Transfer Students' Perception of Their Transition Experiences at a Private, Religiously Affiliated University

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TRANSFER STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TRANSITION EXPERIENCES INTO A PRIVATE, RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED UNIVERSITY

By

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A DISSERTATION

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TRANSFER STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TRANSITION EXPERIENCES
INTO A PRIVATE, RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED UNIVERSITY

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This qualitative case study explored the experiences of transfer student as they transition into a small, private, religiously affiliated university. Three theories informed the foundation of transfer student experiences in this study, including Schlossberg’s (1984) Transition Theory, Tinto’s (1987), Theory of Student Departure, and Bean and Metzner’s (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine transfer students to assess their perceptions of transitioning into a small, private, and religiously affiliated university. During the interview, students were also asked to discuss how their experiences at the prior institutions influenced their perceptions of their transition. Grounded theory methodology was employed to analyze the data. Five themes arose from the data that captured transfer student’s experiences and their transition to the current institution. The themes included: campus engagement, flexibility, resources, stress, and size. Institutional size was indentified as impacting each of the other four themes. Institutional size was seen as a hindering factor by creating stress for the students, or an opportunity to become committed to the institution, if it resolved a concern. The implications of these results assist higher education professionals in enrollment services, advising and retention
services, and student affairs at small, at private, religiously affiliated institutions in creating opportunities to help transfer students with their transition.
DEDICATION

To Nuris Esther Valdes.

Without the love, affection, and tireless commitment that you display to your children every single day, I would have never been able to accomplish this feat. The sense of encouragement and confidence that you have instilled in me and the support that you have provided during challenging times has enabled me to overcome obstacles and to continue the climb towards the aspirations I long to achieve. The sacrifices you have made to provide me with the very best education you could, laid the foundation that aided me in this process. I know that I can never fully repay you for all that you have done for me, but I hope that this accomplishment will put me one step closer to being able to provide you with the support that you have provided me.

Thank you for all you have done for me. I hope and pray that God continues to give me the knowledge, strength, and health to continue to make you proud.

I love you Mom.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

With more students attending multiple institutions during their baccalaureate program, transfer students face various challenges that hinder their transition and academic progress. The inability of students to transition into a four-year institution has caused some of them to either transfer to another institution or withdraw from college. These challenges are often the result of various factors within the campus environment that impact their experiences and perceptions. Therefore, it is imperative for higher education professionals to become better informed on the experiences and perceptions of transfer students.

Currently, transfer students represent a rising demographic trend as more students commence their post-secondary education at two-year institutions. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (2016), 39 percent of post-secondary enrollments for the 2014 Fall 2014 semester are enrolled at two-year institutions. Furthermore, enrollment at two-year institutions increased exponentially between the period of 2000 and 2010, which signified a 29 percent rise at two-year institutions (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2016). With a projected enrollment increase of 21 percent between 2014 and 2025, two-year institutions in the United States are on track to enrolling 8.2 million students (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2016). While 80 percent of two-year institution students are interested in transferring to a four-year institution (Cejda, 1997), fewer than 40 percent participate in a college transfer track (Conklin, 1991). With a lack of a college transfer track, only 10 percent of students at two-year institutions successfully transfer to a four-year institution (Conklin, 1991). These statistics not only convey the rising importance of two-year
institutions in higher education, they also highlight the need for higher continuity between two-year and four-year institutions. Additionally, this study attempted to uncover how the prior experiences and perceptions of transfer students affected their transitions into a four-year institution. In other words, the study explored the factors and processes that affected the experiences and perceptions of transfer students. For the purposes of this study, a transfer student was defined as a degree seeking student who has completed a minimum of 12 credit hours. By shedding light on the perceptions and experiences of transfer students, this study might reveal how private and religiously affiliated universities support their transfer students to increase retention rates and improve overall student satisfaction.

The Problem of Transfer Student Attrition

Although most of two-year college students aspire to transfer to a four-year institution, many do not transfer and even fewer graduate upon transferring. Horn and Skomsvold (2011) stated that 46 percent of students at two-year institutions transferred to a four-year institution or completed an academic credential, but only 12 percent earned a baccalaureate degree within six years. In addition, when compared directly with native students, transfer students are demonstrating higher attrition rates (Anglin, 1993).

Academic performance is not the primary reason for transfer student’s lower completion and higher attrition rates in comparison to native students. Glass and Harrington (2002) found that most transfers do not withdraw due to academic reasons. Various research studies have also assessed the experiences of transfer students during and after their transition into a four-year institution. Researchers have ascertained the following factors hindered a transfer student’s transition: poor academic advising,
financial concerns, faculty interaction, classroom size and experience, and social environment (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Davies & Casey, 1999; Berger & Malaney, 2003). These factors not only presented challenges transfer students as they entered the new environment, but also influence their desire to remain enrolled in the four-year institution. Therefore, it is essential for higher education administrators to identify and understand what non-academic factors are impeding a transfer student’s transition. Consequently, administrators may use this information as a basis for implementing support systems that successfully integrate transfer students into their institutions.

**Empirical Evidence on Student Attrition and Persistence**

The majority of attrition models the more prominent ones (Astin, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987) have assessed student attrition from the perspective of the traditional college student (18-24-year-old student, enrolled full-time, and residing on campus). The overarching conclusion from many of the attrition literature has been a positive correlation between a student’s involvement with the university environment (both academically and socially) and their ability to graduate from university (Astin, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987). These attrition models measured student attrition using various variables, which included student characteristics, academic performance, and social engagement. Students’ characteristics were identified as predictors of future dropout (Bentler & Speckart, 1979, as cited in Bean & Metzner, 1985). Academic variables, such as past academic performance, can directly influence a student’s decision to withdraw (Spady, 1970). Additionally, academic variables were important considerations because the involuntary withdraw of a student could result from low grade
point average (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Lastly, Tinto (1987) determined social engagement to be a primary predictor of student attrition.

Still within the realm of student attrition, other researchers have explored the driving forces behind student retention. For example, Astin (1975) described two main factors that predicted student retention: personal and environmental. Personal factors included academic background, family background, educational aspirations, study habits, expectations, age, and marital status (Astin, 1975; as cited in Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Environmental factors included residence, employment, academic, environment, and characteristics (Astin, 1975; as cited in Morrison & Silverman, 2012). For Astin (1975), students with high levels of academic performance, educational aspirations, and parental education were more likely to remain in university. Female students with external responsibilities such as marriage, childbearing, and employment were less likely to remain in university (Astin, 1975). Astin (1985) also argued that external factors supported his conclusion that the likelihood of a student persisting increased with the student engagement in the academic and social environment of the institution. Consequently, these researchers suggested that retention contributed to student attrition.

