always

gonna put me down a little, but they'll always be there to help me back up and give me advice and help me through it. ~Madison

- So far I've been going back [home] almost every weekend, which shouldn't be happening. ~Madison
- As of now, I still talk to the same people from high school. We all keep in touch. A lot, actually. We have a group chat. So we talk to each other through that almost every day, and sometimes FaceTime and whatnot. It's really nice, because usually people separate right after high school because we don't see each other. But we still talk and stuff, which is nice. Hopefully Christmas time we can see each other. ~Mariana

Uncovering new support.

- When I came to [Southeastern], I was excited, I was nervous, I unpacked my car, and the people were so nice. Everybody. All the seniors and all them, they were helping me unpack, they were doing everything they could, they were helping everybody. I mean, everybody that you could look up to were in my mind, helping out, trying to make our stay easy. ~Andrew
- I think the [welcome week] events made transitions easier. And the support, like the psychiatry or therapy or whatever. I think all those places make the transition easier. I think the RAs make the transition easier. They help you out whenever you need their help. And they're kind and positive and funny too; they'll make you laugh. Everybody's very nice. The teachers too. ~Andrew

- I feel like just the people I go up to and say hi to are sources of support. They're so nice, even when I'm walking to the [wellness] center or whether it's the Subway, they're just nice. So they're supportive. I don't just start telling them my whole life story, they just care about the students. ~Andrew
- I'm taking a [college success] class, which basically introduces you to college and how to handle that, basically teaching us study tips, and what you want to be for your major. I'm undecided right now, but I feel like that's helped me. ~Antonio
- I would have to say my roommates [have been a source of support], 'cause I hang out with them and they cook for me, because I don't know how to cook.
~Antonio
- I love my RA. She's really cool. She helps a lot too. So I'm really thankful for a good roommate and a good RA. If I didn't have a good roommate and a good RA, then I'd probably be really upset, in my bed all day. ~Ashley
- My RA's always been there, like asking, "If you ever need help, let me know." People at the front desk always asking. My teachers, they kind of understand. And I've had other people that are friends, and other people that are upperclassmen that say, "If you need any help..." There's help all around.
~Jackson
- My friends here [have been supportive], just saying if I'm having a tough time, "You can do it. It's not impossible." That type of thing. ~Jackson

- [Rushing] really was a good time, going through it. [I got] a lot of friends [out of the experience]. I know now like 70 people, and I came in knowing like 1 person.
~Joshua
- At orientation, I met friends, I have classes with them. So that's really helpful and nice to have. Just to already know someone, which was awesome. I could relax, like alright, you don't have to be nervous. I know you. ~Madison
- Your teammates [are supportive], because you're on the same boat pretty much. You're all going through the same thing. Because it's like when you're at the dorm with all of them, you see them doing homework, then it's just like, "Wow. I should really be doing this." And they can kind of motivate each other, so it's good to have those peers around you that are motivated. ~Mariana

Finding one's place.

- [My Psychology teacher is] a really good teacher though. I'm almost obsessed, because the knowledge that he teaches, I can't get over it. I almost want to go back in my Psychology book and start reading it again. I have it; I'm not selling it, because that's my major, so I won't sell it. And I mean the first semester, someone who inspires me?! Come on. Usually a freshman just wants to get out of class. Not everybody, but I'm inspired. ~Andrew
- [Southeastern] gave me hope. I felt like the ecosystem was really simple. It feels home-y and clean and fresh, and there seemed like there were really nice people. It was very humble, and very positive, very unique. ~Andrew

- [The transition has] been incredible. From the beginning of the semester here at [SU], it was all exciting. You didn't know where to go and stuff, and you were trying to find your way around campus. And it was awkward most of the times when you didn't really know if people liked you and stuff. But now you feel comfortable, you know where you're going, you're ready for the next semester, you know what to expect, you're ready to learn. You kinda get the feel of how you're gonna get graded and what the college life is about, like your friends. You have time, especially since I was in [a college transition class], I feel like I've learned so much about college. ~Andrew
- I'm basically just excited to further my education and start, basically, a new chapter of my life. ~Antonio
- I go to [a] church thing. I'm doing intramural sports. I'm trying to find an on-campus job. I'm looking. ~Ashley
- I'm not really involved [at college], but now I want to. So I was going to talk to my RA when we come back so I can see what I can do. I want to do the [leadership development program aimed at first year students] thing, because [my RA] does that, and she said it's cool. I want to do the running club and the soccer club. And I wanna just learn about what other organizations we have, because I really don't know, because I wasn't interested. And now I am. I'm excited.
~Ashley
- I love it. I feel like I'm supposed to be here. ~Ashley

- I'm away, starting my life earlier than most people, and that's going to help me out, and I'm not going to be behind. So that's the main thing I look at – I'm doing something with my life. ~Jackson
- There's just no other way you'll get a real job [without coming to college]. I want to be able to have kids and a wife and be able to provide for them. You can't do that doing yard work every day. That was my job in the summer, and it's fine making decent money for an 18, 19 year old, but, you know, I can't be running a house with that kind of money. It's not good, and it's not fun. I want to be able to wear a suit and air conditioning and all that stuff. So that's my drive, just being able to provide for a family. ~Jackson
- Definitely a diverse amount of people here from high school, there's cliques here, but in high school there's just always that main group. Here you don't feel like you're left out of that one group because there's so many people that you can, there's just always someone to hang out with. ~Jackson
- My high school GPA wasn't too great, but it was good enough to get in here. So I applied, and there's nothing wrong with the school. They were just in the [news]. It's gonna be on the map, I wanna be a part of something new. And it's basically the only place I got accepted in. So I just wanted to start something. ~Jackson
- I don't know about running for student government or anything like that. If I did that, I would really be plugged in, which would be cool. 'Cause I didn't really like that kind of stuff in high school, but I might like it now. Why not try something new? ~Jackson

- College is better than high school. For me, in high school, in school in general before, I've always literally just sat in class and like, "Can you hurry up and teach me something?" I've not learned one thing. Like every single day, my mom, "How was school? Did you learn anything?" "No." Every single day from when I can remember. It's like, I feel like I haven't learned anything, but, yeah I have, but I just feel like I haven't really learned anything, like I'm just sitting there, I'll be taking stupid classes, I'll just be sitting there doing nothing, wasting my time, on my phone. And then now, here I'm not wasting my time. I'm actually doing things, and I'm more productive, so I feel like I'm getting more done. And then I just feel more like an adult, I guess. ~Kelsi

Individual Textural Descriptions

Another important step in phenomenological analysis is creating textural descriptions for each research participant. An Individual Textural Description is a passage that explains what has occurred in an individual's experience. This passage boils down the participant's interview transcript corpus, through the horizons and invariant constituents, into a coherent description of the experience; so the reader can understand what was experienced by that individual without reading all transcripts and stumbling over superfluous and unordered information. Moustakas (1994) explains this process in the following way: "Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Textural Description* of the experience. Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview" (p. 121). For this reason, I

have constructed textural descriptions for each participant organized within the themes and including quotes from the interviews to include in this section.

Andrew.

Andrew's transition experience is one of increased independence and decision-making:

I feel independent, I feel kind of free, and I have a lot of choices I can make on my own. I feel like I can make the friends I want and I can do the things I want, think the things I want, say the things I want, without, maybe, so much pressure behind it, without all the feedback I'd get from my family.

While Andrew still acknowledges that he needs his parents for "support and finances" and that they might not be ready for him to be more independent with his decision-making, he states that he feels "better, being on my own" and like he does not "have to rely on anybody." He states that "sometimes a person in college wants to prove to themselves that he can be a little more independent" even when that involves handling the "little stressors" like getting locked out, finances like paying tickets, and a general increase in "responsibility." Andrew likes that college can help him "slowly, but surely" get "out into the real world" with increased complexity over time, starting in traditional freshmen dorms before moving to upperclassman housing.

This increased complexity and responsibility extends to Andrew's personal and academic life. Andrew explains that "exams can be really challenging. But I think that's a good thing." Where the difficulty comes in for Andrew is in determining how to spend his time, when he feels "pulled" in different directions:

Knowing how to spend time with your friends and knowing how to spend time with education can be challenging for me too, because I mostly spend time studying or doing homework and stuff, so it's hard for me to determine if it's the time where I should ask a friend, like, "Hey, do you want to do this?" There's a

lot of times where I got so caught up in my stress where I bailed on a friend or something. So it's kind of hard. That could stress me out too, extra plans.

Andrew has learned a number of ways to personally approach the transition. Prior to coming to college, Andrew had the experience in high school of playing catch-up to overcome past transgressions: "I worked hard. I worked my butt off. In school, I tried to get every good grade I could, so I could make it." He also had the experience of living away from home before college at a care facility and at a boarding school. He found the first transition to be "a little bit harder, because I've never been away from home before." But after that, Andrew got used to transitions and being away from home, saying "and that's why I'm not afraid to be here." Andrew explains learning how to manage his time and make decisions, to stay organized and focused, to put school first and "not go to parties," to write "like I'm advanced," to solve problems, and to show instructors "a little bit of respect" and participate in class to "get on their good sides" and develop "a good relationship" with his instructors. While Andrew is "mainly focused on school," he is also "focused on meeting people" and "communicating with people." Andrew also shares some of his philosophy that helps him through the transition, including "working hard, and trying my best at things, and being positive, and trying to focus, and trying to get goals done" along with bringing "good images to mind," working to "be that person that you wanna be," and taking "it one day at a time."

Andrew has left loved ones behind and is working to find new support at SU. "I'm connected to my mom and my dad. Not my friends though. I don't have any friends." Andrew states that he receives support from his parents and did visit them four times during the semester. However, in terms of friends, he explains, "I meet new friends

everywhere I go. I don't really stay in touch with any of my old friends. Hopefully this will be the place where I can keep in touch with people, kinda make things set in stone, kinda make a relationship last, kinda want that in life." Andrew has experienced "sadness, depression, happiness, excitement, anxiety. All of the above. Because, I've lost friends. I've made friends." But Andrew explains that "the transition has been great, because I've met so many great people." Among these people, Andrew includes the people who helped him move in, those who work at his dorm front desk, professors, his roommate and other friends, a leadership program, welcome week events, an intellectual therapy group, his "support group," the counseling center, students with disability services, the library, and RAs (resident assistants). Andrew asserts that:

Just the people I go up to and say hi are sources of support. They're so nice, even when I'm walking to the [wellness] center or whether it's the Subway, they're just nice. So they're supportive. I don't just start telling them my whole life story, they just care about the students.

Lastly, Andrew has begun to find a sense of purpose and place at SU. Andrew expresses having a "gut feeling" to come to SU, because it "gave me hope. I felt like the ecosystem was really simple. It feels home-y and clean and fresh, and there seemed like there were really nice people. It was very humble, and very positive, very unique." Andrew loves the food and the lakefront; and he kayaks, swims, goes to movies and out for lunch, and hopes to meet a girl to marry and start a family. While he is "mainly focused on school," he has participated in different activities and events, though he thinks fraternities and sororities can make people feel left out, as he, himself, strives "to be different." Andrew is excited to learn, especially now that he is studying "something that's actually useful in the world," "stuff that's towards our major," and since he has

found a teacher in his major who “inspires” him. Overall, Andrew says the following about his transition experience at SU towards the end of his first semester:

[The transition has] been incredible. From the beginning of the semester here at [SU], it was all exciting. You didn't know where to go and stuff, and you were trying to find your way around campus. And it was awkward most of the times when you didn't really know if people liked you and stuff. But now you feel comfortable, you know where you're going, you're ready for the next semester, you know what to expect, you're ready to learn. You kinda get the feel of how you're gonna get graded and what the college life is about, like your friends. You have time, especially since I was in [a college transition class], I feel like I've learned so much about college.

Antonio.

Antonio's transition is one of increased independence and responsibility. He notes that while he is still dependent on his parents financially and while they still teach him how to do things like cook, by living on his own and doing things like cooking and cleaning; he is “becoming somebody” and becoming more independent. Antonio views this as a big difference from high school, where students were “nurtured” and where teachers would work to keep students on track; stating that in college, “you can not show up a single day, and the professor won't care.” Antonio does not think there is “even any comparison” between the transition from middle school to high school and the transition from high school to college, because there is such a large increase in independence in the latter. He does, however, compare the transition to college to getting his license and the increased independence associated with that. Antonio notes that he now has control over “pretty much everything,” including self-improvement and that after leaving a “very strict” house, he is “enjoying myself more, not being questioned so much for the things that I do.”

Antonio notices increased demands in his school work and his home life. At home, Antonio finds tasks like cooking to be “time consuming,” making it difficult to manage his time and fit in studying. However, Antonio observes that “study time is a lot more in college” as well, noting that “college is basically just tests.” He can no longer count on homework to “make it up” if he does poorly on a test. This makes the transition difficult as Antonio fears he may not be good at taking tests and his parents assert he will have to come home if he does not do well in school.

Since starting college, Antonio has begun learning what works and what does not to get him through the transition. He took a summer course at a local community college to “test out the waters” and see if he could “handle everything, coursework-wise.” He has since learned that he needs to study more and “get better on time management.” He is working on time management by restricting demands on his time – deciding not to join a fraternity as urged by his parents, stating, “I just also want to do better for myself and not be put in the situation where I have to go out one night and not study for a test . . . I don’t think I could handle [joining a fraternity]. It’s just too much.” He focuses on “staying active” to avoid feeling lonely and meditates, stating “I feel like that’s a necessity in college, because there’s a lot going on. You kind of just need to sit back and let it.” Prior to the fall semester, Antonio took a remedial course he was not required to take “to get better” and meets regularly with a study group for his hardest class. Antonio strives for improvement stating:

Never give up. The only thing I can do is try to get better, so might as well stay positive and try different things. You’re not going to get anywhere by not doing anything, so might as well just start somewhere.

While Antonio has left some friends and family behind, he has kept some in his life. Antonio describes a large family including “seven brothers and sisters” and “four parents.” However, Antonio says “I don’t really feel sad or anything about leaving, because I know they’re still there. It’s a two hour drive.” His sister is also attending SU, though living on a different part of campus. Antonio explains that his parents support him “both financially and emotionally,” but that besides his family and one friend, he has not really stayed in touch with people back home. Antonio expresses that most of his high school friends went to the local community college and did not even realize he left town. He explains that he will text them back when they text him, but that “after a while, we’re not going to hang out, because I’m all the way over here.” He knows that when he goes back home he will “still have them if I want to.”

While his family has supported him in the transition, Antonio’s mother has made things a little difficult too. SU was not Antonio’s first college choice. However, his mother did not submit his application to the school of his choice, because she did not want him that far from home. Once in college, Antonio’s mother wants him “to go back [home] like every weekend.” Antonio had initially planned to limit his visits home, staying on campus for the first full month. However, he ultimately went home approximately “every two to three weeks.” Additionally, Antonio had started seeing someone before leaving for college. They continued to talk for part of the semester, until Antonio determined the relationship “was a negative” and “unhealthy,” ultimately deciding to “cut that off.”

Though Antonio is leaving support at home, he is also finding support at SU. He was originally concerned about “moving away from home and living with people that I

didn't know and didn't know if I was going to like." However, he became friends with his roommates and his roommates' friends. The group would "cook together" and "basically hang out together." While Antonio notes that his sister seems to have an easier time making friends in traditional freshmen housing where everyone has their doors open, as compared to his apartment style dorm with predominately upperclassmen, he does assert, "I'm making my own friends here." Antonio finds additional support through a college success class, which teaches him study tips and helps him determine a major as well as through the wellness center when he is sick. Antonio indicates thinking that "everybody's made [the transition] as easy as it can possibly be."

Lastly, Antonio found his purpose and place at SU. Though SU was not Antonio's first choice, he came to college to "further my education and get a degree" and to "start a new chapter of my life." He found that while the "people are very different from [back home]," the school is not bad. Antonio indicates being involved at college mainly by interacting with his roommates, former roommates, and their friends and by going to the gym, though he expresses a desire to get involved with outdoor pursuits. Ultimately, Antonio "thought [transitioning] was going to be a lot harder," stating, "it's pretty good now. . . I pretty much like the transition."

Ashley.

Ashley's transition experience is one of increased freedom and responsibility. This includes a flexible schedule with fewer classes on a daily basis and the ability to sleep in, as well as control over what classes to take, who to hang out with, what time to go to bed, and what to eat. Students are no longer "treated like babies" as in middle school or made to do things as in high school. Teachers care less about the students who

need to push themselves harder to perform well. There is more pressure and stress on Ashley as she is away from her family and “responsible for everything.”