In a different study, Spady (1970) stated that college student attrition could be explained through the interaction of the student with the academic and social environment of the institution. Integration with the academic and social system of the institution could either be intrinsic or extrinsic (Spady, 1970). While social integration was determined by factors in the student’s personality, each factor should be compatible with their relationships and engagement. Spady (1970) concluded that a student that
successfully interacted with the academic and social environment of the institution was likely to remain in said institution.

Other researchers have delved into the causes that produced student attrition. Tinto (1987) determined that a student’s likelihood of withdrawal was a result of the student’s attributes, skills, commitments, intentions, and interactions with the university environment. The student’s experiences with the institution and integration with its environment was the most important factor for predicting their likelihood of withdrawal (Tinto, 1987). The more a student integrated with the social and academic environment of the institution, the more likely the student persisted until completion (Tinto, 1987).

Attrition models provided by Astin (1985), Spady (1970), and Tinto (1975), heavily relied on the student’s involvement with the environment of the institution. These models might not be entirely applicable to non-traditional college students because of their limited exposure to the social and academic environment of the institution. To evaluate the unique circumstances of non-traditional college students, such as transfer students, Bean and Metzner (1985) developed the "Conceptual Model of Nontraditional College Student Attrition." This model used a combination of student demographic information and nontraditional student variables that included both academic and environmental factors. Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model did not place high emphasis on social engagement, however, because of the limited involvement opportunities of non-traditional college students.

**Empirical Evidence on Transfer Student Transition and Experiences**

Research on the transition challenges of transfer students revealed that transfer students did not face challenges that lead to lower rates of completion in comparison with
non-transfer students (Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011). Various studies have identified the following transition challenges: (1) transfer preparation (Laanan, 1996), (2) academic adjustment (Pascarella, 1999), and (3) social environment (Townsend, 1995; 2008). These challenges provided the basis for how transfer student transitioned and experienced their university experience.

With specific challenges, transfer students responded to the fundamental differences between a two-year college and a four-year university. Studies have found that two-year institution transfer students expressed discontent with the advising department in four-year institution because of the lack of information and the academic demands of the institution (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Davies & Casey, 1999; Nuñez & Yoshimi, 2016). Other studies determined financial concerns as the primary factor impeding a transfer students’ transition from a two-year college to a four-year university (Austin, 2006; Davies & Casey 1999).

Additionally, two-year institution transfer students felt that the academic demands of the university forced them to forgo campus activities for academic success (Davies & Casey, 1999). Furthermore, students at two-year institutions experienced frustration and difficulty balancing academics and personal responsibilities, such as employment (Davies & Casey, 1999).

Researchers also determined that transfer students from two-year institutions experienced a lack of faculty and student interaction because the faculty was too concerned with research (Laanan, 1996; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, many transfer students transferring from small two-year institutions to large public institutions
were overwhelmed by the size of the university and underwhelmed by the absence of a personalized learning environment (Davies & Casey, 1999; Flaga, 2006; Laanan, 1996).

While size and personalization were vital components in shaping the transitions and experiences of transfer students, student engagement and participation were also important. Research has shown that transfer students from two-year institutions felt marginalized in a large university environment because they did not share the same commonalities as first-year (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Austin, 2006; Townsend, 2008). Furthermore, evidence has identified that transfer students from a two-year college were apathetic towards the social environment of the university (Núñez & Yoshimi, 2016). In addition, other evidence indicates that transfer students experience institution’s social activities as distractions (Davies & Dickmann, 1998).

**Purpose of the Study**

According to empirical evidence, transfer students have been a significant demographic in the United States, and their presence will continue to rise in subsequent decades (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2016). Nevertheless, transfer students have suffered from low persistence and completion rates. In addition, studies have determined that transfer students were withdrawing for various reasons, other than academics (Austin, 2006; Flaga, 2006; Duggan & Pickering, 2007). Thus, it was critical to understand the experiences of transfer students at four-year institution to identify perceptions and integration into the institution.

Although a body of literature existed on the transition experiences of transfer students, this research may be limited in spotlighting the experiences of transfer students who are transitioning into a small, private, and religiously affiliated university setting.
This is because most research on the experiences transfer student transition mostly focused on large, public research institutions. Those concentrating on a small, private, and religiously affiliated institutions - where the learning and social environment may vary - have been limited.

Private and religiously affiliated institutions are different from public universities because they are often significantly smaller than larger public institutions (1000-2,999 versus 10,000 plus total undergraduate enrollments, respectively). Therefore, private and religiously affiliated institutions provided a lower student to instructor ratio, greater personalized student learning, and a more centralized academic advising system. The drawbacks of private and religiously affiliated universities also differed from those of larger public universities. Small, private, and religiously affiliated institutions might have limited course offerings, stricter program curriculums, fewer student programs (e.g., multicultural student centers; campus life programs), and higher tuition rates in comparison to large, public institutions.

Qualitative studies that focus on transferring into a small, religiously affiliated, private university have been absent from the literature on the experiences of transfer students. Furthermore, no studies to date have compared the transition experiences of transfer students from two-year and four-year institutions who transferred into a small and religiously affiliated private university. In the literature, there have been discussions about the need for more qualitative studies on the experiences of transfer students (Ishitami & McKitrick, 2010) and the various types of four-year institutions (Townsend & Wilson, 2008). In relation to the need for more qualitative studies, Wang (2009) has explored the psychological factors that either impede or reinforce a student’s persistence.
In addition, there was a need to provide more insight on how students at two-year institutions perceived their transition, their degree of attainment, and their influences (Wang, 2009). Because the evidence suggested that transfer students encounter unique challenges, more research needed to assess the experiences of each transfer student (Duggan & Pickering, 2007; Townsend, 2008).

Therefore, this study aimed at extending the literature on transfer students by providing insight into the perceptions of transfer students transferring from both two-year institutions and four-year institutions. In addition, this study juxtaposed the transition experiences of transfer students from two- and four-year institutions to give voice to factors affecting their transition and integration at the receiving institution. By developing a mid-level theory that described the current and previous experiences of students transferring to a small, private, and religiously affiliated university, this study uncovered how students forge experiences through a dynamic synthesis of student’s experience at their previous and their current institution.

**Research Questions**

Two research questions guided this study:

1. How do transfer students perceive their transition experience into a small, private, and religiously affiliated university?
2. How do the experiences of transfer students at their previous institution affect their transition experiences?

The methodology that was used in this study was a grounded theory, case study. The study focused on capturing and portraying shared transition experiences of students transferring to one private and religiously affiliated institution. Due to the bounded nature
of the study, this study represents a case study (Creswell, 2012). Because the goal of this study was to develop a substantive, mid-level theory, grounded theory guidelines outlined by Corbin and Strauss, (1990, 2015) were employed in describing and explaining the shared experiences of transfer students at a small, private, and religiously affiliated university.