College classes seem “easier, but then again, harder at the same time,” depending on how much effort is expended. There are fewer classes taken at a time, but they are “ten times harder.” College involves more research papers and more studying, which needs to be done “*before* the test, not the day before the test.” Ashley understands she needs to study more than in high school, and when she does not, she is “really happy with a C.” Ashley experiences higher levels of stress than high school, “because of all the work.”

While adjusting to the new college environment, Ashley learns what will help her thrive in the environment, and what will not. Taking dual enrollment classes prior to college, helped Ashley realize that college is not “all fun and games,” that she would need to study in order to pass. Additionally, Ashley learned that in order to do her best, she must be attentive, study early, and put a number of hours into studying, aiming for two hours of studying for every credit hour of course work. Though Ashley knows this, she struggles with procrastination and “slacking” from time to time. Ashley learned that she can optimize her study time by being more organized; typing neat notes on her laptop; highlighting important points and pulling out broad topics in her notes, using a model she learned from her aunt, who went to college. Besides the academic lessons Ashley has learned, she copes with the transition by considering her grandmother’s traditional Hispanic beliefs, referring to the Bible, having an open mind, and entering situations with a positive outlook.

Ashley has been “upset” and “sad” being away from her family and friends back home. However, while her “only in school friendships” from high school have ended, her family and best friend remain in her life. Some relationships, such as the one with her younger brother and younger cousin have gotten stronger since she moved away. Ashley notes her grandparents, friends, and mom as being the most helpful in the transition, as they comfort her when she is sad, call and Skype her, and visit her. This continued contact means a lot to Ashley, showing her that “they haven’t forgotten about me” and that “they still show they care.”

While loved ones from Ashley’s past have assisted in her transition, some have also made it more difficult. The person who stands out the most as making Ashley’s transition difficult is her boyfriend from home who would say things like, “I hate you being away. This is so hard on both of us.” Ashley agreed, but pointed out, “I can’t really do anything, because I’m not moving back.” Ashley went home “more than I should have” and “worried too much about him instead of school.” Ultimately, Ashley realized the relationship was “too distracting” and ended it, allowing her more time to meet people and make friends on campus. In addition, Ashley’s grandmother also makes the transition a little more difficult through her worrying, while her mom and best friend are upset she moved away, leaving her friend feeling lonely and concerned they are losing their friendship. In Ashley’s words, “They wanted me to stay, but I had to go.”

Though Ashley had to leave loved ones to come to college, she does uncover additional support in her new environment. Ashley recognizes she did not initially “have as many friends as I did back home,” leaving her feeling lonely. However, after ending her relationship, she began making new friends, making the loneliness less of a factor.

She avoids people who seemed “snobby or rude” and focuses on new friends, a church group with similar beliefs to her own, advisors, her RA (resident assistant), and her roommate as sources of support. Ashley’s RA is “cool” and helpful. Similarly, Ashley’s roommate was “random,” but on realizing they “do the same things and get along really [well],” over time, they have become “best friends.” Ashley even finds support in “older friends that I’ve known who went to my school that I didn’t really talk to that I talk to now that we’re here and we’re in the same boat.”

Lastly, Ashley also discovers purpose and place in college, wanting to further her education in order to land a “steady job” in the future. Ashley realizes college requires “a lot of work,” but is certain “it’s gonna be worth it later on,” as it helps her to get “ready for later on in life” when “I’ll have my own family.” Ashley views doing well in college as a first generation student as a challenge she wants to meet, stating, “I wanted to prove to myself I could do it, and not quit like my parents did.”

Ashley navigated the college search and is becoming involved on campus in order to find her place at SU. Ashley was attracted to SU by the environmentally-friendly outlook and a high feeling of safety on campus. She was also excited to start fresh and be in an environment with less drama than high school. At first, Ashley found it harder to navigate the increase in people and groups in order to make friends. However, after ending her relationship, Ashley looks forward to getting more involved on campus, looking to add a leadership development program, a running club, a soccer club, and other organizations to her current activities including a church group, intramural sports, playing soccer with her roommate, and going to the gym. Ultimately, Ashley’s college

experience improved over time, leaving her happy she left home for college and able to say, “I love it. I feel like I’m supposed to be here.”

Jackson.

Jackson’s transition experience is characterized by freedom and decision making. Jackson explains that “there’s a lot of freedom; you’re living on your own.” “[In] high school, you have your parents telling you what to do. Now it’s just like, ‘Should I go party or should I study?’ And there are very hard decisions to make.” Jackson points out that now “it’s up to you if you go to class or not” and that the stakes are higher in “the real world.” “Here, I mean, you mess up, you mess up.” “If you’re gonna fail, that’s either your parents’ money or you’re gonna have to pay for that later on.”

Jackson describes college as “harder, class-wise,” requiring “a whole different kind of studying” to learn an entire course of material in one semester. Jackson expresses “stress” and “disappointment” when “[I] do it like I used to do it, but then I get it back and I’m disappointed in my grade.” Jackson is overwhelmed by the “amount of assignments” and the “temptations.” “It’s very tough, emotionally and physically. It’s just draining, because there are so many distractions.” Jackson reflects on difficult “decision-making” that “matures you very fast”: “I have to do this homework assignment, but [going out]’s fun. This isn’t fun...”

Jackson articulates what he has learned in his attempt to have a successful transition. Prior to coming to college, Jackson spent time “learning how to study, learning how to take notes, learning how to listen in class, to the details” as well as learning how to make “the right decisions, so when I get to college, I know how to say no, I know who to hang out with” when “[I’m] on [my] own.” At college, Jackson has

learned it is necessary to “be an expert at [cramming];” that one’s computer needs to be checked every night for emails from professors; to “try and be more organized;” and to “have a schedule of what you’re going to do and stick to it, ‘cause if you ever get off of it, it’s very hard to get back on.” Jackson has also learned it’s important to talk to his parents about college. “Don’t let it go in one ear and out the other.” In fact, Jackson describes an eye-opening moment when his parents sat him down during his first semester and told him:

If you don’t really buckle down and start studying at least 2-3 hours a day, 2-3 hours at least, a day, reading notes, reviewing them, taking notes, highlighting stuff, reading, you’re not going to turn out to be the person, the student that you need to be.

Jackson has learned things about socializing as well, learning that unlike in his past, if he says no to a social opportunity, “there’s always someone to hang out with,” “there’s always something to do later.” Rushing a fraternity has helped Jackson to “get out of my comfort zone” and grow “more confidence” in order to be able to start conversations with people in elevators and in lines. Unlike in high school, Jackson is open to “going to parties now,” and “connecting with different kinds of people, just to see what they can bring out in me.” Jackson realizes that “I’m here for four years. I’ve got a lot of opportunities here that I don’t see, that I can’t see yet. I know I have many doors that are going to be opened, you know, a day from now, a year from now, a month from now.”

Jackson is determined to seek those open doors and to maintain other elements of his philosophy: “If you worry, you just worry more, stress yourself out even more, and that’s not healthy.” “Everybody has their flaws . . . everyone has things they need to

work on and get better at.” “The transition is basically all on the individual and how they handle it. Even if it’s bad, you have to adapt to it. It’s just how you look at it.” “[When something bad or unexpected happens, I usually] just try to find the solution for it. And then solve it. And then move on. So, just treat it kind of like a math problem.” “I’ve always finished strong, always had the mentality, it’s not how you start, it’s how you finish.” In addition to the philosophies and strategies listed here, Jackson finds his faith, including referring to his Bible and devotion book and attending church, to be an integral “big part of me making right decisions” and a necessary element when he finds himself feeling bored, lonely, or homesick.

For Jackson, coming to college has meant leaving some loved ones behind, though maintaining relationships with some as well. Jackson describes his family, including his parents, older brother, and two younger sisters as “super close.” Jackson describes looking forward to regular, positive, supportive, daily text messages from his parents and random calls and texts from his brother, as he only went home three times during the semester. While he is “not really in contact with anybody from my school,” Jackson does stay in regular contact with his two neighborhood best friends, who also send him supportive messages, and does look forward to seeing them on school breaks. Jackson also stays in touch and receives support from his church pastor from back home and his high school basketball coach.

At college, Jackson has found support as well, especially in his fraternity pledge brothers. “We’re all going through the same thing, you know being away from home and stuff. So they’ve all been definitely helping me out.” Even after Jackson was dropped from the fraternity, Jackson exclaims, “I’m still in contact with my pledge brothers,

‘cause I got really tight with them. We’ll always be friends.” Additionally, Jackson is “close with a lot of people on my floor, has become friends with someone he met in the bookstore, and is “cool with” a number of high school friends of a pledge brother with whom Jackson attends church. Jackson also describes receiving support from teachers, RAs, and upperclassmen who often offer help.

Lastly, Jackson continues to work to find purpose and a place at SU. Jackson views college as a location in which to continue growing, saying college is “gonna help you out later in life, making the right choices and being smart with who you’re with and what you’re doing,” while also “starting my life.” Jackson explains that “there’s just no other way you’ll get a real job” or be able to provide for the wife and kids he wants or to have nicer things in life without going to college. Jackson chose to apply to SU after hearing how “gorgeous” it was from friends and classmates. SU accepted Jackson though his “high school GPA wasn’t too great,” and Jackson was “happy when I got my acceptance letter,” because he wanted to “be a part of something” at a developing university. At college, Jackson notices “a diverse amount of people.” Among the student body, Jackson sees “cliques,” but no “main group,” saying “here you don’t feel like you’re left out of that one group because there’s so many people that you can, there’s just always someone to hang out with.” Jackson also views all first year students as being in a similar situation, “just because I feel like every kid who’s going in the first year, at a university is going to feel scared, frightened, homesick.” Jackson continues:

Some people might be smarter than others, and all that kind of stuff, and they did different stuff in high school. But I think that’s what’s cool about it; we’re all going through the same thing. You know, you can be a genius, but it’s still gonna be hard in all the same aspects. Might not be the school, but it’s the social life, and you know, that kind of stuff. We all go through the same things. It’s not like

you're always going to have an assignment that's easy to you; you're going to have something that's difficult. So I think it just all comes back together of being equal.

Jackson thinks it is important to “get plugged in” to college. He also “always liked the term brotherhood, always having a team.” As a result, at the urging of some friends, Jackson rushed a fraternity, gaining 70 brothers. While things did not work out with the fraternity, Jackson maintains those friendships and continues to work out and play basketball, while also considering other ways to get involved. “I don't know about running for student government or anything like that. If I did that, I would really be plugged in, which would be cool. ‘Cause I didn't really like that kind of stuff in high school, but I might like it now. Why not try something new?”

Joshua.

Joshua's transition from high school to college is marked by an increase in independence and assumed responsibility. His parents wanted him to go to community college at home, but he determined, “I want to leave. I'm ready.” Joshua notes that with the exception of some regulations in housing, he can do anything he wants in college, including making the decision of whether or not to go to class. Joshua declares he knows he is alone and therefore has “to make all the decisions.” As a result, he has learned “what to handle,” “what I can do,” “how to live on my own and finance,” and the need to “buckle down.”

Joshua finds the school work to be “a little bit harder,” but to “not really [be] a big deal.” Joshua discusses feeling challenged or overwhelmed when he has biology tests, acknowledging that Biology I has about “a 25% pass rate” and stating that, “Bio is hard.”

However, he explains that he is still passing biology and that his other classes are “all good,” even earning a 99.9% in his education class.

Joshua came to college with some ideas and learned others on his way to allow him to successfully navigate the transition. Prior to college, Joshua learned to “study a lot” to keep his grades up to counteract his SAT scores in order to gain admission to college, leaving less to learn on arrival. Joshua also “moved a lot” as a kid. About the experience, Joshua states, “I didn’t really like going through it, but I can like, this isn’t a big deal, moving to college. I can handle this.” In order to keep his grades up, Joshua learned to keep “up on studying,” to use “the buddy system” to study, to go to the center for academic achievement and the library to focus on studying, and to remind himself “that if I doesn’t pass a class, I have to retake it and pay more on top of it.” Related to the social aspects of college, Joshua has also learned “that you’re literally going to be by yourself unless you make friends,” so it is important to meet new people. He finds that joining things and getting involved keep him from getting bored and provide him with “people to hang out with.”

While Joshua did leave his parents back home, he also came to college with his best friend, who later became his girlfriend. Joshua notes that people whose parents are far away might have difficulty with the transition due to missing them; however, he indicates not “really miss[ing his] parents that much,” because they are “only an hour away.” While Joshua mentions he can see his parents pretty much whenever he wants, he only went home approximately four times during the first semester, though he does find his mom to be supportive by “always . . . just pushing me to do good.” Joshua also expresses that his best friend/girlfriend has a great influence on his transition, and that he

has stayed in touch with some friends from home via facebook. Joshua is not really held back in the transition by anyone. He notes that his mom calls him every day to tell him she misses him and that at least one of his trips home was only because she asked him to come home. However, he states "I'm fine with [her calling everyday]. It's not a big deal." Joshua indicates that he would sometimes just tell her, "I gotta go," if he did not feel like talking or was busy.

Joshua finds both academic and personal support at SU. Academically, Joshua takes advantage of supplemental instruction sessions, the center for academic achievement, and the writing center. Joshua also refers to teachers as being "alright" though he likes high school teachers better, because they can be more understanding. Personally, Joshua found support for the initial move-in from a crew of campus helpers and finds a connection to the campus and 70 new acquaintances along with "a lot of friends" from his fraternity.

Lastly, Joshua focuses on his purpose in attending college and on getting involved to find his place at SU. Joshua explains that "nowadays you pretty much need your degree" and that SU fit into his plans because they would accept him with his SAT scores through the appeals process. Joshua explains that the environment is "different" because "all you see is college kids," while Joshua would like to see "normal people" as well. However, he has gone ahead and jumped into the "college kid" scene by maintaining a schedule and working out, rushing and joining a fraternity, becoming vice president of the Crohn's Awareness organization, and striving to get on the student conduct committee and to be hired as an RA. Joshua states that the transition has "been good" and that he has "enjoyed every moment of it."

Kelsi.

Kelsi's transition experience is one of freedom. "I guess transitioning from elementary school to middle school. It's been getting, you get more freedom each time, like every step of the way, there's a little bit more freedom. And this is the best, obviously because there's the most freedom, living on your own and stuff." While Kelsi acknowledges "you feel more independent but then you're still locked up in little things. Like you still have RAs," and that she needs to "compromise" with her roommate, that does not limit her enthusiasm for her "favorite part." "Now I can actually use my phone, and I can wear whatever!" Kelsi further states, "it's actually not that bad, doing stuff for myself" and likes that in addition to doing "whatever" she wants, she can now do it "whenever" as well.

Kelsi is also experiencing increased demands on her time, and feeling stress:

I haven't really had any experiences because I've been so busy with the cheerleading. I actually went through recruitment for a sorority. I was actually doing, I was in [a sorority], but I just dropped it last week because I don't have enough time. So it's like I don't have time to do anything. I've barely talked to my roommate. I've only gone to class and went to cheer practice.

She also says, "There's always something going on, so I can't really relax or anything."

In order to function in the new environment, Kelsi has learned a number of things. Academically, Kelsi notes that "you actually have to go [to class] to learn" and that "you actually have to read the stuff" to do well. Additionally, Kelsi thinks it is important to study, attend study groups, "pay attention," "work your hardest," and "talk to your professor one-on-one." Another necessary element is self-discipline:

[The transition has] made me realize that I have to actually have self-discipline to actually do my homework. Because before I never really did my homework. It's actually not that bad. I have my own little desk in my room, every night I sit there

for like an hour, and I do all my stuff, and I get it all done, and I'm like, "Woo, I'm done." Like I'm done for the next day and everything, and I feel better. I can relax now. Because before I would have a whole bunch of things piled up, and I would stress out.

Kelsi has also found that listening to the experiences of others, like her mom, and talking out her feelings, even on social media, can help her to focus in school. Kelsi has also found cheerleading to have an important role in her life. "I've been cheering since I was seven, so cheerleading is my life. It's pretty much cheerleading helps me get through things." Kelsi attributes cheerleading with keeping her busy so she does not get "sad" and "homesick" and with helping her to stay fit despite her "bad" eating habits.

Additionally, as a "kind of shy" person, Kelsi has sought to get "a little more outgoing."

Her advice to others explains her belief in the importance of forming connections with others:

Get involved on campus because it's gonna help form relationships, and you need relationships in order to function properly. And just not having relationships, you're going to feel isolated. It's terrible. You're going to sit in your room all the time. Which is kinda like what I'm doing now. And it's really bad. Just, getting involved on campus, forming relationships and everything."