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative methodology because the principal aim was to fully understand the lived transition experiences of transfer students. With a qualitative method, researchers could make three philosophical assumptions: (1) ontological, (2) epistemological, and (3) axiological (Creswell, 2012, p. 15-18). An ontological assumption referred to the nature of reality and its various characteristics (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research embraced the notion of multiple realities, which is reported through the various quotes and perspectives of the sampled group (Creswell, 2012). Capturing the various experiences of transfer students at a small, private religiously affiliated institution was the aim of this study. Without understanding the various perspectives of the participants, it was impossible to fully understand what these students were going through as they transitioned to their new institution. The epistemological assumption, however, referred to the researcher lessening the distance between themselves and the participants (Creswell, 2012). By getting as close as possible to the study subjects, the researcher could provide a more accurate and authentic description.

To gain an accurate description of the participants’ experiences, the researcher must establish trust and rapport with participants. Finally, it is important that the researcher understand the value-laden nature of the study (Creswell, 2012). In a
qualitative study, researchers bring with them their own values and biases, when reporting the data. The researcher’s voice is embedded throughout the study and through his interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2012). The researcher should thus attempt to eliminate any biases that would have presented an inaccurate representation of the findings with various credibility measures.

The purpose of this study was to capture and understand the shared or common lived experiences of transfer students who transferred to one specific small and religiously affiliated institution. A grounded-theory case study approach was utilized in data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Because the study was primarily concerned with the specific conditions of a small, private, and religiously affiliated university, the researcher utilized a case study approach to better highlight the specific environment and its transfer students. Case studies were the qualitative approach that examined a single bounded system through in-depth interviews identifying common themes that facilitated understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2012). For example, instrumental case studies focused on a specific issue or concern and utilized a specific case, or in the case of this study, a setting that best demonstrated the problem (Creswell, 2012). Lastly, the study utilized a grounded theory, which attempted to develop an explanation of how and why a particular phenomenon was occurring and constructed by participant driven data (Creswell, 2012). Grounded theory utilized common themes that formulated the lived experiences of the participants that formed an understanding and explanation for the occurrence of the experience (Creswell, 2012).
Target Institution

The study took place at an institution of higher education in the southeastern United States. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2017) has classified the target setting as a four-year, small, primarily residential, university (primarily master’s level). Carnegie classified a small institution as an institution with an undergraduate enrollment of 1,000 to 2,999 (Indiana University, 2017). The institution is affiliated with the Roman Catholic religion, whose traditions and practices are central to the identity of the university. The university’s identity has been characterized as developing future leaders who lead with the pillars of the Catholic faith: justice, mercy, forgiveness, peace, and love. The institution’s Catholic identity is apparent in its mission statement, which focuses on developing ethical leaders. By offering various religious developments, activities, and access to campus ministry, student participate in the institution’s traditions. The institution also promotes its identity by incorporating ethics and religious study in its undergraduate core curriculum.

The institution is in a semi-urban area with a total undergraduate student enrollment of 2,752, as of Fall 2016. Total student enrollment (including graduate students) equaled 4,674. The student body was composed of 60 percent female and 40 percent male. Within an ethnic break-down for the Fall 2016 semester, 49 percent of students were Hispanic, 18 percent of students were White, 15 percent of students were Black, 2 percent of students were Asian or Pacific Islander, 3 percent of students identified as part of multiple races, 6 percent of students registered as unknown, and 8 percent of students identified as other. Based on the Fall 2017 semester, the institution has an undergraduate acceptance rate of 51 percent and an overall acceptance rate of 54
percent. The institution’s incoming transfer population for the Fall 2017 semester equaled 129 students. Of the 129 transfer students, 58 percent of transfer students were female, and 21 percent of the transfers were international students. The ethnic makeup of the transfer students, for the Fall 2017 semester, were the following: 41 percent Black, 34 percent Hispanic, 6 percent White, 7 percent unknown, and 12 percent refused to identify. Transfer students majored in the following disciplines: Health Sciences (40 percent), Social Sciences (26 percent), Business (19 percent), Education (5 percent), Computer Science (3 percent), Undecided (3 percent), Communications (2 percent), and Religion (2 percent). Seventy-six percent of the students transferred from two-year institution with the remaining 24 percent from four-year universities.

Due to the overall low student enrollment, the institution offers a small classroom environment with a student to faculty ratio of 12:1 and an individualized student-learning environment. Non-religious student development programs (e.g., multicultural center; diversity awareness programs) and regular campus life activities (e.g., Greek Life; non-academic student clubs) are absent from the institution. Course offerings are limited. With fewer courses, the institution does not offer night courses and it only offers one online baccalaureate program. For simplification, the target setting has been given the following name: Saint Aaron University (SAU).

**Significance of the Study**

Having accurate and precise data concerning the unique needs, experiences, and possible challenges of transfer students in a small, private, religiously affiliated institution of higher learning will assist higher education professionals in assessing the condition of their students. Furthermore, higher education professionals can accurately
identify those students who are at-risk of withdrawing. Gaining better information on the motivations and needs of transfer students will also assist in establishing support programs, both social and academic. With more accurate information, transfer student can smoothly integrate into a four-year institution, which creates an environment that minimizes stress.

Most of the research on transfer students utilized a quantitative that examined the challenges of students who transferred to large and public institutions. Qualitative research on the experiences of transfer students at a small, private, and religiously affiliated institution can extend the body of knowledge found in the literature by providing more an in-depth understanding into the transition experiences of students through their own voices. In addition, this study provides professionals in small, private and religiously affiliated institutions with information they can utilize to assess whether the programs they have in place are suited to address the transition concerns of transfer students. The study also provides information that will facilitate higher education professionals in understanding the unique needs of transfer students and identify the type of environment that fosters a positive transition for students.

Duggan and Pickering (2007) determined the needs of transfer students are so varied that they cannot be evaluated as a homogenous group. The authors argued that to obtain a more accurate assessment, each student must be evaluated to determine what specific factors are impeding their academic progression. Therefore, this study was not aimed at providing a comprehensive assessment of the experiences of transfer students. Neither was it the purpose of this study to provide answers that can be applied to all
transfer students. Instead, the purpose of this study was to capture the individual experiences of transfer students in one institution.

This case study, analyzed through grounded theory, captured the diversity of experiences to better access the transition challenges of the students into a small religiously affiliated institution. To do so, it was also important to understand whether the unique environment of the receiving institution creates an experience that differs from prior research. The new knowledge gained from this study will help small, private, and religiously affiliated school professionals understand transfer students experience as they transition into a new environment and what factors impede their academic progress and satisfaction.