Kelsi has left some loved ones behind, but kept some in her life as well. Kelsi's mom, a teacher, "would always help me with everything" when she lived at home. Kelsi "was scared because I wasn't going to have anyone to help me" at college. However, Kelsi indicates still being able to call her mom whenever she needs help, so her mom can explain things, help her think through a situation, or help her solve a problem.

Additionally, one of Kelsi's friends from home attends SU as well and is also a cheerleader. Kelsi reveals this friend "always helps me," hangs out with her, and encourages her to try new things like pledging a sorority.

While these loved ones support Kelsi, some others have made the transition difficult for her. Kelsi discusses friends from back home who would all get together, texting her, sending her photos, and asking when she was coming back home, leading Kelsi to feel lonely and to go home more often than she otherwise might. Kelsi also started the semester with a boyfriend. Though he did encourage Kelsi, academically,

He was also creating more stress in my life, because I went home every single weekend, and I only had class Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. So I was home from Thursday night til Monday night. So I never, I didn't take my work with me or anything. I did not study whatsoever at the beginning, really. And so, I would stay on the phone with him every night and just get no sleep and end up wanting to skip or something. It was terrible. And that's also a reason I don't have that many friends. Because at the beginning of the year, everyone was like, "Oh, I don't have anyone, let's all go mingle and everything." But then now they kind of have their cliques. Now I'm just like, "Oh, ok." I'm ready to mingle now, but... I know it's my fault but... I'm trying.

Starting the semester with a boyfriend back home greatly affected Kelsi's transition, as is illustrated by her description of her transition in relation to others,

I feel like for people who have a boyfriend back home, I feel like [my transition has been] more so similar to them, because going through the break up thing or being away from each other, not being used to it sort of thing. In college you have to focus on yourself. And it was so hard for me, because I would always focus on him, but I need to focus on myself. I need to figure out what I want to do. Because I've been focusing on him for such a long time, and I literally have no idea what I want to do in life. I'm so confused. So I just feel like I'm going to school for no reason, kind of, but at least I'm going somewhere. So I'm setting up a future, I just don't know what I'm doing. As soon as we broke up, I started doing so much better, because I could focus on myself more, and I wouldn't be up all night talking to him. I would just be able to finish more work, be able to actually study, etc. It just, it's easier, not with him. Before I had no time because I was always with him. And then now I actually do.

While Kelsi has to be away from some loved ones, she's eager to make new friends at SU, explaining, "I didn't really have friends at home . . . I've really only hung out with three people my whole life." However, Kelsi came in thinking, "Maybe in

college I'll have friends.' And it's, no, it's the same." Kelsi does recognize that she focused time on her boyfriend instead of seeking new friends, but she hopes next semester will be a new opportunity. "I feel like next semester there's gonna be more new people, so I feel like they're going to be more open to meeting people. So hopefully then I'll be able to meet more people." In the meantime, Kelsi does get along well with her roommate, has "helpful teachers," and took a college transition class on campus.

Lastly, Kelsi is still navigating her way on campus to find her purpose and her place. Kelsi explains that she came to college:

Because my mom went, and I have [a college savings plan], and because I know, in order to get a good job, like with money and stuff, you have to go to college. I really don't want to go to college, but I know I kind of have to.

Further, Kelsi has difficulty finding motivation to do her school work and is undecided in her major:

I don't know what I'm gonna do. I've been thinking since freshman year of high school; I still have no idea. People have, like 'I wanna do this, this, and this! And I'm like... They have options. I don't have options.

Though Kelsi is not sure in what she wants to major, she still appreciates the academic environment at SU:

For me, in high school, in school in general before, I've always literally just sat in class and like, "Can you hurry up and teach me something?" I've not learned one thing. Like every single day, my mom, "How was school? Did you learn anything?" "No." Every single day from when I can remember. It's like, I feel like I haven't learned anything, but, yeah I have, but I just feel like I haven't really learned anything, like I'm just sitting there, I'll be taking stupid classes, I'll just be sitting there doing nothing, wasting my time, on my phone. And then now, here I'm not wasting my time. I'm actually doing things, and I'm more productive, so I feel like I'm getting more done. And then I just feel more like an adult, I guess.

Additionally, Kelsi plans to pursue career counseling to find direction in her major.

While Kelsi finds it difficult to “feel” the holidays on campus, and thinks it is strange to see people “smoking on campus,” “older people” with backpacks, and students with unusual style that might not involve shoes; she thinks everyone transitioning is going through something similar, and she chose to come to SU for a handful of reasons. When Kelsi toured the university, she found the campus to be “really cool” and appreciated the campus layout and the presence of a Subway and a Taco Bell, two of her “favorite places.” However, the primary draw was that SU was a school in which Kelsi could make the cheerleading team. While the cheer-team does not feel as “family-oriented” as Kelsi is used to, and while she currently sometimes feels “isolated and alone,” Kelsi feels that the transition experience “hasn’t been negative”:

I needed to get out of my hometown, because I was dating that guy and I had like nobody. It was probably for the better for us to break up, for me to come here and then to break up. So it was good, but obviously hard for me.

Madison.

Madison’s transition experience is one of a love/hate relationship with responsibility. “Being on my own, the responsibility, I like it, but then I don’t like it. I like being free and going out but then, I go out too much. And that’s where, it gets bad, and I get behind.” Madison explains that “With my parents, I’d have to ask, ‘Can I go out with my friends?’ And they’re like, ‘Did you get your homework done?’ Now I’m just like, ‘Bye, Grandma.’ I don’t have to ask.” Though by the end of the semester, Madison indicates, “It was kind of difficult at first, just because I wasn’t used to it, and getting all the responsibility, but I got used to it and figured out what’s most important and what I need to do.”

In addition to demands on her time, Madison notices increasing academic demands as well. Madison explains that the course work is “not a walk in the park,” is “definitely a challenge,” and creates “lots of stress,” especially around finals. Madison notes she is “struggling” in all but one of her classes, ultimately dropping her biology class. While she sat “scrunched up” and didn’t talk to anyone in her large class, she expresses “nervousness” in smaller classes where she can be called on, even if she knows the answer, for fear it could be wrong. Madison was involved in sports in high school, but does not participate in major sports in college. “I heard it takes so much of your time. I couldn’t even handle that. I can barely handle classes.” Madison finds a steep learning curve in college, stating:

[In] high school they baby you, and they don’t prepare you at all for college unless you take classes here, like the dual enrollment. That’s the only way you’re going to get prepared. I was not ready at all. I was not expecting, like where I am now.

Madison continues to engage in a process of learning what works and what does not work in the college environment. Madison is uncomfortable and sometimes “scared” to be in unfamiliar situations alone. This led her to switch from a large biology class held in a lecture hall to a smaller class where students sit in clusters, where students “actually get to talk to people and meet people.” On the topic of meeting people, Madison exclaims, “Oh, this is what [college is] all about.” Madison makes an effort to get “out of my shell” and meet people, even just talking to “random people” as she walks around, finding them all to be “super nice so far.” While Madison is getting a handle on engaging in social interactions, she is struggling a bit with her academics. She finds registering for classes to be “an easy process,” but is challenged to choose school over friends.

However, Madison is working to get to this mindset, stating towards the end of the semester that:

Recently I've been choosing school over friends, just because the conversation I had with my parents, I need to focus. I realize that I definitely need to start school everything, like don't even worry about friends or a job. Just get school done, and once you do good, then look for a job. Then once I get my own money, hang out with my friends, instead of just friends, friends, friends, all the time.

Madison recognizes "it's all on me, I have to study. I'm not blaming anyone for my mistakes." She also acknowledges that college costs money and "is a lot more important to focus on" and is determined "to prove to [my parents] that I'm going to try a lot harder and show them that I actually care."

Madison has left a number of loved ones behind, but still keeps many of them in her life. Madison's sister attends SU as well, so Madison can always go to her with questions, ask her to show her around, and benefit from her sister checking up on her and making sure she meets deadlines. Madison's parents have also stayed in her life, especially her mom, checking up on her, "pushing me towards the right thing, and organizations," texting, calling, and giving Madison an ear to which to vent. Towards the end of the semester, Madison started to avoid her parents to prevent being "yelled at" about her grades, expressing that her parents expect her to be like her sister,

But I'm not a straight A student, like she is. I mean, I care. I try. They just think I'm not trying as hard as her, but it's just me, myself, I just can't, like I'm not like her, I guess. But they don't realize that.

However, Madison acknowledges,

Even when, like with my parents, when we're fighting, they're still always there for me. They're never going to like put me all the way down. They're always gonna put me down a little, but they'll always be there to help me back up and give me advice and help me through it.

While Madison is urged to come home more than she thinks she should, she does find her parents and grandparents to be generally supportive.

Outside of her family, Madison states that she no longer spends much time with her high school friends or one of her best friends due to their busy schedules. Overall, she states that while her friends from college and back home can be a positive, “that’s when they become negatives,” encouraging her to go out or stay up when she knows she should be studying or sleeping.

In terms of making connections and finding support on campus, Madison has made friends in classes and during orientation, but is experiencing “some sadness” because some of her newly made friends are leaving SU. She hopes a space will open up in the dorms for second semester so she can “make more friends,” stating, “I’m really excited about that. I want to move in and have a roommate, make a connection with someone.” In addition to friends and family, Madison has worked with first year advising and looked for information on the university website.

Lastly, Madison is in the process of finding a sense of purpose and place at SU.

Madison explains that:

[I] mostly [chose to come to college because of] my parents. They didn’t force me, but they just got me to see that it’s a better thing instead of starting off as a job like at a gas station or something like that. They think it would be better for me to, actually get some studying and maybe get like a real job. They made me open my mind and see the better opportunities.

Madison chose SU based on its proximity to home, the presence of her sister, and the fact that the institution accepted her. The presence of Madison’s sister meant she already knew someone on campus, but she is interested in making more connections. Madison attended welcome week events, watches ice hockey games with friends, and works out.

However, she wants to get more involved. Madison had plans for getting involved with a school spirit organization, the programming board, and a number of other clubs and activities, but she ran into scheduling conflicts or did not find the time. By the end of the semester, Madison indicates “I haven’t really gotten involved, so that [hasn’t really helped my transition].” Also, while Madison has made a number of friends, she longs for “new friends” that are not associated with “drama.” Madison describes her transition as “a mix, but more positive than negative, just because I always had people helping me out.” She hopes to get a room on campus next semester, saying “I definitely want to ‘cause I feel so uninvolved.” Madison longs for roommates and friendships like her sister has developed “because they’re supposed to be my friends for the rest of my life.”

Mariana.

Mariana’s transition from high school to college is one of awareness of excitement and pressure. Mariana describes herself at the beginning of her transition as “excited” and “looking forward to the new chapter in [her] life.” However, in the scene she describes, Mariana quickly begins to focus on the pressure on herself, upon realizing that her parents are no longer there to help and that in college, “you have control of everything” and “you do your own success.” Mariana notes positive aspects of the new chapter, including “figur[ing] out who you are,” “making your own decisions,” and becoming “more responsible.” However, she indicates needing “to get better” at responsibility and time management. Mariana had the experience of being away from home before at soccer camp, where she was by herself and it was “all on you” to “show what you’re there for.” However, she found those camps to also be “a big transition” and to be “kind of hard.”

In addition to increased need for responsibility, Mariana notes increased demands on her time and her academic performance. As a member of the soccer team, Mariana states that “time is very tough, because you’re always dealing with practices and meetings and stuff.” As a result, she struggles “getting the academic part in.” This is especially difficult now that she has to study more, “like two hours” for a college class, as opposed to the “15 minutes” she was used to in high school. Mariana expresses that college, with sometimes only two tests to make up the entire grade, is “tougher” than high school classes with more tests and assignments, “more chances.” She finds the transition to be “overwhelming” and stressful, as she fears being yelled at by counselors and coaches and losing eligibility to play soccer if she does not keep her grades up.

While working within the increased demands, Mariana has learned a number of things that work and do not work to help her through the transition. Mariana explains that she did not really do anything to prepare for the transition besides to come in with a “bring it on attitude.” However, in Mariana’s words, “and they brought it on, and I’m not ready now. I’m struggling.” Mariana says that “you really need to discipline yourself,” have self-motivation, maintain “positive thoughts,” and “just get it done.” Unfortunately, Mariana struggles with all of these things as well as procrastinating, managing time, picking up concepts quickly, and ignoring negative thoughts such as “No, I don’t want to study,” “No, I just want to sleep,” “No, I’m too tired,” “I don’t want to go to class,” or “I don’t want to listen to my professor.” While Mariana has struggled, she also feels she has “gotten to know myself better throughout the semester” and is “finding out what works best with studies.” She is also committed to working with tutors and meeting with

her counselor regularly to make a schedule and go over what she needs to do for the week.

While Mariana has left family and friends behind, they have still made the transition easier for her by supporting her. She sees her parents, who live about 50 minutes away, “almost every weekend” and talks to her friends “almost every day” on a group chat. Mariana describes these relationships as supportive, though when she needs to focus on studying, she needs to stay on campus. Additionally, Mariana expresses some stress related to watching money to help her parents in their current financial situation. In general though, Mariana feels that “usually people are rooting for you” and finds her coaches, counselor, athletic staff, and teammates to be supportive and helpful.

Mariana’s transition also includes finding a sense of purpose and a sense of place. Mariana chose to come to college to open up “a lot more job opportunities” and to take the next step. She also came to college and to SU so she could continue to play soccer. Mariana likes that the university is “close to home” and that “the campus is close together,” alleviating concerns of getting lost or feeling overwhelmed at a larger institution. To find her place, Mariana has tried hip hop, Zumba, and yoga classes for fun and gotten involved with church and Bible study. Most importantly, though for Mariana, she has found her place on her team. After expressing that she does not know how non-athletes would make friends besides trying to get involved, she states that with athletes, “You’re all on the team, you automatically have to be friends, pretty much. And usually it’s the case that you just love each other.”

Individual Structural Descriptions

Another necessary element in phenomenological analysis is creation of individual structural descriptions for each participant. Researchers use repeated review and analysis of the interview corpus, the individual textural descriptions, and imaginative variation in order to produce the individual structural descriptions of how participants experienced what they did, within context. According to Moustakas (1994), imaginative variation includes considering “the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meaning;” “recognizing the underlying themes or contexts” of the experience; “considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon, such as the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others;” and searching for examples “that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon” (p. 99). For this reason, I have constructed, and present here, individual structural descriptions that present the underlying themes of each individual’s interview corpus, especially as related to universal structures as mentioned above. The individual textural descriptions were written around the themes across all eight study participants. While each participant exemplified each of the six themes discussed above, each participant did not emphasize the same things. This section briefly examines the topics, themes, and universal structures that came out during the interviews as the most salient to each participant.

Andrew.

Andrew’s transition experience is underscored by the universal structure of relation to others. A large amount of time during our interviews focused on the theme of

independence and Andrew's ability to make his own decisions. This could be related to Andrew's past experiences in supervised living situations with the learning center and the boarding school, but were discussed in relation to his parents. "I feel independent, I feel kind of free, and I have a lot of choices I can make on my own. I feel like I can make the friends I want and I can do the things I want, think the things I want, say the things I want, without, maybe, so much pressure behind it, without all the feedback I'd get from my family." Andrew looks forward to being truly independent and not feeling required to answer to someone, referring to "feelings of maybe wanting to be more independent from your parents and stuff, like making your own choices and not having to rely on them for money and stuff, so they hold it over your head." This may come from a deeper feeling of wanting to define himself in his own terms, rather than someone else's, as illustrated by Andrew's comment "I always tried my best to be different." While Andrew understands that he still needs his parents for "support and finances" he sees college as a step in the transition towards independence, starting with first coming to college, and increasing as he moves to apartment-style housing, and ultimately out on his own.