This study can also provide enrollment managers with a better understanding of the factors that are important to transfer students, which they can utilize in their recruitment planning. In addition, academic support administrators can use this study to engage transfer students during advising sessions. It will also assist these professionals in developing orientation and transition programs that provide them with knowledge of what specific information transfer students are looking for and what concepts should be addressed by advisors. The literature on transfer students has recognized that lack of information and the poor accessibility to advisors has been one of the greatest concerns for students when transitioning into a new institution (Davies & Casey, 1999; Nunez & Yoshimi, 2016). Therefore, it is the hope that this study will clarify some of the concerns transfer students face and add to the knowledge required to prepare higher education professionals in assisting this student demographic. The conclusions of this study can also facilitate professionals at institutions similar to the target on effects of student
development and transition. Lastly, the results of the study could facilitate policymakers in future policy decisions regarding funding, support programs, and credit transferability, for transfer students entering four-year institutions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature on transfer students has assessed the various challenges transfer students face when entering their new institution. The following chapter will provide a comprehensive look at the various research findings on transfer students. The chapter begins with an explanation on the early literature of transfer students. Furthermore, this early literature focuses on the transfer shock that transfer students experience at their new institution. This chapter is divided into sections: the early transfer shock research, recent transfer shock studies, and transfer shock at religious institutions. Consequently, the chapter will discuss the theories that frame this study, starting with Schlossberg’s (1984) Transition Theory, Tinto’s (1985) Theory of Student Departure, and Bean Metzner (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition. Afterwards, the study discusses the current empirical literature on transfer students. The current empirical literature section includes the following areas that researchers have determined as impacting the experiences of students: (1) institutional quality, (2) institutional type, (3) transfer student transition, (3) transfer preparation, (4) academic adjustment, (5) social environment, (6) time balance, and (7) financial concerns. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with an explanation on the premise of this study.

The literature on transfer students centered on various themes regarding the student’s transition from their previous institution to their new four-year university. The majority of the studies have discussed the transition of students transferring from two-year two-year institutions to four-year institutions (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Davies & Casey, 1999; Berger & Malaney, 2003; Duggan & Pickering, 2007). The early literature has assessed the academic performance of transfer students at their new institution to
determine whether performance differences exist between the transfer students and non-transfer students (Hills, 1965; Nickens, 1972; Keely III & House, 1993, Cedja, 1997). The most recent literature studies the transition experiences of transfer students to understand better what specific factors affect their transition (Townsend, 1995; Laanan, 1996; Pascarella, 1999; Flaga, 2006; Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010). The studies have also identified various themes from the transfer experiences of students that have influenced their transition, which includes transfer preparation, academic adjustment, poor academic advising, financial concerns, faculty interaction, classroom size, and social environment (Townsend, 1995; Laanan, 1996; Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Davies & Casey, 1999; Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Although the literature on transfer students focuses mainly on students transferring from two-year colleges to four-year institutions (i.e., horizontal transfers), this study investigates the experiences of transfers from both two-year and four-year institutions. By studying all transfer students, one may best understand the transition experiences of these students and how their prior experience influenced their transition. It is likely that the experiences students had at their prior institution will have some affect how they perceive the environment of the new institution and their transition. This chapter will later present of Schlossberg (1984), who discussed how an individual’s prior experience with a transition affects how they perceive a similar transition and how they will cope with the stress. In addition, Schlossberg states the effects of a preexisting stress, which may either influence or cause another stress event (Anderson et al., 2012).

Students undergo a transition when they enter college for the first time, for they are compelled to adjust to new environments and expectations. The same applies for
transfer students who must familiarize themselves with a new campus environment.

Because a transfer student’s prior transition challenges may influence their transition to their new institution, the student may have to cope with the new and chaotic stresses. Therefore, understanding the students’ experiences at their prior institution is crucial to understand fully their perception of their transition at the new institution and the challenges and benefits they experience at the institution. In addition, it would only be a partial representation of the transition experiences of transfer students if participation were limited to those arriving from two-year colleges. By including transfers from both two- and four-year institutions, a more accurate description of the transition experiences of students at the target setting is provided.

**Transfer Shock and the Focus on Academic Performance**

Total enrollment at all post-secondary institutions in the United States during the 2014 year reached 20,207,369 (Integrated Postsecondary Educational Database, 2016a). Of the total college enrollments in 2014, 6,714,485 began their post-secondary education at two-year institutions (Integrated Postsecondary Educational Database, 2016, February). On average, about 80 percent of students commencing their post-secondary education at a two-year institution expressed a desire to transfer to a four-year institution to obtain a baccalaureate degree (Cedja, 1997). Due to the increasing number of transfer students, research has begun to focus on this student demographic, including assessing their academic performance and their transition.

**Early transfer shock research.** Early research on transfer students focused on comparing the grade point average (GPA) and degree completion of transfer students with non-transfer from four-year institution. The most prominent of the early literature
was Hills’ (1965) assessment of the academic performance of transfer students in comparison to non-transfer students. Hills (1965) concluded that most transfer students undergo *transfer shock* (lower GPA performance during their first semester at the four-year institution). Hills (1965) concluded that transfer students performed significantly lower than non-transfer students. They experienced a significant GPA drop during their first semester at the receiving institution. Hills (1965) termed this phenomenon as “transfer shock.”

More specifically, Hills (1965) identified that transfer students experienced transfer shock ranging from .09-.75 letter grade drop from their entering GPA after their first semester at the four-year institution. Hills (1965) also concluded that most transfer students seem to improve academically in the following semesters. When juxtaposing the academic performance of transfer students with non-transfer students, most of the non-transfer students performed overall better than transfer students (Hills, 1965). Hills (1965) concluded that transfer students have trouble adjusting during their first semester, which leads to and that maladjustments or a “transfer shock” (lower GPA).

Nickens (1972) challenged Hills’ (1965) conclusions that the phenomenon of transfer shock exists. According to Nickens (1972), no relationship between transfer and GPA drop exists. His argument was founded upon three findings: (1) data demonstrating that some transfer students maintain their two-year institution GPA during their first semester at the four-year institution; (2) data demonstrating that some transfers reach higher GPA scores in their entry semester at the receiving institution; and (3) an absence of data clearly demonstrating that GPA drops are a result of transitioning from one institution to another (Nickens, 1975). He argued that a student’s transition is not the
appropriate factor to demonstrate a drop in GPA. Instead, he asserted that “transfer shock” is more likely the result of differences in grading practices than on inadequate adjustment by transfer students. He also concluded that recovery was not uniquely attributable to transfer students, as natives demonstrated having similar results. Nickens (1972) found that the GPA increases of transfer students, who graduated were not significantly different than non-transfer students. Nickens’ (1972) coined the term “transfer ecstasy” to describe those transfer students that demonstrated a similar or higher GPA in their first semester at the receiving institution from that of their prior institution.