Besides Andrew's preoccupation with gaining independence, he is also very focused on making connections with everyone from his roommate to his RA, from his teachers to his therapists, from the students who work at the front desk of his dorm to the person who works at Subway. Andrew is very interested in building his "support group," people who can help him avoid or help him through a situation where he "go[es] crazy" or has an "anger issue." Andrew also brings up striving to form a relationship with the professor in his entry-level major course on multiple occasions. Additionally, Andrew also just wants to make and keep friends. When thinking about people Andrew is still

connected to from home, he mentions his parents and then states, “Not my friends though. I don’t have any friends.” This is something Andrew very much wants to change, however, and indicates this by saying, “I don’t really stay in touch with any of my old friends. Hopefully this will be the place where I can keep in touch with people, kinda make things set in stone, kinda make a relationship last, kinda want that in life...” In addition to wanting to form lasting friendships, Andrew strives to find a lasting relationship with a woman as well, bringing up the issue, out of the blue, in the interview, that it is difficult to meet women, saying, “It’s harder to find a girl than you think. I thought I was going to come in here and they were going to find me, but I guess I just have to wait and just do my studies and just do school and I’ll just figure everything out. Get married, have a child, and you know.” While Andrew has never had a girlfriend before, he would now like to find and form a life-long relationship. All of the issues Andrew continually came back to supported a desire to form and maintain lasting, adult relationships, as he saw them.

Antonio.

Antonio’s transition experience is underscored by the universal structure of relation to self. Antonio is not overly concerned with keeping a number of people in his life or in forming high numbers of new friendships, deciding not to follow his parents’ advice to join a fraternity, nor joining any other campus organizations. He does note that his sister seems to have an easier time making new friends in her traditional freshman dorm, where “everybody has their door open, and they’re all transitioning together.” However, while Antonio states “I would say that maybe [my transition is] a little bit harder than the average freshman,” as a result of living in apartment-style housing, he

concludes his thought by saying, “but I don’t really see it as a setback or anything.”

Antonio also does not strive to maintain friendships from home. This is evidenced by the following comment about his friends from his home town:

Sometimes I text them, because they don’t even know that I’m here, and I have to explain to them, and the whole process of, “Oh my gosh, I miss you so much!” But then after a while, we’re not going to hang out, because I’m all the way over here.

This tendency to move forward carries over to a girl Antonio had started seeing back home over the summer as well. “It was kinda a relationship or whatever. So I saw that things weren’t going well and just decided to end it. It took a toll. It’s not really worth it. It was mainly that. Like I knew that was a negative. It wasn’t healthy and all that. So kinda cut that off.” It is not that Antonio shuns the idea of friends and relationships, simply that he does not see a need for a large number of them in his life. He does still regularly spend time with roommates, former roommates, and their friends, saying that they are “just a small group, but we’re always together.”

Beyond not putting high amounts of effort into finding and maintaining relationships, Antonio shows much interest in developing his own philosophy and in self-improvement, saying “self-improvement, I think I have control over. The only way to get better is for me to do it.” Antonio spent a fair amount of time preparing for the transition over the summer, unlike a number of the other participants. He took time to have his mother teach him to cook and even took a remedial class at his local community college that he was not required to take, saying:

I didn’t have to take the reading one, only the math one. But I took [it anyway, because] I wasn’t satisfied. I barely passed the thing by two points, which is barely anything, so if I wanted to better myself, I feel like I should.

Antonio continues on to give his thoughts on remedial classes in general, saying “there’s two ways to look at it. Some people are like, ‘Oh, I’m taking this class for bad.’ And I’m like, I’m taking this class to get better.” During his first semester at SU, Antonio also chose to take a college success class, “which basically introduces you to college and how to handle that, basically teaching us study tips, and what you want to be for your major.” Antonio states that he is “undecided right now, but I feel like that’s helped me.” Additionally, Antonio joined a study group for his hardest class and meditates regularly. He seems to sum up his philosophy on self-improvement in the following statement:

Never give up. The only thing I can do is try to get better, so might as well stay positive and try different things. You’re not going to get anywhere by not doing anything, so might as well just start somewhere.

Ashley.

The theme that rose to the top when exploring Ashley’s interview corpus is that she seems to be residing in a gray area, where things are not right or wrong, helpful or harmful, easy or difficult, but both, at the same time. This theme comes up in a number of ways. Ashley explains that the “teachers are, not more lenient, but they don’t care.” The course load also seems to fit this theme, when Ashley says things like “I have fewer classes than I had in high school, but they’re like 10 times harder than they were in high school” and “[College] seems easier, but then again, harder at the same time.” This theme extends to studying as well, as Ashley acknowledges, “you just have to put a lot of time into it,” explaining how she learned “you have to study *before* the test, not the day before the test” and that students should strive to study two hours for every credit hour. However, Ashley also discusses studying the day before tests and procrastinating on papers. I also see this theme in Ashley’s relationships. She describes her mother,

grandmother, and best friend from home as being her largest sources of support, calling her, texting her, talking to her when she is sad, and visiting her. However, Ashley also discusses each of these individuals as making the transition difficult, her mom being upset she left, her grandmother worrying, and her friend expressing concern about losing the friendship. Another place I see this theme playing out is in Ashley's perception of her involvement at SU. She says, "I'm not really involved [at college];" however, she is involved with going to the gym five days a week on a schedule with a friend, playing soccer every day, going to a "church thing," and participating in intramural sports on a regular basis. The last place I note this theme playing out is Ashley's sense of purpose. She expresses a very strong sense of purpose, more so though many of the other participants, citing a desire to further her education and end up with a "steady job," to start to develop the skills necessary to live on her own and care for a family, and "to prove to myself I could do it, and not quit like my parents did." However, Ashley acknowledges focusing more of her attention on her boyfriend and more of her time traveling home to be with him than on school towards the beginning of the semester. Ultimately, this all seems to come down to issues of relationship with self. Ashley is learning lessons and has intentions, but is not always able to put those fully into action and to see them through.

Jackson.

One of the main things that stood out during my interviews with Jackson and in rereading his transcript corpus is the idea of decision-making. Upon reflecting on this theme and another theme that stood out to me, on the universal structure of relation to others, I realized that the concept of decision-making falls under this category for Jackson

as well. Jackson brings up decision-making on many different occasions. Each time, however, the decision-making is related to deciding whether to be social or to study or whether to participate with drugs and alcohol while socializing. Some of these decisions include: “Should I go party or should I study?” “ ‘Hey, let’s go and do this.’ I have to do this homework assignment, but that’s fun. This isn’t fun...” “Should I study? Or should I get on my suit and go [to the pool to hang out with the girls in bikinis]?” Further on the topic of decision-making, Jackson discusses drifting away from his group of friends in high school, “kinda [doing] my own thing, play[ing] basketball, just kinda chilling with the team and stuff,” because his friends “were getting into the really bad stuff.” Jackson explains that:

During high school, I kept telling myself, “I’m doing the right thing, I’m doing the right thing, I’m doing the right thing.” Making the right decisions so when I get to college, I know how to say no, I know who to hang out with, and that’s what I’m doing now.

Though Jackson’s ideas on what are acceptable decisions do change over time:

It’s not bad to do it now, because I guess I’m a little more mature, but back then, I just felt like it wasn’t the right thing to do. But here it’s just a way to be social, and it’s not bad as long as you know what you’re doing, as long as you have good self-control and good responsibility of yourself. But you definitely have to know your limit when it comes to certain things. And it’s basically just all decision-making.

Again, the issues of decision-making go back to interacting with others and forming relationships with others.

Also on the theme of relationships with others, Jackson focuses a lot on making connections and mentioned more than once his concern that if he turned down a social opportunity he would lose out on a possible friendship. “I just felt like, if I didn’t hang out with [potential friends] then, then they wouldn’t want to hang out with me again.

Because that's happened in the past." However, Jackson admits that since coming to college, he realizes that is not the case. "There's always someone to hang out with. There's always someone you're gonna be really cool with. There's always something to do. So if you don't do something then, there's always something to do later." Part of the impetus to test that theory out came from Jackson's parents, to whom Jackson is also very close.

My parents sat me down, and they were like, "If you don't really buckle down and start studying at least 2-3 hours a day, 2-3 hours at least, a day, reading notes, reviewing them, taking notes, highlighting stuff, reading, you're not going to turn out to be the person, the student that you need to be." So that really opened my eyes to see that it's ok to say, "No, I'll catch up with you guys later. I need to study for a couple hours." And then go hang out, come back, and study a little more.

This was one way that Jackson grew in his social skills during the course of the semester. Another way was through getting "out of [his] comfort zone" and in "grow[ing] more confidence, just in being social and all." Jackson played basketball all during high school and had planned to play in college as well. It seems likely that a main reason Jackson was so attracted to basketball was the team aspect of it, stating "I've always liked the term brotherhood, always having a team" when referring to his fraternity. This idea is what led Jackson to rush a fraternity when he had not originally planned to do so. Now that Jackson is no longer in the fraternity, he plans to remain friends with the people he grew close to during the process, continue to be involved with his church activities and pick-up basketball, and possibly pursue other avenues, maybe even including student government.

Joshua.

The theme that stood out to me through Joshua's transcript corpus relates to a structure of time – focused on the present. While other participants might have felt pulled by the past, by dating partners, parents, and close friends, Joshua did not seem to be. He was not dating anyone when he came to college. His parents had wanted him to stay home and attend community college, but he had asserted “I want to leave, I'm ready.” Joshua indicates only going home four times during the course of the semester, fewer than most of the other participants. And while his mom calls him every day, Joshua indicates “It's not a big deal. Sometimes she calls me though, and I'm like ‘I gotta go.’ ” Joshua came to SU with his best friend, who ended up his girlfriend by the end of the semester, again, focusing on the present. About his other friends from home, Joshua says “I'm friends with a lot of people on facebook still I talk to that go to different schools. I'm not really that big on going back.”

This attachment to the present is also noticeable by the sheer amount of activities in which Joshua is involved. Already by our first meeting at the end of the third week of classes, Joshua indicated going to the gym every day, rushing a fraternity, being the vice president of the Crohn's Awareness organization, and having an upcoming interview to be on the student conduct committee. Towards the end of the semester, Joshua also expressed that he was applying to be an RA. On his philosophy surrounding involvement, Joshua states, “join a lot of things. Get involved, so you're not bored all the time. And then you have a lot of people to hang out with.” Joshua certainly met this goal, and by every indication, did well in his school work also, taking the time to study

based on another one of his theories, “Study. You’re here for a reason. So, just get it done.”

Kelsi.

When going through Kelsi’s interview corpus, several themes stood out to me, so I will address each of them briefly here, including the universal structures of structure of time, relation to self, and relation to others. In regards to time, Kelsi went through most of the first semester feeling like there was not enough of it, at least not enough to get further involved, meet people, or relax, saying:

I haven’t really had any experiences because I’ve been so busy with the cheerleading. I actually went through recruitment for a sorority. I was actually doing, I was in [a sorority], but I just dropped it last week because I don’t have enough time. So it’s like I don’t have time to do anything. I’ve barely talked to my roommate. I’ve only gone to class and went to cheer practice.

Similarly, Kelsi also states “there’s always something going on, so I can’t really relax or anything.” However, Kelsi does not always view the lack of time as a negative, stating:

Maybe some people might [have a harder transition] because they might not be involved with something so they have more down time. They’re gonna be more homesick and everything. I’m involved. I have cheerleading. I have something to do, so I won’t get all sad and everything.

By the end of the semester, Kelsi realizes that her lack of time has not really been all about cheerleading, but more about her boyfriend who she ultimately broke up with, when she states, “before I had no time because I was always with him. And then now I actually do.” However, Kelsi realizes that late in the semester, it is difficult to put her newfound time to use making connections, as she would like stating “now that I have the time, there’s nothing really available.”

On the topic of relation to others, Kelsi struggles with a number of relationships and her role within them. Kelsi feared being away from her mom, saying “My mom’s a teacher, so when I was at home, she would always help me with everything, and now, I was scared because I wasn’t going to have anyone to help me.” Kelsi navigates this concern by calling her mother when she needs her help.

Another relationship involves Kelsi’s boyfriend from back home. One extended discussion from Kelsi really illustrates the issue here of how Kelsi allowed her life to be consumed in someone else’s life:

He was also creating more stress in my life, because I went home every single weekend, and I only had class Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. So I was home from Thursday night til Monday night. So I never, I didn’t take my work with me or anything. I did not study whatsoever at the beginning, really. And so, I would stay on the phone with him every night and just get no sleep and end up wanting to skip or something. It was terrible. And that’s also a reason I don’t have that many friends. Because at the beginning of the year, everyone was like, “Oh, I don’t have anyone, let’s all go mingle and everything.” But then now they kind of have their cliques. Now I’m just like, “Oh, ok.” I’m ready to mingle now, but... I know it’s my fault but... I’m trying.

This statement also indicates Kelsi’s difficulty in making friends on campus.

On the topic of relationship to self, Kelsi seems to struggle with defining herself as a person and as a learner and with being comfortable on her own. Kelsi is concerned that people will think she is a “weirdo” if she walks around or eats a meal in the dining hall by herself. When her friends from home text her, she would think about how they were all together and she was hanging out with her stuffed animals. Additionally, Kelsi defines herself much more than the other participants seem to, calling herself “nerdy,” a “weirdo,” and a “bad eater,” among other things. She also discusses how she has only really had three friends her whole life and wonders if that will change in college. She

seems to struggle with the idea that she could be someone else, that she could stray from her image of herself and from others' image of her. I do think she is on this path of realizing she can create herself as she wants now that she was able to break up with the boyfriend she had been with since middle school, and can see the ability to get more involved and make new friends on the horizon.

Madison.

In reading Madison's interview corpus, the themes that stood out to me were on the universal structures of relation to others and relation to self. In regards to relation to others, Madison seems to struggle with defining boundaries. Madison comments time and again on the fact that she goes out with her friends too much and struggles to prioritize her academics:

My friends are positive, but that's when they become negatives, like when they're like, "Let's go out tonight!" And I'm like, "I really can't. I gotta do this." And they're like, "OK." And then they show up at my house.

"I think there's been a few situations where I've missed something because I was out with friends." While some of the participants have made statements to the effect that it is important to prioritize academics because that is why they are each here at SU, Madison once reflected on "getting to know people and thinking, 'Oh, this is what it's all about,' meeting new people." Even though Madison clearly does have friends to hang out with on campus, she was preoccupied with the idea of moving into the residence halls prior to doing so, in order to make more friends. "Hopefully when I move into the dorms I'll make more friends. I'm really excited about that."

Madison's drive to have many friends could be linked to her discomfort with being places without someone she knows, which she addressed several times as well. One

time Madison brought this up was in relation to her first day of class, when she said to her sister, “Come to class with me, I’m scared.” At another point, Madison discussed sitting through a class in a large lecture hall where she did not know anyone, “all scrunched up,” afraid to talk to anyone. Yet another time that Madison mentioned her reluctance to be without people she knew was in talking about a student organization she had been really excited about at the beginning of the year and for which she had paid the dues. Madison’s father told her to go to the meetings she had paid for, but Madison indicated “I’m not going to go by myself. He doesn’t understand. I don’t like doing stuff by myself. I’d rather go with someone, instead of standing by myself. He doesn’t get that though. I do not want to go alone.” It also seems possible that this discomfort in going places without someone she knows is the reason Madison has not sought academic assistance. While Madison describes struggling in all but one of her classes, she did not mention visiting the center for academic achievement, tutoring, or supplemental instruction. In fact, the only office Madison mentioned utilizing in terms of support services was first year advising. Perhaps not coincidentally, the one academically related area Madison mentioned as “easy” was registering for classes.

In addition to struggling to create boundaries with friends and avoiding being on her own, Madison also seems to rely on others to remind her of things she needs to complete, commenting that her family constantly checks up on her to see if she is completing her homework and saying the following about her sister:

My sister has helped me out. She’s always on my tail about it. Like, “Make sure you sign up for classes. Make sure you get [an online wellness related program] done.” I’m like, “Ok, mom.” But it helped me out because I forgot. So I’m not complaining about that.

On the topic of relation to self, Madison makes a number of comments about limitations and about her parents not seeing or understanding her for who she is. A number of these examples have already been discussed above, where Madison discusses not wanting to be alone and her dad's inability to understand why she would not go to the meeting for which she paid. Other examples relate to her academic abilities. At several points, Madison discussed trying, but not being able to achieve at the level she or her parents expect or desire as well as her parents not thinking she was trying hard enough. About the biology class Madison dropped, she states "even I tried really hard, some people aren't the same. I just couldn't handle it." At another point, Madison talks about being compared to her sister.

[My parents] don't realize that [most students don't get the grades they want the first semester] because there's only two of us, me and my sister, and my sister's like the godchild, like an angel, and she did so good her first semester. They really think I'm going to do as good as her, but I'm not a straight A student, like she is. I mean, I care. I try. They just think I'm not trying as hard as her, but it's just me, myself, I just can't, like I'm not like her, I guess. But they don't realize that. I'm like, "Ok. Whatever."

While Madison does seem aware of her issues related to the lack of boundaries with her friends, it is unclear if she is aware of how her reluctance to be alone, dependence on others for reminders, and view of herself and others' understandings of her might be affecting her.

Mariana.

In reading Mariana's interview corpus, the themes that stood out to me were on the universal structures of structure of time and relation to self. In regards to time, because Mariana is on the soccer team, she struggles with finding the time to work everything in. "Time is very tough, because you're always dealing with practices and

meetings and stuff.” In addition to having less available time than less committed students, Mariana also indicates needing more time for her academics than other students might. “Being in the remedial, I guess, it just means it takes more time for us to learn things instead of getting it like this (snaps). And I’m definitely like that in every subject, which is difficult.” However, beyond that, Mariana admits, at several points, to being poor at time management, stating “I struggle, getting the academic part in.”

On the topic of relation to self, Mariana struggles to see herself as a successful student. She explains that all she did to prepare for the academics of college was to bring her attitude, but that that is not turning out to be enough.

I don’t think I did anything to prepare. I just kind of came in ready for it. Bring it on. That’s about it. I didn’t do any of these summer readings I was supposed to do. But, I mean, just the bring it on attitude, I guess. And they brought it on, and I’m not ready right now. I’m struggling. I’m not doing very well. It’s kind of a bummer. I need help.

Mariana also expresses concern of holding more of the responsibility for her academic success in college. “I was excited, looking forward to the new chapter in my life. But once I got here, everything was starting, it’s a lot of pressure on yourself because it’s like, you do your own success. It’s not like your parents helping you.” Mariana also explains that she had a hard time previously handling the transition of attending a summer soccer camp on her own. While Mariana describes trying to maintain positive thoughts such as “it’s just the first test. [Mar], it’s just the first test. Usually people do bad,” she indicates thinking negative thoughts on a daily basis, such as “No, I don’t want to study,” “No, I just want to sleep,” “No, I’m too tired,” “I don’t want to go to class,” or “I don’t want to listen to my professor.” Mariana sort of wraps this idea up when she says “the transition, it’s definitely hard for me. I don’t have that self-motivation to do my work.”

Composite Textural-Structural Description

The last step of phenomenological analysis is the creation of a composite textural-structural description based on the individual textural descriptions and structural descriptions. Moustakas (1994) explains this step as follows: “The final step in the phenomenological research process is the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). The goal of a phenomenology is for the reader to walk away with the feeling that she has a better understanding of what it is like to experience the phenomenon. That is the goal with this section.

The transition experience from high school to college for traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United States involves increasing independence, intensifying demands and difficulty, learning what works and what doesn't, leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life, uncovering new support, and finding one's place as well as universal structures including relation to others, relation to self, and structure of time.

Increasing independence.

The transition experience is one of increased independence, freedom, responsibility, and decision-making.

I feel independent, I feel kind of free, and I have a lot of choices I can make on my own. I feel like I can make the friends I want and I can do the things I want, think the things I want, say the things I want, without, maybe, so much pressure behind it, without all the feedback I'd get from my family.

“You feel more independent but then you’re still locked up in little things. Like you still have RAs.” Besides depending on parents for “support and finances” the students do not “have to rely on anybody.” They handle the “little stressors” like getting locked out, finances like paying tickets, and a general increase in “responsibility.” They are “becoming somebody” and becoming more independent. College helps them “slowly, but surely” get “out in to the real world” with increased complexity over time, starting in traditional freshmen dorms before moving to upperclassman housing, and ultimately out on their own. Students are no longer “treated like babies” as in middle school or “nurtured” like they were in high school, “you can not show up a single day, and the professor won’t care,” requiring students to push themselves harder to perform well. “Now I can actually use my phone, and I can wear whatever!” Students have a more flexible schedule with fewer classes on a daily basis and the ability to sleep in and to do “whatever” “whenever,” and also have control over what classes to take, what time to go to bed, and what to eat. There is more pressure and stress as students are “responsible for everything.” The stakes are higher in “the real world.” “If you’re gonna fail, that’s either your parents’ money or you’re gonna have to pay for that later on.” “You do your own success.” Students learn “what to handle,” “what [they] can do,” “how to live on [their] own and finance,” and the need to “buckle down.”

Intensifying demands and difficulty.

Students feel “pulled” in different directions. “Knowing how to spend time with your friends and knowing how to spend time with education can be challenging.” Students living in apartment style dorms find tasks like cooking to be “time consuming,” making it difficult to manage time and fit in studying. Participation in sports is very time

consuming. College classes seem “easier, but then again, harder at the same time,” depending on how much effort is expended. There are fewer classes taken at a time, but they are “ten times harder,” where an entire course of material is learned in one semester, and require “a whole different kind of studying.” College involves more research papers and more studying, which needs to be done “*before* the test, not the day before the test.” “Study time is a lot more in college.” “Exams can be really challenging.” “College is basically just tests.” Students experience “stress” and “disappointment” when “[I] do it like I used to do it, but then I get it back and I’m disappointed in my grade.” When students do not study enough, they are “really happy with a C.” Students can no longer count on homework to “make it up” if they do poorly on a test. “[In] high school they baby you, and they don’t prepare you at all for college unless you take classes here, like the dual enrollment. That’s the only way you’re going to get prepared.” Students fear having to leave school if they do poorly. Students are overwhelmed by the “amount of assignments” and the “temptations” to avoid class work. “It’s very tough, emotionally and physically. It’s just draining, because there are so many distractions.”

Learning what works and what doesn’t.

Students “test out the waters” at community colleges and being away from home for school and camps. They talk to their parents about college. “Don’t let it go in one ear and out the other.” Students learn that college is not “all fun and games,” they need to study in order to pass, aiming for two hours of studying for every credit hour of course work. Students struggle with procrastination, “slacking” from time to time, poor time management, and prioritizing socializing over academics. Students learn how to manage their time, to “be an expert at [cramming],” to stay organized and focused, to put school

first and “not go to parties,” to use “the buddy system” to study, to go to the center for academic achievement and the library to focus on studying, to attend study groups, to solve problems, to “talk to your professor one-on-one,” to “try and be more organized,” to “have a schedule of what you’re going to do and stick to it, ‘cause if you ever get off of it, it’s very hard to get back on.” “You actually have to go [to class] to learn,” and “you actually have to read the stuff” to do well. Students take time “reading notes, reviewing them, taking notes, highlighting stuff, reading,” “learning how to study, learning how to take notes, learning how to listen in class, to the details,” as well as learning how to make “the right decisions.” “You really need to discipline yourself,” have self-motivation, maintain “positive thoughts,” and “just get it done.” Students “[get] to know [themselves] better throughout the semester” and are “finding out what works best with studies.”

Students learn about socializing as well, learning that possibly unlike in the past, if they say no to a social opportunity, “there’s always someone to hang out with,” “there’s always something to do later.” So students can say no to social opportunities to study instead. Students learn to “get out of [their] comfort zone” and grow “more confidence” in order to be able to start conversations with people they do not know. “You’re literally going to be by yourself unless you make friends,” so it is important to meet new people. Joining things and getting involved keep students from being bored and homesick and provide them with “people to hang out with.”

Students find it beneficial to remember the beliefs of their relatives, refer to the Bible, and have an open mind and a positive outlook. Students also find a number of philosophies that help them get through the transition, including: Take “it one day at a

time.” “Never give up. The only thing I can do is try to get better, so might as well stay positive and try different things. You’re not going to get anywhere by not doing anything, so might as well just start somewhere.” “I’m here for four years. I’ve got a lot of opportunities here that I don’t see, that I can’t see yet. I know I have many doors that are going to be opened, you know, a day from now, a year from now, a month from now.” “If you worry, you just worry more, stress yourself out even more, and that’s not healthy.” “Everybody has their flaws . . . everyone has things they need to work on and get better at.” “The transition is basically all on the individual and how they handle it. Even if it’s bad, you have to adapt to it. It’s just how you look at it.”

The participants learned what worked for them and what did not in a number of ways. Participants note having parents sit them down to have related discussions and to convey these messages to them. The participants also mention seeking, as well as receiving unsolicited, advice from parents, siblings, friends, older classmates, and faculty and staff as well as learning about these lessons through transition and academic success courses. Typically, however, the participants indicate that they learn the most through trial and error, applied experience, and reflection. While a number of participants discuss being told useful pieces of information from family, friends, and others before coming to college, they also tend to quickly mention that they did not heed this advice or truly see it as meaningful and applicable until they experienced the situation in college themselves. Then, through reflection, the students were able to put this advice into action and attempt to turn around and deliver this advice to others. It is when the students begin to see that their ways of approaching their situations are not achieving the results they want, that they begin to remember, pursue, and try other ways to approach the situation. Sometimes

the students would recognize their methods were not working only after having it pointed out to them, though usually, they came to the realization on their own through reflection. Additionally, students expressed being able to learn these lessons through transition and college success courses when given opportunities for exploration and application.

Leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life.

Students miss their families and are “upset” and “sad” to varying degrees based on how close they are in their relationships, how close they are in proximity, and how often they see their families. Students sometimes get closer to younger siblings after being away. Parents still support them “both financially and emotionally,” encourage them to make good decisions, and help them with difficult situations. Students, often seek parental advice or support, especially if they were close with the parent before coming to college. Parents and grandparents call, text, and visit students, showing them that “they haven’t forgotten about [them]” and that “they still show they care.” Parents also encourage students to come home to visit, sometimes too often. Students stay in touch with close friends, but not the “only in school friendships,” though they might text those friends occasionally or stay in touch on facebook. Close friends will text, group chat, talk on the phone, FaceTime, and visit. These contacts can make the student feel cared about, but can sometimes make them feel lonely and homesick, especially when friends ask repeatedly when the student is coming back and express concern over losing the friendship. Students who come to campus with a close friend or relative from home continue to receive support from those individuals. Students stay in touch with dating partners from home, but each study participant who started the semester with a dating partner from back home (3) ended the relationship during the semester, determining it

“was a negative,” was “unhealthy,” was “too distracting,” and that it took time from their studies and forming connections on campus. Students also stayed in touch with church pastors and youth leaders as well as high school coaches.

Uncovering new support.

Students are originally concerned about “moving away from home and living with people that [they] didn’t know and didn’t know if [they were] going to like.” However, students do make new connections, which ease their transitions. “The transition has been great, because I’ve met so many great people.” Students want these to be lasting connections. “Hopefully this will be the place where I can keep in touch with people, kinda make things set in stone, kinda make a relationship last, kinda want that in life.” Students not living in traditional freshmen housing believe that it is easier to make friends there and long to live there, where “everybody has their door open, and they’re all transitioning together.” Students involved with fraternities find support from pledge brothers. “We’re all going through the same thing, you know being away from home and stuff. So they’ve all been definitely helping me out.” Students find support in a number of people and places: people who helped with move in, those who work at the dorm front desk, “helpful teachers,” roommates, floormates, new friends, a leadership program, a college success class, a college transition class, welcome week events, an intellectual therapy group, the counseling center, church groups and Bible study, students with disability services, first year advising, the university website, supplemental instruction sessions, the center for academic achievement, the writing center, the library, the wellness center, upperclassmen who offer help, coaches, counselors, athletic staff, teammates, and RAs who are “cool” and helpful. “Everybody’s made [the transition] as

easy as it can possibly be.” “Just the people I go up to and say hi are sources of support. They’re so nice, even when I’m walking to the [wellness] center or whether it’s the Subway, they’re just nice.” “Usually people are rooting for you.”

Finding one’s place.

Students choose to come to college for a number of reasons, including wanting to “be a part of something;” “because my mom went, and I have [a college savings plan], and because I know, in order to get a good job, like with money and stuff, you have to go to college;” because college is the next step; because college is “gonna help you out later in life, making the right choices and being smart with who you’re with and what you’re doing;” to start fresh and be in an environment with less drama than high school; and because “I wanted to prove to myself I could do it, and not quit like my parents did.” Students also find their place by getting excited about learning “something that’s actually useful in the world,” “stuff that’s towards our major.”

Students choose to come to SU for a number of reasons as well, including because it “gave me hope. I felt like the ecosystem was really simple. It feels home-y and clean and fresh, and there seemed like there were really nice people. It was very humble, and very positive, very unique.” Other reasons include feeling safe; loving the food, including Subway and Taco Bell; enjoying the lakefront; because it is “gorgeous;” because SU would accept the student whose “high school GPA wasn’t too great” or whose test scores were low; because they appreciated the campus layout; because it is “close to home;” because they made the cheerleading team or the soccer team; and because family or friends go to SU.

In order to find their place, students try hip hop, Zumba, and yoga classes; get involved with church and Bible study; attend welcome week events; spend time with roommates and friends; watch sporting events; go to the gym; kayak; swim; go to movies and out for lunch; join and become officers in student clubs and organizations; consider outdoor pursuits; participate in leadership development programs; play intramural sports and college sports; rush and join Greek organizations; and apply to be on committees and to be hired as RAs. Students try new things:

I don't know about running for student government or anything like that. If I did that, I would really be plugged in, which would be cool. 'Cause I didn't really like that kind of stuff in high school, but I might like it now. Why not try something new?

Students find that there are "cliques," but no "main group;" so "here you don't feel like you're left out of that one group because there's so many people that you can, there's just always someone to hang out with."

Overall, by the end of the first semester, students start to feel like they have developed a sense of place at college:

[The transition has] been incredible. From the beginning of the semester here at [SU], it was all exciting. You didn't know where to go and stuff, and you were trying to find your way around campus. And it was awkward most of the times when you didn't really know if people liked you and stuff. But now you feel comfortable, you know where you're going, you're ready for the next semester, you know what to expect, you're ready to learn. You kinda get the feel of how you're gonna get graded and what the college life is about, like your friends. You have time, especially since I was in [a college transition class], I feel like I've learned so much about college.

"I love it. I feel like I'm supposed to be here."

Relation to others.

The universal structure of relation to others underscored the interviews with four of the participants: Andrew, Jackson, Kelsi, and Madison. Some of these concerns focused on the theme of independence and the students' ability to make their own decisions. This could be related to past experiences in supervised living situations as well as to the level of autonomy parents allowed their children prior to college.

I feel independent, I feel kind of free, and I have a lot of choices I can make on my own. I feel like I can make the friends I want and I can do the things I want, think the things I want, say the things I want, without, maybe, so much pressure behind it, without all the feedback I'd get from my family.

Students look forward to being truly independent and not feeling required to answer to someone, referring to "feelings of maybe wanting to be more independent from your parents and stuff, like making your own choices and not having to rely on them for money and stuff, so they hold it over your head." This may come from a deeper feeling of wanting to define themselves in their own terms, rather than someone else's. On the opposite side, students who grow used to family members regularly checking up on them and reminding them of things, can cease to remind themselves, becoming dependent on others to be successful.

Students are also focused on making connections with a wide range of people, from roommates to RAs, from teachers to the person who works at Subway, working to build a "support group." Students strive to form lasting relationships. "Hopefully this will be the place where I can keep in touch with people, kinda make things set in stone, kinda make a relationship last, kinda want that in life..." Students sometimes struggle with the belief that if they turn down a social engagement, it will not be offered again. "I

just felt like, if I didn't hang out with [potential friends] then, then they wouldn't want to hang out with me again. Because that's happened in the past." However, they come to realize that is not the case in college. "There's always someone to hang out with. There's always someone you're gonna be really cool with. There's always something to do. So if you don't do something then, there's always something to do later." Students work to get "out of [their] comfort zone" and to "grow more confidence, just in being social and all." Students consider joining Greek organizations and other student clubs and organizations to make friends and hope to be close with teammates if they are involved with sports.

While students strive to form relationships with others, they struggle with the decision-making involved with deciding whether to spend time socializing or working on academics. Some of these decisions include: "Should I go party or should I study?" "Hey, let's go and do this.' I have to do this homework assignment, but that's fun. This isn't fun..." "Should I study? Or should I get on my suit and go [to the pool to hang out with the girls in bikinis]?" "My friends are positive, but that's when they become negatives, like when they're like, "Let's go out tonight!" And I'm like, "I really can't. I gotta do this." And they're like, "OK." And then they show up at my house." "I think there's been a few situations where I've missed something because I was out with friends."