Recent transfer shock research. As transfer student enrollments continued to rise, researchers continued to study the existence of transfer shock and its effect on students. The more recent transfer shock studies delved into the characteristics of transfer student and compared GPA performance between two-year and four-year transfer students. Subsequently, recent transfer student studies also explored the differences between transfer students and non-transfer students. Keeley III and House (1993) studied new sophomores and junior transfer students who transitioned to the university. The researchers tested age, gender, class, ethnicity, residence, associate degree completion and grade performance (Keely III & House, 1993). In addition, Keely III and House (1993) compared the academic performance of students transferring from two-year to four-year institutions and non-transfer students with transfer students. The researchers were able to conclude, that all transfers demonstrated a degree of transfer shock during their first semester. The transfers juniors entered with a mean GPA of 3.099 but dropped to 2.764 (transfer shock of 0.335), and the sophomore transfers entered with a mean cumulative GPA of 2.971 that dropped to a 2.677 (transfer shock of 0.294) after their first
semester (Keely III & House, 1993). Consistent with previous research, the transfer students demonstrated recovery after their first semester at the receiving institution, but the juniors showed a significant improvement in comparison to the sophomore transfers (0.251 and 0.139 respectively) (Keely III & House, 1993).

When comparing the GPAs of transfer student and non-transfer students, the sophomore transfer students recovered but continued to perform below non-transfer sophomores students in the next four semesters by an average GPA difference of 0.070 (Keely III and House, 1993). Alternatively, the transfer junior students recovered better than the transfer sophomores student by reaching parity with non-transfer junior students juniors by their second term and outperformed them in the following next two terms with the highest GPA advantage of 0.048 (Keely III and House, 1993). Although transfer juniors students outperformed the non-transfer junior students in the later semesters, the transfer students had higher attrition rates (30 percent) than their non-transfer peers (10 percent) (Keely III and House, 1993). When comparing the academic performance of transfers from two-year intuitions with transfers from four-year institutions, the two-year institution transfers demonstrated higher transfer shock. The transfer shock was greater for sophomores, who were never able to reach the GPA performance of their non-two-year institution transfer peers in the subsequent semesters (Keely III and House, 1993).

Additionally, Keely III and House (1993) determined that associated degree earners demonstrated higher GPA performance than non-degree earners (3.042 and 2.885 respectively) by their fourth semester. Keely III and House (1993) concluded that women outperformed men for both the sophomore and junior transfer classes, with the female juniors demonstrating a higher GPA over their male peers at every period. The fact that
women on average outperformed their male counterpart is consistent with other research, and it is not an outlier for transfer students (Wang, 2009). When comparing the academic performance of transfer students by their academic major, they identified that both sophomore and junior transfer students, who majored in Business, demonstrated a highest transfer shock with the junior transfers having the greatest GPA (Keely III and House, 1993). Alternatively, those transfers majoring in Engineering and Professional Studies demonstrated the least transfer shock and by their fourth term reached GPA levels higher than their transfer GPA (Keely III and House, 1993).

Age was also determined to play a significant factor in GPA performance for transfers. Keely III and House (1993) recognized that those transfers aged 25 or older demonstrated having minimum transfer shock, particularly sophomores which experienced a GPA increase during their first term at the new institution (1993). In addition, transfers aged 21 and under, had higher GPA scores in every semester than their 21-24 transfer peers (Keely III and House, 1993). Lastly, the researchers determined very little from studying the residence statuses of the transfers. They were able to conclude that those junior transfers commuting to campus demonstrated having a higher GPA performance than junior residential transfers, but the researchers stated that the results might be attributed to the students’ age than their actual residential status (Keely III and House, 1993).

In addition, Cejda (1997) revealed that more accurate studies on transfer shock will probably require extension to cover assessment within academic disciplines and majors. Cejda (1997) identified, transfer students in Education, Fine Arts, and Social Sciences demonstrated GPA increases during their first semester at their new institution.
Those transfer students in Mathematics and Sciences and Business demonstrating a GPA drop (Cedja, 1997). The study provides two critical implications for future research on transfer students, which include: (1) the need to assess transfer shock within academic disciplines or majors and (2) emphasis by previous research concerning the preliminary characteristic of transfer students as being prone to transfer shock was not fully accurate (Cedja, 1997).

**Transfer Shock at Religiously Affiliated Institutions**

The literature on the academic performance of transfer students at religiously affiliated, private institutions has been limited. In one study, Cejda and Kaylor (1997) attempted to add to the literature on transfer students by examining the effect of transfer shock for those students entering a religiously affiliated, private liberal arts college. The researchers were able to conclude that although the students transferring to Benedictine College entered with a GPA that was .22 points higher than those transferring to St. Vincent College, transfers at both institutions demonstrated having similar mean GPA declines of 0.09 and 0.08, respectively (Cejda & Kaylor, 1997). The researchers noted, that although methodological differences in the literature make it difficult to draw generalizations, studies looking at transfer shock at public institutions have demonstrated GPA declines ranging 0.07 to 0.85 (Cejda & Kaylor, 1997). This conclusion demonstrated that transfers are experiencing significantly less transfer shock at private liberal arts colleges (Cedja & Kaylor, 1997, p. 656).

**Guiding Theoretical Frameworks**

Three theories formed the theoretical framework of the study: Transition Theory, Theory of Student Departure, and Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition.
Schlossberg’s (1984) Transition Theory explained the transition process of adults and the four factors that influence their perception and ability to move through a psychosocial transition. Tinto’s (1975) Theory of Student Departure is a college attrition theory that discusses the importance of a student’s academic and social integration. Lastly, Bean and Metzner’s (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition assesses the impact of the external environment on student persistence.

**Transition theory.** The literature on transfer students has concluded the transition challenges transfer students face when they transfer to a four-year institution. Nancy K. Schlossberg (1984, 1995) created a model that evaluates the stress and challenges an adult may face during a psychosocial transition. Schlossberg’s transition model has three critical parts. First, *approaching transitions* is the process of identifying the type of transition and the degree of effect, while analyzing which process will be best to deal with it. Second, *taking stock of coping resources* is the process of identifying the type of resources (i.e., situation, self, support, and strategies, or the 4 S System) an individual has at their disposal to cope with the transition. Third, *taking charge* deals with the process of strengthening the 4S’s an individual has at their disposal in order to better manage the transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

Anderson et al. (2012) defined a transition as an event that is perceived by the individual experiencing it, as a significant transition. According to the researchers, a transition is any event or non-event that leads to a change in a person’s relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Anderson et al., 2012). A non-event refers to an event that was expected but never materialized (e.g., a marriage that never took place or an academic degree completion that was cut short) (Anderson et al., 2012). Regardless of the
effect a transition may have, all transitions require a degree of coping. According to Anderson et al. (2012), part of the process of moving through a transition is “letting go aspects of the self,” and disengaging with former roles to learn new ones (p. 39). Additionally, the individual's perception of the transition is critical, as it will influence one's feelings and the method they will utilize to cope with the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). It is the individual that gives meaning to the transition, the level of challenge, and the specific ways to cope (Anderson et al., 2012). Involvement of the individual experiencing the change, the environment of the transition, and the relationship between them, is necessary to cope with the change (Anderson et al., 2012).

Transitions occur in three phases: endings, neutral zones, and beginnings (Bridges, 2004; as cited in Anderson et al., 2012). Detachment from previous roles is the focus of the endings phase. Entering the stage of moratorium from the conventional daily activities signifies the neutral zone phase. Lastly, the complete passage of the endings and neutral zone and fully acceptance of their new role, signifies the beginnings phase of the transition (Bridges, 1980; as cited in Anderson et al., 2012). For a transfer student, the first phase of moving through a transition involves ending their former role as a two-year institution student or the role they had at their previous institution. The student then moves to the neutral phase which involves their transfer to the new four-year institution and their attempted integration with the its academic and social environment. Lastly, the transfer student reaches the beginnings phase when he or she has fully integrated with the environment of the institution and accepts their new role in it. The authors addressed that transitions are impacted by four critical factors: (1) the situational variable (context of the transition), (2) the self-variable (the person and their perception of the transition), (3)
the support variable (support system available), and (4) the strategies variable (use of the 4S's) (Anderson et al., 2012). The researchers emphasized that an individual's appraisal of the transition impacts how they feel and cope with it (Anderson et al., 2012).

According to the authors, an individual's resulting appraisal of the 4S's influences their selection of the coping strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). Sussman (1972) stated that an individual's resources include their options, which could be either: actual, perceived, utilized, or created (Anderson et al., 2012). The options (i.e., structural and psychosocial) available to individuals directly affect a person's self-esteem. Structural options refer to externally forced changes which the individual may have little control over (e.g., unemployment), while psychosocial options refer to the person's ability to perceive alternatives (Sussman, 1972; as cited in Anderson et al., 2012). For some individuals, the external environment impacts their access to coping resources, as the 4S's may be restricted and thus cannot rely on them (Anderson et al., 2012). This is primarily the case with transfer students, since their commuter status and non-collegiate obligations (e.g., employment and family) may hinder their availability to access certain coping resources.

Transitions can either be internally created or forced upon the individual by external factors (Anderson et al., 2012). For transfer students, internal factors can include: the student’s level of preparedness for the academic demands of the new institution, the confidence the student may have with navigating the new environment, and their ability to engage with the social environment of the institution. External factors that may affect a transfer student include: childbearing and employment obligations that may limit the time a student may have to dedicate to academics. The researchers stated, that although a transition may be beyond the scope of one's control, the response to it
may not be (Anderson et al., 2012). Anderson et al. (2012) expressed that an individual will always face a degree of stress, regardless of the type the transition. Therefore, regardless of the level of preparation a transfer student may have, their transition into the new environment of the institution will cause a certain level of stress. This stress could be limited in time or severity, depending on the resources available to the student. The degree of difficulty a person may face with a new role is dependent on whether the transition is perceived by the individual to be positive or negative (Anderson et al., 2012). A person's past experience with a transition may have a significant effect on their ability to successfully assimilate to a similar type transition (Anderson et al., 2012). The researchers expressed, that the effects of one transition may stimulate other stresses and transitions (Anderson et al., 2012). In addition, an individual's appraisal of the transition is affected by their perception of who or what is responsible for it.

Number of factors, such as emotional, financial, social, and personal resources, can influence the effectiveness of a person's ability to manage and adjust to a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Social support systems are critical factors for handling stress caused by a transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Anderson and colleagues concluded four types of support systems individuals can utilize to ease the stress associated with a transition, which included: (1) intimate relationships; (2) family units; (3) network of friends; (4) institutions and/or communities in which they participate in (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 84). For transfer students, social support systems may take the form of family members, academic advisors, faculty members, and peers. Citing Caplan (1976), the researchers expressed, that support systems are utilized by the individual to mobilize psychological resources and overcome emotional burdens (as cited in Anderson et al.,
The authors presented four coping models individuals can utilize to alter or limit the discomfort associated with a stressful event, which included: (1) information seeking; (2) direct action; (3) inhibition of action; (4) intrapsychic behavior (self-mindset utilized to eliminate issues) (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 90).

The constructs provided by Schlossberg (1984) provide insights on how students may evaluate challenges during a psychosocial transition. Based off Schlossberg’s (1984) theory, students entering the new environment may look for support mechanisms such as, family, peers, faculty, and academic advisors to cope with the stress of a transition. Additionally, the 4s system (situation, self, support, and strategies) can influence how the transfer student perceives the transition. Therefore, by asking how a student perceived their experience at their new institution, a better understanding is provided on whether the student is (1) experiencing a transition as outlined by theory and (2) if so, what factors are influencing it.

**Theory of student departure.** Tinto (1987) stated, in his Theory of Student Departure, that a student’s likelihood of persisting at an institution to complete their academic program was influenced by their level of integration with the institution’s academic and social environment. Tinto's (1987) theory identified that a student's likelihood of withdrawal was influenced by their individual attributes, skills, commitment, intentions, and interaction with the collegiate environment (as cited in Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Of the influences mentioned, Tinto expressed that the level of a student's integration with the college environment is the greatest factor impacting a student's likelihood of withdrawing before completing their academic goals (1987).
Tinto (1987) stated, that for a student to fully integrate with the college environment, a student needs to progress through three stages (as cited in Morrison & Silverman, 2012). The first stage is a student's separation from their past communities (i.e., family, past institutions, and residential community) (Tinto, 1987). When Tinto developed his theory, his primary observation was that traditional college students (i.e., 18-21-year old’s and living on-campus) and many of the involvement factors do not consider non-traditional college students such as transfer students. For example, the first stage of integration is a major obstacle for transfer students, as many of them are commuter students and are regularly influenced by events concerning their family or residential community. Transfer students may be older than traditional-aged college students and may have employment or familiar responsibilities that may hinder their ability to separate from their past communities.

The second stage is the student's transition between their previous and new collegiate environment (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Tinto (1987) expressed, that students are likely not to fully anticipate the collegiate environment they are entering, therefore, are likely to have trouble transitioning. The level of transition difficulty a student will face is based on their previous experience with a similar environment and the level of guidance they received (Tinto, 1987). It is during this stage that transfer students may experience stress from the transition. For transfer students, it is in the second stage where they transfer from their previous institution to their new institution. Additionally, students in this stage begin to identify the causes of their transition stress and utilize resources to cope with it. For Tinto (1987), the resources include institutional programs, faculty/student interaction, and social programs that facilitates student involvement with
the academic and social environment to ease integration. When the resources are absent or limited, a student’s involvement and subsequent integration is hindered.