Students fear losing the support they had at home, from family, friends, and dating partners. "My mom's a teacher, so when I was at home, she would always help me with everything, and now, I was scared because I wasn't going to have anyone to help

me.” Students do stay in contact with parents and other loved ones. However, maintaining relationships with dating partners can have large negative effects:

He was also creating more stress in my life, because I went home every single weekend, and I only had class Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. So I was home from Thursday night til Monday night. So I never, I didn't take my work with me or anything. I did not study whatsoever at the beginning, really. And so, I would stay on the phone with him every night and just get no sleep and end up wanting to skip or something. It was terrible. And that's also a reason I don't have that many friends. Because at the beginning of the year, everyone was like, “Oh, I don't have anyone, let's all go mingle and everything.” But then now they kind of have their cliques. Now I'm just like, “Oh, ok.” I'm ready to mingle now, but... I know it's my fault but... I'm trying.

Lastly, students can be uncomfortable being in places without someone they know. “Come to class with me, I'm scared.” “I'm not going to go by myself. He doesn't understand. I don't like doing stuff by myself. I'd rather go with someone, instead of standing by myself. He doesn't get that though. I do not want to go alone.” This issue could keep students from forming new relationships that will help them on campus and from seeking academic and other help.

Relation to self.

The universal structure of relation to self underscored the interviews with five of the participants: Antonio, Ashley, Kelsi, Madison, and Mariana. Students realize that they need to focus on themselves and their growth in college, making them willing to leave loved ones behind including dating partners, when they realize the relationship is “not really worth it,” “a negative,” or “[not] healthy”:

In college you have to focus on yourself. And it was so hard for me, because I would always focus on him, but I need to focus on myself. I need to figure out what I want to do. Because I've been focusing on him for such a long time, and I literally have no idea what I want to do in life. I'm so confused. So I just feel like I'm going to school for no reason, kind of, but at least I'm going somewhere. So I'm setting up a future, I just don't know what I'm doing. As soon as we

broke up, I started doing so much better, because I could focus on myself more, and I wouldn't be up all night talking to him. I would just be able to finish more work, be able to actually study, etc. It just, it's easier, not with him. Before I had no time because I was always with him. And then now I actually do.

Students strive to find who they are on their own and what they want.

Additionally, students work to develop their own philosophy and to improve themselves. "Self-improvement, I think I have control over. The only way to get better is for me to do it." Students prepare for college and strive to learn how to do household tasks, study, and make decisions in regards to time management and other issues. This is not always easy. Students often struggle to learn these lessons and to fully enact them. Students chose to take college success classes and college transition courses. Students join study groups and, "never give up. The only thing I can do is try to get better, so might as well stay positive and try different things. You're not going to get anywhere by not doing anything, so might as well just start somewhere." Students strive to get involved to find their place and their purpose at college. Students strive to define themselves and begin to realize that this definition can be fluid. They can be challenged to integrate as well as to differentiate their understandings of themselves from others' understandings of them. They may also be challenged to figure out how to get someone to view them in another way. Students recognize their limitations and sometimes struggle to see themselves as successful students. Students also labor to be comfortable and happy away from loved ones. Students try to maintain positive thoughts, but have to fight off the negative ones.

Structure of time.

The universal structure of structure of time underscored the interviews with three of the participants: Joshua, Kelsi, and Mariana. During the transition, students are focused on the present. They want to leave home and start college. “I want to leave, I’m ready.” They disconnect from those who no longer have a place in their lives and look to form new relationships on campus. They get involved on campus through things like going to the gym, rushing a fraternity, joining student organizations, participating in sports, applying to be on committees and to be an RA. They “join a lot of things. Get involved, so you’re not bored all the time. And then you have a lot of people to hang out with.” However they take the time for academics as well. “Study. You’re here for a reason. So, just get it done.”

Students involved with sports feel there is never enough time. “Time is very tough, because you’re always dealing with practices and meetings and stuff.” “There’s always something going on, so I can’t really relax or anything.”

I haven’t really had any experiences because I’ve been so busy with the cheerleading. I actually went through recruitment for a sorority. I was actually doing, I was in [a sorority], but I just dropped it last week because I don’t have enough time. So it’s like I don’t have time to do anything. I’ve barely talked to my roommate. I’ve only gone to class and went to cheer practice.

However, participation in sports is not always the full reason for the lack of time, but could involve spending time with dating partners as well. “Before I had no time because I was always with him. And then now I actually do.” Timing can also be an issue. “Now that I have the time, there’s nothing really available.” Time management and the amount of time required to learn information and complete tasks are also salient to

students. Regardless of the reason for the lack of time, it is not always viewed as a negative:

Maybe some people might [have a harder transition] because they might not be involved with something so they have more down time. They're gonna be more homesick and everything. I'm involved. I have cheerleading. I have something to do, so I won't get all sad and everything.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the transition experience of traditional-age, first-time, full-time, conditionally-admitted students, attending a mid-size, four-year public university in the Southeastern region of the United States through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. Using a series of two interviews, data were gathered on the lived experiences of eight students during the course of their first fall semester in college in order to help understand how they make meaning of their transition experiences. The themes, individual textural descriptions, individual structural descriptions, and composite textural-structural description were presented in Chapter 4. This chapter will include conclusions related to Schlossberg's transition theory, the relation of the current study to other theories and research discussed in Chapter 2, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and researcher reflexivity.

Conclusions

The theoretical base through which I set out to view and make meaning of the data I collected for this study was Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1985b; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995). As a reminder from Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, Schlossberg views transitions in an integrated way, where everyone is always engaged in the transition process, whether moving in, moving through, or moving out of a situation. Further, in order to assist someone in successfully navigating through a transition, Anderson,

Goodman, and Schlossberg envision three steps: 1) Approaching Transitions, involving identifying the transition and how much it will change a person's life as well as where the individual is in the transition process. 2) Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4 S System. 3) Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources. The resources that Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg describe fall under four categories, and in any given situation, can be viewed as assets to a successful transition or liabilities, depending on how they are viewed by the individual and how they assist in her transition or make the transition more difficult.

The 4 S System includes examining the situation, the self, support, and strategies. An understanding of the situation includes an examination of elements such as the trigger for the transition, the timing, the source or level of control over the situation, whether a role change is involved, the duration of the transition, previous experience with similar transitions, concurrent stress, and one's assessment of the transition as positive or negative. An understanding of the self in terms of coping assets and liabilities includes an understanding of one's personal characteristics and psychological resources, including socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, ego development, outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience. Support can be varied and can include family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, strangers, organizations, institutions, etc. Lastly, strategies can vary greatly as well, but can be viewed in three categories, according to Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012). Responses that modify the situation to alter the source of strain include negotiation, optimistic action, self-reliance versus advice seeking, and exercise of potency versus helpless resignation. Responses

that control the meaning of the problem to cognitively neutralize the threat include positive comparisons, selective ignoring, and substitution of rewards. Finally, responses that help the individual manage stress once it has occurred include emotional discharge, self-assertion, and passive forbearance. The ratio of assets to liabilities helps to explain “why individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times” (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 57).

Because, in this study, I set out to gain an understanding of the transition from high school to college during students’ first semester on campus, I was not able to be with the students when they were approaching the transition. Nor was it in the scope of my research or a part of my role with them as researcher to assist the students in taking charge of their situations and assisting them to strengthen their resources. As a result, I focus here on working to take stock of the participants’ coping resources and liabilities as is evidenced in the information they shared during the interviews. Additionally, while I was not present leading up to the transitions, I also make some assessments about the transition and the stage in which the participants seem to be in the transition process – moving in, moving through, or moving out. Schlossberg’s theory turned out to be quite helpful in making sense of the data provided by the participants and was even notable in the themes that evolved across the entire transcript corpus of all participants, as will be discussed within the sections below. As a result, it seems appropriate to organize this conclusions section to include a focus on the situation, the self, support, strategies, and approaching transitions.

Situation.

As stated above, an understanding of the situation includes an examination of elements such as the trigger for the transition, the timing, the source or level of control over the situation, whether a role change is involved, the duration of the transition, previous experience with similar transitions, concurrent stress, and one's assessment of the transition as positive or negative. The trigger for these traditionally-aged students coming to college was high school graduation combined with an interest to continue their educations. These were anticipated transitions, and ones that students generally wanted for various reasons, such as to "be a part of something" and "in order to get a good job," making this an asset in the transition. Similarly, the timing was also expected and "on time" for these students who just graduated high school. In fact, participants seemed to see their timing in attending a four-year college as good in comparison to friends who were attending community colleges prior to possibly transferring to a university, as several noted this during interviews, making this an asset as well. The students at the university were "becoming somebody," while the students at home were in "13th and 14th grade."

The level of control over the situation is a more complicated issue. The idea of control came up at many points during the interviews, leading to a theme of increasing independence. In general, participants were happy to have increased control:

I feel independent, I feel kind of free, and I have a lot of choices I can make on my own. I feel like I can make the friends I want and I can do the things I want, think the things I want, say the things I want, without, maybe, so much pressure behind it, without all the feedback I'd get from my family.

Other times, however, participants struggled with the increased pressure of now being “responsible for everything.” Simply commenting on the choice to come to college, the participants indicated having some level of control. Several indicated being urged to go to college by their parents, but none of them indicated they were forced to go or that the decision to attend college was someone else’s besides their own. However, in terms of location of the transition, while some students purposefully choose SU due to a “gut feeling,” making a sports team, or being drawn to its beauty and other campus features; several noted that a primary reason they came to SU was because their grades and/or test scores kept them out of schools they had preferred. Additionally, one participant mentioned that his mother purposefully did not mail his application to his school of choice on time because she did not want him so far from home. As a result, I would characterize the level of control as a mixed bag overall.

In terms of role change, while students now see themselves as more independent, “more like an adult,” rather than as someone’s child, they still are someone’s child, and they still are students. So in terms of their primary role as student, this has not changed and should be viewed as neutral. The issue mentioned about the role change from child to adult would depend on how strongly the students felt this change and would be similar to the discussion about control and independence above in regards to whether a perceived role change would be considered positive or negative to the individual student. It is possible, however, that other roles changed. For example, a primary element of Jackson’s role in high school was as an athlete. In college, this was no longer the case. It seemed clear that Jackson was trying to replace his sports team with his fraternity brothers, meaning that he took it that much harder when he was dropped from the

fraternity. As a result, I would generally view role change as a neutral factor, though it could be positive or negative for some students depending on their situations.

The duration of the transition will typically be somewhere from four to six years for students to earn their college degrees and move to the next phase of their lives. While the duration might be important for non-traditional students taking a break from other elements of their lives or trying to juggle multiple primary roles, this seemed to be a complete non-issue for the participants in this study. One participant discussed opportunities that might develop a year from now, and several discussed one day having a family. However, I did not hear anyone indicate they wanted college to last longer or less time. Many seemed to be interested in moving from the moving in to the moving through phase, where they felt more settled in their environment; but no one seemed to focus on the next stage of life or to view it any more clearly than a nebulous. As a result, I would characterize this as another neutral element.

In relation to previous experience with similar transitions, this can vary by the individual. Some participants did not have much to say when asked about transitions they had been through in the past, several only mentioning the transition from middle school to high school and including that there was no comparison between the two transitions. Another participant mentioned earning his driver's license and the increased independence that came with it. Three participants mentioned living away from their parents previously: Joshua, Andrew, and Mariana. For Joshua, I see this as an asset, as he did not seem to be highly affected by the transition in comparison to others. With Andrew, I would also note this element as an asset, as he explicitly stated, after living away from home in a boarding school, "I got used to it, and that's why I'm not afraid to

be here.” Mariana brought up her time away from home at a soccer camp, stating “It’s also really all on you, and you’re by yourself. You have to show what you’re there for. It was a big transition for me. It was kind of hard.” Being that Mariana also struggled with the level of responsibility in college, this could have been a liability, or at best, neutral.

In terms of concurrent stress, I did not see much come out in the participant interviews. Much of the stress discussed was in relation to the transition, as a result of increased workload, increased demands on time, and increased levels of responsibility. If collegiate sports are considered a separate transition from the transition to college, then this would be a concurrent stressor in terms of time demands that was a liability to Mariana and Kelsi. Additionally, I suppose the changes in relationships from home could be considered concurrent stressors as well, in which case this element was a liability for several also, including Ashley, Kelsi, and Antonio who started the semester in relationships. Concerns over finances were also stressors mentioned by Andrew and Mariana, as well as in passing by others, which could be considered liabilities as well.

Lastly, one’s assessment of the transition as positive or negative will vary from person to person. In general, I would characterize this as an asset, as the participants were generally “excited” to take this step, and some, especially Kelsi, discussed how the transition was a positive step for her, academically and personally. However, some of them, such as Madison and Mariana did struggle to view themselves positively as students, meaning that this element could have been a liability for them. In general, when students view the transition in a positive light, this element will be an asset.

Self.

An understanding of the self in terms of coping assets and liabilities includes an understanding of one's personal characteristics and psychological resources, including socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity/culture, ego development, outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience. It was not within the scope of this study to examine the effects of personal characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age and stage of life, state of health, or ethnicity/culture. While it is not fully within the scope of the study to address the psychological resources, I will make some comments on ego development, outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, and spirituality and resilience.

Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) explain ego development as an assessment of maturity. “At a low level, the conformist will think in stereotypes, conform to rules, and follow instructions without question. At a higher level, autonomous individuals are more critical and better able to tolerate ambiguity” (p. 78). While college students are likely to be in a number of different development levels, in terms of ego development as described here, I did not note many comments from participants that would indicate a low level of ego development. Based on where we might expect first-semester college students to be, in terms of cognitive development (Perry, 1970), the participants demonstrated an impressive ability and willingness to think critically about their experiences and the experiences of specific and hypothetical others as well as to think critically about their own journeys in order to develop a set of “rules” or

philosophical ideals that fit their own lives. As a result, I would say this was an unexpected asset.

In terms of outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, this could definitely vary by student. In this study, each participant labeled themselves as an optimist when asked, and most did seem to carry themselves that way, thinking positively rather than negatively. The two that seemed to have a more negative outlook were the two who were struggling the most academically: Madison and Mariana. Even so, however, I would not characterize them as being pessimistic or having low levels of self-efficacy. Mariana did not seem to have a clear vision of how to get there, but knew she needed to work with her counselors and put more time into her academics in order to maintain eligibility for sports. And Madison was determined to demonstrate to her parents that she does care about her academics and that she can do better. Overall, though one participant indicated an interest in avoiding problems when asked about how he reacts when presented with a difficult or unexpected situation, the majority indicated being upset at first, but then taking action to solve the problem either on their own or after reaching out to others. So here, again, I would say this element is an asset for these students.

In terms of commitment and values, the participants generally seemed to be highly committed to making the transition work and to being successful in college. Referring back to the previous paragraph on self-efficacy, when the students were faced with a set-back such as a poor grade on a test on which they thought they had performed well, none of the students indicated giving up. Instead, they all indicated trying harder and learning lessons to do better the next time. The same is true on the social front. When participants failed to make new friends during the first semester, as in Kelsi's case,

or failed to make the type of friends they wanted or that were sustaining, as in Madison's case, neither participant indicated giving up, but expressed a commitment to trying again next semester under different circumstances. So here again, I would say this is generally an asset and is tied directly to resilience.

Lastly, spirituality seemed to be a neutral element for some who did not mention it. However, several, including Ashley, Jackson, and Mariana, did mention church and Bible study as assisting them in the transition, with decision-making, and with managing their emotions. Antonio also indicated mediation was assisting him. So I would characterize this last element as neutral or an asset depending on the student.

Support.

Support can be varied and can include family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, strangers, organizations, institutions, etc. Much space in this dissertation has already been spent discussing support within the themes of *leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life* and *uncovering new support*, so I will not belabor the point here. Some "support" can be a liability, including dating partners who remain at home and distract the students from their lives at college as well as friends and parents who repeatedly tell the students how much they are missed, what fun the student is missing, and how they are concerned their relationships are being negatively impacted. In general, however, support came through the interviews as a very large asset and could be found in the form of parents and families, old friends, people who helped with move in, those who work at the dorm front desk, "helpful teachers," roommates, floormates, fraternities and student organizations, new friends, a leadership program, a college success class, a college transition class, welcome week events, an intellectual therapy

group, the counseling center, church groups and Bible study, students with disability services, first year advising, the university website, supplemental instruction sessions, the center for academic achievement, the writing center, the library, the wellness center, upperclassmen who offer help, coaches, counselors, athletic staff, teammates, and RAs. In the words of one participant that was echoed by several others, “Everybody’s made [the transition] as easy as it can possibly be.”

Strategies.