The final stage involves the student's integration with the college environment (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). A student's integration can be influenced by the level of interaction between the student and members of the institution (i.e., students, staff, and faculty), as well as how closely the cultural values of the institution matches that of the student (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Tinto (1987) determined that external events may have significant impact on a student's integration. This is a greater concern for non-traditional students, such as transfer students, whom may have non-collegiate obligations that may impact their collegiate involvement and integration (Tinto, 1987).

**Conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition.** The prominent attrition models provided by Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) places a heavy reliance on a student’s social involvement with the environment of the institution as a predictor of persistence. These attrition models have focused mainly on traditional college students and have ignored those other students with different characteristics. Therefore, Bean and Metzner (1985) constructed a model to better assess the likelihood of attrition for nontraditional college students. Bean and Metzner (1985) defined a nontraditional college student as a student not residing on campus, who is older than 24 years, and is enrolled part-time. Transfer students often characterized as nontraditional college students because many of them meet the three criteria outlined by Bean and Metzner (1985). According to the researchers, because of their part-time status and their external responsibilities, nontraditional students often have minimal interaction with the main agents of socialization at their institution (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Due to their minimal interaction
with the social environment of the institution, attrition models that rely primarily on social interaction, may not be fully applicable to nontraditional college students. Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model is based on three postulates: (1) nontraditional students have less interaction with the college environment, engage less with faculty, and utilizes less of the campus services; (2) nontraditional students share similar class-related activities with traditional students; (3) nontraditional students have greater interaction with the noncollegiate environment (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 490).

Four sets of variables encompassed Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model, which included: academic performance, intent to leave, background variables, and environmental variables. Academic performance refers to the student’s in-class performance. Students with low GPA’s are expected to withdraw at higher rates then well performing students (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The student’s GPA is mostly based on their high school academic performance (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The second variable, intent to leave, refers to the student’s desire to withdraw from the institution based on either psychological or academic outcomes (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The student’s background variables, to include educational goals and high school performance, is expected to affect attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Lastly, environmental variables are expected to have a heavy influence on the student’s likelihood of withdrawing (Bean & Metzner, 1985). These environmental variables include finances, employment hours, off-campus employment, family responsibilities, and the student’s opportunity to transfer (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model assumes that the students’ variables will have one of two compensatory interactions. The first compensatory interaction involves
environmental variables that are assumed to be of greater importance to nontraditional students than academic variables, which results in the following (Bean & Metzner, 1985). A student will persist and remain in school if both academic and environmental variables are positive but will likely withdraw if both are negative (Bean & Metzner, 1985). A student will also likely withdraw if academic variables are positive but environmental variables are negative (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The inverse is also true; a student will remain in school if the environmental support is positive, but academic performance is poor (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Students that are unable to balance their academic and external responsibilities or face financial difficulties will not remain enrolled regardless of academic performance (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

The secondary compensatory interaction is between academic outcome, GPA, and psychological outcomes (Bean & Metzner, 1985). A student who has positive academic and psychological outcomes is likely to remain enrolled but will withdraw if both variables are negative (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Students with low levels of satisfaction or goal commitment, or high levels of stress are likely to withdraw, even if their GPA is high (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Those students that perceive gaining positive psychological outcomes from their continued enrollment at the institution will likely remain despite having a low GPA (Bean & Metzner, 1985). For nontraditional college students, academic performance on its own will not influence a student to remain enrolled, it must be paired with positive psychosocial outcomes (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The external environment and the student’s perception on how it affects their experience, is the primary factor influencing their persistence and continuation at the institution (Bean & Metzner, 1985).
A student’s background variables are included in the model because past behavior is indicative of likely future behavior (Bean & Metzner, 1985). A student that performs low academically in high school is likely to perform poorly in college (Bean & Metzner, 1985). In addition, for nontraditional college students, academic variables represent the primary matter in which these students interact with the institution because of their limited social involvement (Bean & Metzner, 1985). These academic variables will therefore directly impact their GPA and attrition, if a low GPA causes involuntary attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985). For the most part, Bean and Metzner’s model places little importance on the effect of social interaction on attrition because of nontraditional students rare and limited exposure to the institution’s social environment (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Nevertheless, the researchers do admit that for individual cases, a nontraditional student may find the interaction with faculty or peers to be a determinant factor regarding continued enrollment (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The researchers assume most nontraditional students do not place high importance on social interaction and instead will be more concerned with how the external environment is impacting their collegiate experience (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Current Empirical Literature

**Perception of institutional quality.** In a study by Noel-Levitz (2012), students’ perception of the quality of service between various higher education institutions were compared. Students expressed that the most important factor concerning the quality of the institution regarded the individualized attention they received (Noel-Levitz, 2012). When comparing students’ satisfaction concerning the individualized attention afforded between four-year public and private institutions, public institutions demonstrated a
lower mean satisfaction score than private institutions (5.10 versus 5.28, respectively) (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Student perception of the quality of service offered by the institutions (e.g., accessibility and helpfulness of non-faculty members) were also rated between the four-year public and private institutions. The students perceived the level of service quality at four-year private institutions higher (5.17) than at four-year public institutions (5.06) (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Lastly, the institutions were rated on the students’ satisfaction of the campus climate (i.e., the level of enjoyment; campus diversity; kindness of staff; the institution’s commitment to academics; student perceived value of tuition cost) (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Students at four-year private institutions expressed higher mean satisfaction scores concerning the campus climate than those at four-year public institutions (5.30 versus 5.19, respectively) (Noel-Levitz, 2012).

An institution’s learning climate was also identified to influence a student’s level of satisfaction (Moos & Moos, 1976, as cited in Vahala & Winston, 1994). Classrooms that offered student involvement, personalized attention, innovative learning methods, and clear expectations, were determined to be positively influence student satisfaction and mood (Moos & Moos, 1976, as cited in Vahala & Winston, 1994). Conversely, classrooms that offered low support from instructors related to discontent among students (Moos & Moos, 1976, as cited in Vahala & Winston, 1994). Vahala and Winston (1994) identified that students’ perception of the genuine concern of faculty was significantly lower at four-year research universities than at private liberal arts colleges. Vahala and Winston concluded that private liberal arts colleges are providing better environments, where faculty and student interactions can foster more than at larger four-year research institutions (1994).
Regarding the academic rigor of learning environment, Vahala and Winston (1994) found that students at two-year institutions expressed having a more intellectually challenging learning environment than did students at private liberal arts colleges. The possible cause of variation may stem from the greater academic preparedness of students attending private liberal arts colleges than at two-year institutions (Vahala & Winston, 1994). In addition, Vahala and Winston (1994) determined that students at four-year research institutions expressed having a more structured evaluation and study plan, than students at two-year institutions and private liberal arts colleges. Vahala and Winston (1994) also concluded that students at both two-year and four-year research institutions expressed having a more hostile learning climate (depending on the academic discipline) than those attending private liberal arts colleges. The results demonstrated that students are finding the learning environments at the larger four-year research institutions as more bureaucratic and structured than the more perceived individualized approach of the two-year and private liberal arts colleges (Vahala & Winston, 1994). Although less individualized, Vahala and Winston (1994) conclude that students are expressing a greater preference for the structured approach of the larger four-year research institutions as opposed to the more flexible and personal structure of the two-year and private liberal arts colleges.