Lastly, strategies can vary greatly as well, but can be viewed in three categories, according to Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012). Pearlin and Schooler describe the three types of coping:

1. “Responses that modify the situation” (such as negotiation in marriage, discipline in parenting, optimistic action in occupation, and seeking advice in marriage and parenting)
2. “Responses that . . . control the meaning of the problem” (such as responses that neutralize, positive comparisons, selective ignoring, substitution of rewards)
3. Responses that help to manage stress after it has occurred (such as “denial, passive acceptance, withdrawal, magical thinking, hopefulness, avoidance of worry, relaxation”). Specific mechanisms include “emotional discharge versus controlled reflectiveness, . . . passive forbearance versus self-assertion, . . . potency versus helpless resignation, . . . optimistic faith” (as cited in Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg, p. 87-88)

While all of the “responses that modify the situation” are not necessarily applicable, I did note the use of optimistic action and seeking advice. I could see optimistic action in things like changing study habits after doing poorly on a test, making a plan to get more involved and meet people after not making new friends, and working to use a schedule after missing engagements. Advice seeking was visible when participants would discuss going to their parents with problems, gaining help from older

students, and visiting offices like first year advising. When these strategies were used, they seemed to be assets.

In terms of “responses that control the meaning of the problem” the only one I truly noted was along the lines of positive comparisons, where students would justify poor performance on a test or in a class by explaining that other students, especially other first year students also do poorly on tests and in classes. This line of thinking could help to relieve students, but could also pull them into complacency. So whether it is an asset or a liability would depend on the situation and the ultimate follow-up. Mariana even acknowledged this herself, stating:

I've tried to keep positive thoughts. Like, “it's just the first test. [Mar], it's just the first test. Usually people do bad.” But I can't let that be my excuse. I have to do really well on the next one.

Madison is another participant who used this strategy, saying that she had tried to tell her parents that lots of people do poorly their first semester. She, however, explained herself to be committed to showing her parents that she did care and was trying in the future. So, I would say, when used in this context, this strategy can be an asset.

In terms of “responses that help to manage stress once it has occurred,” I saw several of these, including hopefulness, relaxation, emotional discharge, controlled reflectiveness, potency, and optimistic faith. Hopefulness was apparent at multiple points in the interview in regards to doing well in classes and school overall, making friends, getting involved, and having a future after college. Relaxation was discussed by Antonio when he mentioned regular meditation. Emotional discharge was discussed by a couple individuals, including Madison and Kelsi, in reference to talking to their mothers about negative occurrences, and Kelsi in reference to posting frustrations on Twitter.

Controlled reflectiveness was implied any time a participant discussed learning what he or she needed to do differently to improve performance on a test or assignment. Potency was illustrated every time a participant took action to solve a problem and to move forward. And optimistic faith was demonstrated in the participants' discussions of their hopes for the future – making friends, gaining a “good job,” and having a family. I view all of these strategies, with the possible exception of posting frustrations to Twitter, as coping assets.

In general, in regards to strategies discussed here, I noted basically all of them used by the participants to be positive. However, I noted that most of the participants continued to struggle to identify and to regularly implement strategies that would be assets or to develop a wide range of positive coping strategies to use.

The transition process.

An assessment of the transition process requires reflection on whether an individual is moving in, moving through, or moving out of the situation of discussion. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) explain the moving in phase as a time of new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions; a time of learning the ropes and socialization; and a time of hangover identity. They explain the moving through phase as a period of liminality; a time of groping for new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions; a neutral zone or period of emptiness and confusion; a cycle of renewal; and a time of hope and spirituality. Finally, Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg describe the moving out phase as one of separation or endings; a time of role exit; and a time of disengagement from roles, relationships, routines and assumptions.

For the most part, the participants in this study showed themselves to be in the moving in phase, as would be expected. They entered new roles as college students, as adults, as fraternity brothers, as collegiate athletes, as members of student organizations. They sought new relationships with friends, roommates, RAs, professors and support staff, and significant others. They learned new routines with a new class structure, new ways of studying, and new activities. They learned the ropes – learning how to effectively study, manage their time, and socialize. They socialized; a lot. Lastly, there were clear elements of hang-over identity for some, struggling to manage things on their own that their parents used to do for them, struggling to adapt from their high school methods of studying to something that would work in college, and struggling to accept a team that felt less like a family than it had in high school.

However, a few participants still seemed to struggle, at the beginning of the semester, in the moving out phase, focusing on separation and endings; role exit; and disengagement from roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. The holdover in this phase was primarily apparent for the three individuals who came to college with dating partners back home, primarily Ashley and Kelsi. By the end of the semester, these two were doing much more to socialize, form relationships, and establish new routines. However, they both discussed, at length, spending a lot of the beginning of the semester focused on their boyfriends, on this relationship, and on their role and routines within it – talking on the phone constantly, going home repeatedly, and not interacting with people at college. Towards the beginning of the semester, they did very little associated with the moving in phase and quite a great deal with the moving out phase. It was not until they exited their roles as girlfriend and started focusing more time engaging with their lives at

college, and less time focusing on the separation and ending of their relationship, that they began to really progress from the moving out phase to the moving in phase. These two indicated struggling the most socially at SU, struggling to make connections, but were optimistic towards the future after ending their relationships. Additionally, Mariana and Madison seemed to struggle a lot with separation from family, noting going home most weekends, and in Madison's case, relying on family for reminders. Possibly not coincidentally, these two indicated struggling the most academically. These observations indicate that a position in the moving out phase rather than the moving in phase when beginning the transition from high school to college can negatively impact students socially and academically.

Relation to Other Research

While the findings of this study are clearly aligned with Schlossberg's transition theory, they are also in line with other research cited in Chapter 2 as well. The student transition issues listed in Chapter 2 were definitely clear in the experiences of the students who participated in this study. Robotham and Julian (2006) discuss stressors including exams, time demands, financial pressures, new responsibilities, increased academic workload, new relationships, career decisions, fear of failure, and parental pressure. Each one of these stressors was mentioned by the participants and are integrated into the themes that came out of this study, including increasing independence in terms of financial pressures and new responsibilities; intensifying demands and difficulty in terms of exams, time demands, increased academic workload, and fear of failure; leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life in terms of

parental pressure; uncovering new support in terms of new relationships; and finding one's place in terms of career decisions.

Further, Hoyt (1999) expresses that competing demands on students' time and attention, such as conflicts between work, personal, and family issues, can lead to a lack of academic commitment and social participation in education, ultimately leading to attrition. One way we saw this played out in the findings was how Ashley and Kelsi noted they did not put in the time or effort necessary to do well in their classes or make social connections on campus when they were focused on the personal issues related to their boyfriends back home. They also both spoke about needing to end their relationships because of how important it was to focus on their social and academic integration into the college environment in order to be happy and successful. In general, the issues noted by Hoyt relate to the themes of intensifying demands and difficulty and leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life as well as the universal structures of relation to others and structure of time.

Additionally, a number of studies note the importance of support systems, including families (Dominick, Stevens, & Smith, 2006; Hurtado, Carter, Spuler, Dale, & Pipkin, 1994; Arulrajah & Harun, 2000; Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, Boswell, 2006) and precollege as well as college friends (Bonner, 2001; Ranney & Troop-Gordon, 2012; Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, Boswell; Norris & Mounts, 2010). Further, in Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, and Madsen's study (1999) the biggest predictor of attrition was social isolation. Komives and Woodard (2003) as well as Tinto (2006) also support this idea by arguing that the risk of student departure increases if students do not have the skills necessary to become socially integrated nor does the institution create or promote policies

and programs to foster social integration. The need for social and institutional support as well as academic and social integration was very prevalent in the findings of this study, being directly addressed by the themes of learning what works and what doesn't, leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life, uncovering new support, and finding one's place as well as by the universal structure of relation to others.

Further, the findings of this study are in line with the theories discussed in Chapter 2 beyond Schlossberg's transition theory. For example, Chickering's seven vectors of development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) address the following topics: (1) developing competence (viewed in three dimensions – intellectual, interpersonal, and physical), (2) managing emotions, (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (5) establishing identity, (6) developing purpose, and (7) developing integrity. A number of these vectors are clearly visible in the findings of this study. Developing competence can be seen through the themes of intensifying demands and difficulty, learning what works and what doesn't, uncovering new support, and finding one's place. Managing emotions is apparent primarily in the theme of leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence is most visible in the theme of increasing independence. Developing mature interpersonal relationships is seen to an extent in both the theme of uncovering new support and the theme of leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life. Establishing identity and developing purpose come through in the theme of finding one's place. Developing integrity is a little harder to clearly see in these findings, but can be glimpsed in themes such as learning what works and what doesn't and finding one's place.

Additionally, the findings of this study are in line with Astin's Input-Environment-Outcomes model (Astin, 1993) and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993). The primary way that this study is aligned with these two theories is in their basic mechanisms. Astin's I-E-O model aims to explore the personal characteristics and the educational environmental elements that can affect outcomes such as satisfaction, academic achievement, and retention. This study did very much the same thing, though in a more narrative way, especially in the previous section when coping assets and liabilities to a successful transition from high school to college were explored. While Tinto's Theory of Student Departure also notes pre-entry attributes, it focuses more on students' goals and commitments, especially as influenced by institutional experiences and social and academic integration. These topics were very clearly salient to the participants, with students' goals and commitments discussed in the theme of finding one's place; students' university experiences discussed throughout the themes; students' academic integration addressed within the themes of intensifying demands and difficulty, learning what works and what doesn't, and finding one's place; and students' social integration discussed in the themes of learning what works and what doesn't, uncovering new support, and finding one's place.

Further, while this study did not set out to look at data in quantitative terms, it is in line with the quantitative research cited in Chapter 2. Studies such as those by Hood (1992), Wing (1998), and Hornberger (2010) demonstrate the limited predictive value of a number of quantitative variables, including ACT composite scores and subscores, high school class rank and GPA, number of core curriculum courses taken, etc. on the outcomes related to a successful transition, such as earned hours and GPA after the first

year, indicating a need for more flexible and qualitative studies of the transition as well as the assets and liabilities to a successful transition. In this vein, this study allowed students to speak freely about the elements that aided or hindered their successful transition to college, which was viewed in terms broader than earned hours completed and college GPA, providing future studies new starting points and new variables to explore through the themes and data produced by this study.

When looking at non-cognitive factors with the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) both Trippi and Steward (1988) and Fuertes, Sedlacek, and Liu (1994) found that self-concept and realistic self-appraisal were the best predictors of academic success. This is in line with the current study. The topic of self-concept in relation to a successful transition was presented in discussions of the universal structure of relation to self, among other places. The predictive value of realistic self-appraisal further demonstrates the usefulness of college faculty and staff helping students to take stock of their coping assets and liabilities and to strengthen their coping resources.

Heaney and Fisher (2011) also found more predictive value in non-cognitive factors than things such as high school GPA and ACT score on retention. They found that reasons for attending college had a large connection with retention. This topic is discussed in the theme of finding one's place. Heaney and Fisher also found that students were significantly more likely to return for a second year if they agreed or strongly agreed with the claim that faculty were concerned for student success; if they saw a strong connection between their courses and future lives; if they used support services; if they missed home some or none as opposed to "a lot"; if they were more positive about their social experience during the first semester; and if they had a higher impression of

the overall helpfulness of staff. All of these topics came through in the themes of this study. Issues related to the concern of faculty, the helpfulness of staff, and the impression of the social experience during the first semester were addressed in the themes of uncovering new support and finding one's place. Finding a connection between courses and participants' future lives was noted in the theme of finding one's place. Use of support services was noted in the theme of uncovering new support. Finally, the extent to which participants missed home was addressed in the theme of leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life. Heaney and Fisher sum up the take-aways from their study when saying "this study emphasizes the value of gathering context-specific data about conditionally-admitted students to aid in planning both support and targeted interventions" (p. 74), which is just what the current study set out to do.

This study fits amongst the qualitative research cited in Chapter 2 as well. Wolcott (2006) found that prior to the first semester, it is critical that students and their families experience programs and services that educate them about the transition to college, increase students' commitment to the institution, and help students develop realistic expectations about college. These findings by Wolcott are all in line with the findings of this study, especially within the themes of intensifying demands and difficulty and finding one's place. Wolcott also states that "several factors were found to contribute to college freshmen persistence, including support for social and academic integration, academic engagement, fostering student development, and promoting internal locus of control" (p. 19). While not all of these topics were directly addressed within this study, the issues of social and academic integration were touched on in the themes of

intensifying demands and difficulty and uncovering new support as well as finding one's place. Issues related to student development and locus of control can also be glimpsed in the themes of learning what works and what doesn't and finding one's place.

Dominick, Stevens, and Smith's (2006) qualitative study found that in terms of support they received during the transition, students focused on the emotional support they received from family and friends rather than support they received from the institution. These topics were addressed in the current study through the themes of leaving friends and loved ones behind but keeping some in one's life and uncovering new support, though university sources of support were strongly mentioned by participants in this study in addition to family and friends. This indicates that whether students see the university as a resource can vary, and can likely be influenced by the institution. Further, Diel-Amen (2011) indicates, through her qualitative research, that whether students feel stigmatized and avoid seeking help due to concerns of being perceived as incompetent can vary by institution. Students in the current study explicitly expressed not feeling stigmatized. As a result, the current study supports Diel-Amen's assertion and points to another factor in students' transition experiences that institutions of higher education can work to positively and intentionally influence.

Implications for Practice

These data and conclusions indicate a number of implications for practice for institutions of higher education who admit traditional age, first-time, full-time students on a conditional basis or other students who fit this academic profile, and may be found to inform institutions of higher education working with non-conditionally admitted students as well. One important thing to note is that students bring a number of coping assets with

them in their transitions to college. For the participants in this study, the coping assets included:

- the trigger for the transition
- the timing
- one's assessment of the transition as positive or negative
- ego development
- outlook – optimism and self-efficacy
- commitment and values
- spirituality and resilience
- various support mechanisms
- assorted coping strategies

And in some cases, coping assets included

- the source or level of control over the situation
- whether a role change is involved
- previous experience with similar transitions.

Colleges would be well-served to discover what assets their own students bring, to acknowledge these assets, and to use them as a springboard to assist the students in strengthening other resources.

One element that came up in these interviews and would likely be concerns for other conditionally-admitted students and students with similar academic profiles is the fact that the school which the student is attending might not have been his first choice, or possibly his second, or his third. This can lead to potential coping liabilities in the areas

of control and commitment. While SU was not the first choice for a number of students in this study, but was instead described as the school that would accept them, by the end of the semester, students indicated feeling comfortable, happy, and at home at the institution. None of them indicated a desire to leave to try to get into their more preferred school; they had found their place. This is important for institutions to consider. As discussed in Chapter 1, the attrition rate for conditionally-admitted students overall is quite high. While the academic difficulty of college or other personal concerns could be reasons for the attrition, it is also quite possible that the students simply have a difficult time committing to staying at a school they did not originally intend to attend. This would be in line with Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993). As a result, it is important that institutions of higher education with this population of students make an effort to find ways to get the students connected to the institution, invested in the institution, and seeing the institution as a home. Ways to do this could vastly vary by institution. The students in this study implied that at SU, this was accomplished through the sheer amount of friendly and helpful people in the offices and just on the sidewalk, who were described as always being nice and willing to assist the new students with anything they needed. It seems that by offering welcoming and helpful services, universities could do a lot to strengthen the coping resources related to control, commitment, and support.

Other resources related to the situation that colleges and universities could work to help students strengthen involve possible role changes and experience with similar past transitions. In terms of role change, universities can work to be aware of the role changes their students might be experiencing and strive to provide appropriate programming. For

example, in regards to the qualitative change from high school student to college student, universities can provide programming or courses on what this means, what the differences are, and how students can prepare for them and adjust to them. As an example, the participants who choose to take a college transition class or a college success class commented on the usefulness of the classes, what they learned, and how that knowledge helped them in their transitions. In relation to the role change of being an adult, colleges can provide programming on things like time management, budgeting, and cooking. The experiences of the student athletes in the study indicate that programming is needed for these students as they move from high school athlete to college athlete as well.

Further, in regards to experience with similar transitions, while colleges and universities cannot control what experiences individuals have had in the past, they can work to provide opportunities for students that can give them a positive experience with a similar transition. This could be accomplished through extended orientation programs over the summer before college starts or possibly even having conditionally-admitted students come briefly over the summer to complete some remedial coursework, such as a bridge program. By allowing students to be away from their homes, families, and friends in an organized environment with high amounts of social support and academic support, if applicable, as well as a number of social opportunities available to students to intentionally help them form connections with other new students before they even come in the fall; students can have a positive experience related to going away to college. Once this has taken place, students will be more likely to view the primary move for the

fall semester as positive and manageable, while also introducing students to resources and strategies on which they could lean to successfully navigate the transition in the fall.

Another resource that institutions of higher education can help students to strengthen is concurrent stress, which I see as related to students focusing on the moving out phase rather than the moving in phase. As the primary factor related to these two elements in the study is the presence of a romantic relationship with someone back home, institutions do not have ultimate control over this factor. However, several of the participants did indicate that by the time they ended the relationship and were ready to move forward and build connections on campus and engage in resources, there was not much available in terms of social activities, information fairs, and the like. While it is important to have these events towards the beginning of the semester for the majority of the students focused on the moving in phase, who are ready to make these connections, universities may be well-served to continue to hold such events later in the semester for students who were not ready to engage early in the process.

In terms of the self, there is not a high amount of control or impact the university can have in this area, though there are still some things that the institution could do. Commitment was already discussed above. In regards to assisting students to strengthen resources related to ego development and outlook, a likely way would be through one-on-one meetings, perhaps with academic advisors or academic coaches. These one-on-one meetings could allow staff to gain an understanding of where students are in their ego developments and what their outlooks are. Additionally, in these settings, students can be guided through discussions and problem-solving to encourage students to see their own effect and to work towards positive changes and positive development as well as to build

resiliency. Additionally, students can be taught to meditate and religious services can be made available to the students interested in engaging with them as they make their transitions to college.

On the issue of support, colleges and universities can strive to ensure that students are aware of resources available to them and that when they make the effort of connecting with these resources, that they are welcomed by someone who is friendly and helpful, even if the student really needs to be seeking assistance from someone else. Participants in the study made a point of noting that everyone had been helpful and friendly. This observation left the participants willing to engage with others and ready to recommend reaching out and making connections to other students. By striving to always be friendly and helpful, staff can avoid discouraging students from seeking the assistance they may need.

Lastly, I noted above that in general, the coping strategies the participants utilized were assets, but that the participants struggled to identify and regularly implement strategies that would be assets or to develop a wide range of positive coping strategies to use. For this reason, it would seem beneficial for colleges and universities to help students develop and identify such positive coping strategies. This could be addressed through transition and success courses, programming, and individual meetings. Relatedly, simply presenting and discussing information on Schlossberg's transition model could help students to identify their own coping assets and liabilities and to make the effort to strengthen their resources in honor of striving for a successful transition.

Recommendations for Future Research

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a large amount of research on the first year experience and on college attrition, however, there is very little research available applying Schlossberg's transition theory to the transition from high school to college for traditional age, first-time, full time students. The research that is available is on specific sub-populations, like this study. For this reason, additional, similar studies of other groups of students besides conditionally-admitted students as well as studies of students at other types of institutions and in other geographical areas would add to the research base.

Another idea that occurred to me during this study is in regards to the differences between male and female students making the transition from high school to college. When preparing the section on the phase in which students were focused during the transition process, I realized that I specifically noted each of the female participants as struggling to get from the moving out phase to the moving in phase, and none of the men. I also realize that in considering "support" relationships that were considered to be liabilities, these were primarily discussed by the women. While Antonio had a girlfriend back home, he seemed much less affected by it, while Kelsi and Ashley were highly affected. This could be related to the length of the relationships or could be a coincidence, but could warrant some exploration. If men and women experience relationships differently and they affect these students' transitions in different ways, this would be useful information to know when preparing programming for these groups of students.

Another element in the difference between women and men that I noted was in relation to willingness to participate in the study and feeling that they were contributing to the research. When calling men, in order to compose a group of five male study participants (after none responded to my email), I only needed to call six men. One man heard me out and told me he was not interested in participating. The other five heard me out and immediately agreed to help out, suggesting fast-approaching times for the first meeting. At the end of meetings, men often thanked me for choosing them to participate in the study. When calling women, in order to compose a group of five participants, I called 14 women. One heard me out and told me she did not have the time. Of the other eight who did not participate in the study, a couple said they would think about it and emailed back to say they were not interested. Several said they would think about it, never contacted me back, and did not answer my follow-up calls. And two set up appointments with me, one emailing me the day before to tell me she no longer wanted to participate, and the other simply not showing up to our appointment and hanging up on me when I called to reschedule. Once I did meet with the five women, several would conclude our interviews by saying they did not think they had been very helpful or saying they wished they could have been more helpful. All of this could have been coincidence, but could stem from a lack of confidence or a strategy of avoidance among the women more so than the men that could warrant examination. While I was able to learn about the individuals who agreed to participate in the study, those who refused could have had vastly different experiences. Once quantitative assessments related to Schlossberg's transition theory are developed, it might be more possible to get reluctant students to participate in studies from their personal computers or phones.

Additionally, while this study focused broadly on students' transitional experiences, the research literature could benefit from specific explorations focused more narrowly on experiences and issues related to one of the four S's: situation, self, support, or strategies; or on the phase of the transition of transitioning students. Just as qualitative research in general can provide a greater depth of knowledge on the subject, a more focused study could provide greater depth on each element of Schlossberg's transition theory within this transition. With enough focused qualitative research, it may even be possible to create measurement tools to perform quantitative analysis related to the application of Schlossberg's transition theory to the transition from high school to college. Evans, et al. (2010) assert that it will be "impossible to affirm that the transition process occurs in the manner in which Schlossberg and her colleagues have outlined it" until further research is conducted (pp. 225-226), though it did appear to be an appropriate tool for understanding the transition experience in this study.

Researcher Reflexivity

While embarking on and concluding a dissertation is a laborious and sometimes seemingly thankless duty, there were many times during the course of the data collection, analysis, and write up, and especially right now as I conclude the process, where I felt lucky to have been able to participate in something so large, in something I hope will become large. The amount that I learned and the insight that I gained into the experiences of others as well as into my own experiences is nothing short of remarkable. I can only smile at this accomplishment and look forward to the day when these participants will be able to smile on their accomplishments as they earn their degrees.

Throughout the course of this vast project, I formed a relationship with each one of these individuals. I feel invested in their experiences and their education. I want to see them succeed. I wonder how things might change if all upper-level administrators were to complete a phenomenology on a group of students at their institution. How much would they learn? How much empathy would they gain? How much might they be able to affect policies and institutional culture for the better? I hope this experience always stays with me as I move forward in life, informing me and encouraging me to take a second look, to ask another question, to consider a different perspective.

I thanked each of my participants for their assistance from the bottom of my heart at each step in the process. This dissertation would not have been possible without them. What I learned and what I hope to transmit to others would not have been possible without their assistance; and I wonder if they will experience something similar one day, in order to be able to comprehend how important a “stranger” can become in one’s life, and how invested one can become in someone else’s experience and success. I have remained in touch with the participants and hope that continues to be true. Any time I was thanked for inviting someone to participate in the study or wished luck on my dissertation by the participants, I felt truly humbled that these individuals were so caring towards someone who was “using” them for her research. I truly hope that this experience can have a positive effect on these students, as it had on me, in addition to ultimately having a positive effect on the field. I cannot express how touched I was when I received this message from Andrew after asking him to look over the textural description I had composed for his experience:

This is awesome! Yes, it looks great (and accurate). I thank you so much for your time and doing this with me. Reading over this myself I have learned about the self I used to be when I first got here and who I am now. Again thank you so much and this was a great experience!

If this research can lead to a similar experience of understanding and self-discovery for even one other student, I will feel that my effort has been a success.

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Appendix A

Sample Invitation Letter

Dear SU Student,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher or the university.

The purpose of this study is to understand the transition experience from high school to college. Data will be collected through two, one-hour interviews during the course of the fall semester. The first interview will occur at a mutually agreed upon time and location during the third or fourth week of classes. The second interview will occur at a mutually agreed upon time and location during the last two weeks of class or the finals schedule. Both interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word. You will also be invited to provide feedback on the researcher's analysis of your set of interviews for greater clarity.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time you are participating. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will be known only to the researcher. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym, which will be used in place of your name on all transcripts and documentation related to the study.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation include the catharsis of reflecting on your transition and the possibility to positively affect policies and practices in a higher education setting. Additionally, you will be compensated for your time, \$5 for each interview as well as \$5 if you choose to respond with feedback on the researcher's analysis of your set of interviews. Further, each participant will be entered to win one of two \$25 gift certificates from the university book store. Chances of winning are one in five.

If you are interested and willing to participate in the study, or if you have questions, please contact the researcher at sdevilbiss@****.edu or ***-***-****.

Samantha DeVilbiss, Ed.D. Student, Principal Investigator
James V. Griesen, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form Example



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Informed Consent Form Example

IRB #:

Title of Project: The transition experience.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to understand the transition experience from high school to college for students required to meet remediation. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. You were invited to participate in this study because you are a first year college student required to meet remediation.

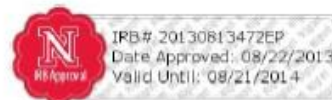
Procedures: Data will be collected through two, 60-minute, semi-structured interviews at an agreed upon location to discuss your transition experiences during the course of the fall semester. Both interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word. You will also be invited to provide feedback on the researcher's analysis of your set of interviews for greater clarity. Information on your gender, date of birth, area of remediation, and whether remediation has been met will be provided by the Department of Student Affairs of Florida Gulf Coast University.

Risks and/or Discomforts: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. In the event of any problems resulting from participation in this study, psychological treatment is available through Florida Gulf Coast University Counseling and Psychological Services at 239-745-3515.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be included in the project or other documents. The researcher will choose a pseudonym for you that will be used in place of your name in transcripts of the interview and if any responses are cited in any other documents. The physical data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's personal office. The digital audio file and transcripts will be kept on the principal investigator's personal computer, which is password protected. Physical and digital data will be viewed only by the investigators of the study. The information obtained in this study may also be published in academic journals or presented at academic meetings, but the data presented will be aggregate data or will utilize pseudonyms.

Benefits: There may be no direct benefit to you as a participant in this research; however, you may find the interviews helpful in self-understanding and/or cathartic in nature. Additionally, the information you provide may contribute to improving the transition experiences for students at Florida Gulf Coast University and/or elsewhere in the future.

Compensation: You will receive \$5 for each interview as well as \$5 if you choose to respond with feedback on the investigator's analysis of your set of interviews. Further, participation in this study will qualify you to win one of two \$25 gift certificates from the university book store. Chances of winning are one in five.



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Opportunity to Ask Questions: If you have any questions about this research, you may call the principal investigator, Samantha DeVilbiss, at any time at 239-590-1896. You may ask questions before or during the study, either by contacting the principal investigator at the telephone number above or by email: sdevilbiss@fgcu.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the principal investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965.

Freedom to Withdrawal: Participation in this research project is voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your current and/or future relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or Florida Gulf Coast University. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. You may retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

Name: _____

- I agree to have my interview audio recorded.
- I agree to be contacted via university email after interview completion for the opportunity to provide feedback on the researcher's analysis of my set of interviews for greater clarity.

Eagle (university) email address: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name and Telephone Numbers of Investigators:

Samantha E. DeVilbiss, Ed.D. Student, Principal Investigator *Office: 239-590-1896*

James V. Griesen, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator *Office: 402-472-3725*

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Pseudonym: _____

Date and time of interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

Establish rapport: Ask participant how they are. Perhaps ask what they have going on this week, etc. For second interview refer back to things already discussed. Share information as appropriate.

Project overview: I want to thank you for taking the time to be interviewed today. As you know, I am studying the transition experience from high school to college. I am interested in your thoughts, feelings, and experiences – your own perspective; so please feel free to discuss anything that comes to mind related to your transition. As the interview progresses, if at any point you need me to clarify something, you have a question, or you'd like to stop the interview, please let me know. There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions. Just a reminder, what we discuss today will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Are you ready to begin?

First Question: Tell me about your transition from high school to college. What dimensions, incidents, and people stand out to you?

Possible follow-up questions as necessary may include:

- Before coming to college, how did you feel/what did you think about leaving high school and starting college?
- Why did you choose to come to college? To this institution?
- What transitions have you been through in the past? How is this experience similar? Different?
- Before you came here, what were you doing to prepare for the transition of coming to college?
- How has your transition to college affected you?
- Which incidents/events connected to your transition stand out for you?
- What changes do you associate with the transition?
- What feelings/emotions have been caused by the transition?

- What thoughts have stood out for you?
- What people connected with your transition stand out for you? These could be individuals connected with your transition in positive and negative ways.
- What practices, beliefs, or thoughts have helped you adjust to college?
- What practices, beliefs, or thoughts have made it more difficult to adjust to college?
- In what ways are you connected to your life before college?
- In what ways are you connected to life at college?
- What people or organizations at the college have made your transition easier? Harder?
- What people or organizations outside of the college have made your transition easier? Harder?
- So far in your transition, would you say it's been positive? Negative? Neutral? Something else?
- How would you compare your transition from high school to college to that of others?
- I noticed that you're noted as remedial in _____. What does being labeled as remedial mean to you? Do you think you are viewed or treated differently because of this designation?

Final question: Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your transition from high school to college?

Conclusion: Thank you again for taking the time to interview today. Please accept \$5 for your time. Would you like to set up when our second meeting will be now or would you prefer I email or call you closer to the time to interview?

Follow-Up Interview Protocol

Pseudonym: _____

Date and time of interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

Establish rapport: Ask participant how they are. Perhaps ask what they have going on this week, etc. For second interview refer back to things already discussed. Share information as appropriate.

Project overview: I want to thank you for taking the time to be interviewed today. During this interview, I'm going to review some of the information I've already told you and might ask some of the same questions. Don't worry about what you did or did not say during the first interview. I'm interested in knowing about your experiences, thoughts, and feelings right now. If they are the same as before, feel free to tell me about them again or to let me know that they are the same and briefly remind me of what they were before. If they are different, please explain how they stand now. Some of the questions I will ask today may be different. As you know, I am studying the transition experience from high school to college. I am interested in your thoughts, feelings, and experiences – your own perspective; so please feel free to discuss anything that comes to mind related to your transition. As the interview progresses, if at any point you need me to clarify something, you have a question, or you'd like to stop the interview, please let me know. There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions. Just a reminder, what we discuss today will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Are you ready to begin?

Before we get into the big questions, I wanted to make sure I have a little bit of background information:

- Hometown
- Family make-up
- 1st generation?
- Size of high school
- High School GPA
- How you're financing college

First Question: Describe what the transition from high school to college has been like? (i.e. academically, socially, relationships)

Possible follow-up questions as necessary may include:

- How have you changed as a result of your transition to college?
- In what ways are you connected to your life before college?

- How often have you gone home this semester?
- In what ways are you connected to life at college?
- What feelings/emotions have been caused by the transition?
- In what ways do you feel challenged or overwhelmed by the transition?
- Over what elements of your transition do you feel you have control?
- What resources have been available to you to assist you in your transition?
- What have been your sources of support, inside and outside of the school?
- Has anyone made the transition more difficult for you?
- What strategies have you used to successfully get through the transition? These could include things you've done, things you've thought, or things you've believed.
- Are there any strategies you've tried that have made the transition harder?
- When something bad or unexpected happens, how do you usually respond?
 - Do you usually face life as more of an optimist or a pessimist?
- So far in your transition, would you say it's been positive? Negative? Neutral? A mixed bag?
- How would you compare your transition from high school to college to that of others?
- What advice would you give to students preparing to make the transition from high school to college, especially students considered to be remedial?

Final question: Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your transition from high school to college?

Conclusion: Thank you again for taking the time to interview today. Please accept \$5 for your time. I plan to send you a description of your transition as I've understood it during January, or at the latest February. Please keep an eye on your email for it. I would love to have your feedback and want to make sure I'm representing your experience correctly. You'll also get another \$5 if you respond to that email with feedback or letting me know that everything seems correct. I also plan to do the bookstore gift card drawing after receiving feedback from all of you early next semester.

Appendix D

IRB Approval

Page 1 of 3



August 22, 2013

Samantha DeVilbiss

Department of Educational Administration

Jackie Gaughan Multicultural Center 1505 "S" St, Lincoln, 68588-0450

James Griesen

Department of Educational Administration

125 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20130813472EP

Project ID: 13472

Project Title: THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE FOR CONDITIONALLY-ADMITTED STUDENTS USING THE LENS OF SCHLOSSBERG'S TRANSITION THEORY

Dear Samantha:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46). Your project was approved as an Expedited protocol, category 6 & 7.

Date of EP Review: 08/12/2013

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 08/22/2013. This approval is Valid Until: 08/21/2014.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Julia Torquati, Ph.D.

Chair for the IRB