**Institutional type.** The type of institution that college students attend were found to influence academic success (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). Each type of institution offers a unique environment and resources that affect a student’s level of satisfaction, which in return affects a student’s academic success and persistence (Miller, 2003). According to Schreiner (2009), student satisfaction accounted for 17 percent of retention variation level
and satisfaction provided the strongest predictor of a student’s intent to persist (as cited in Bryant & Bodfish, 2014).

**Four-Year institutions.** When comparing the level of student satisfaction and graduation rates between four-year private and four-year public institutions, data demonstrated significantly higher rates in both categories at private institutions (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). According to Bryant and Bodfish (2014), graduation rates rose with the student’s level of satisfaction for all the institution types tested, except for four-year public institutions. When looking at the various indicators of student institutional satisfaction, Bryant and Bodfish determined the following average satisfaction percentage rates at four-year private institutions: 66 percent (institutional commitment to academic excellence); 70 percent (intellectual growth opportunities); 63 percent (enjoyable environment); 72 percent (institutional reputation); 76 percent (perception of faculty expertise); 70 percent (faculty accessibility and availability); 54 percent (career guidance) (2014). Four-year private institutions demonstrated having strong links between students’ academic experiences, students’ feelings regarding the campus environment, their satisfaction level, and the institution’s graduation rate (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). Bryant and Bodfish (2014) concluded that four-year private institutions placed a high priority on student satisfaction and classroom experience.

Student satisfaction levels were lower at four-year public institutions in comparison to the four-year private institutions. Students at four-year public institutions expressed the greatest discontent with the limited availability of personnel and space constraints afforded by the large enrollment size of the institution (Bryant & Bodfish,
The limited availability of personnel and space were found to be the greatest contributor to student attrition (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014).

When looking at the impact of tuition rates with student satisfaction levels, student satisfaction levels were steadier at four-year private institutions in comparison with four-year public institutions, which showed significant decline as tuition increased (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). Although satisfaction levels were consistent at four-year private institutions, as tuition rates increased, students were more critical of the financial services of the institution (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). When looking at the various financial factors at the four-year public institutions, students demonstrated low mean satisfaction levels in the following areas: availability of financial aid (48 percent); usefulness of student fees (39 percent); perceived institutional value (54 percent); fairness of billing policies (45 percent); institutional fit (51 percent); satisfaction with the registration process (53 percent) (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014).

Institutional size was found to also be a significant factor affecting student satisfaction. At four-year private institutions, student satisfaction was more consistent among the various enrollment sizes in comparison to the four-year public institutions (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). Nevertheless, students at four-year private institutions did express lower satisfaction levels as the enrollment sizes increased (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). Students demonstrated discontent with the lack of personalized attention, the lower financial aid support, the limited availability of library resources, and the quality of the academic advising at large private institutions (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014).

Regardless of the enrollment size of the institution, students maintained high expectations for the availability of personalized attention (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014).
Bryant and Bodfish (2014) were able to identify the following factors concerning enrollment size that impacted student satisfaction levels the most at four-year private institutions: well-maintained campus (69 percent); course variety (56 percent); helpfulness of financial aid staff (51 percent); availability and helpfulness of library staff (64 percent); genuine concern of academic advisors (64 percent). As enrollment increased, students expressed lower levels of satisfaction, as students voiced disappointment with the availability of individualized attention (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). In short, the study demonstrated that students at four-year public institutions demonstrated having a lower mean satisfaction score level as enrollment size increases (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). Further, as the tuition cost rose at four-year public institutions, students’ perceived value of the institution lowered (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014).

Two-year institutions. Wang (2009) conducted a further assessment of the transition experiences of transfer students, which looked on how two-year institution transfers perceived what factors have influenced their degree attainment. The researcher examined the students’ perception by testing the following variables: precollege characteristics, psychological attributes, postsecondary education experiences, and the environmental factors affecting their degree attainment (Wang, 2009, p. 571). Using the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and 2000, the researcher was able to draw upon 786 cases to include in the quantitative examination (Wang, 2009).

The researcher concluded that 62.6 percent of the two-year institution transfer students were able to obtain a baccalaureate degree by 2000, while 37.4 percent did not (Wang, 2009). Also, Wang (2009) determined that 76.2 percent of the transfers persisted, while 23.8 percent did not. Wang (2009) also concluded that gender and socioeconomic
status (SES) were strong predictors of degree completion, with female transfers demonstrating a 2.459 times higher likelihood of completion over males. Each quintile in SES increase, the likelihood of degree completion rose by 1.278 times (Wang, 2009). The researcher also found that transfer students that were more involved in college and transferred with high GPAs, demonstrated a higher chance of degree completion (Wang, 2009).

When evaluating persistence, the researcher determined that the higher the transfer students perceive their locus of control, the greater likelihood that the student will persist (Wang, 2009). The researcher concluded that for every one-point increase in locus of control perception the student’s likelihood of persistence rose by 1.178 times (Wang, 2009). The researcher also concluded that the higher the student’s perceived locus of control the more confident the student was with his transition and academic performance (Wang, 2009). In addition, having a higher pre-transfer GPA demonstrated that the student was better integrated with the learning environment at the two-year institution and thus more motivated to overcome obstacles impeding academic success (Wang, 2009). Both a transfer student’s level of locus of control and pre-transfer GPA were identified by Wang (2009) as being the highest predictors of degree attainment.

Religious institutions. Studies on college institutional type also extend to the impact of religiously affiliated institutions on the identity development of students (Small & Bowman, 2011). Small and Bowman in their study on the influence of religiously affiliated colleges on the religious commitment and development of college students, identified no significant differences between Catholic and secular institutions (2011). Catholic institutions demonstrated a culture in which religious values were expressed to
be an individual private matter and therefore, was not emphasized as part of the learning environment of the institutions (Small & Bowman, 2011). Therefore, due to the pseudo-secular environment of Catholic institutions, Catholic students at these institutions demonstrated no significant changes in their religious participation, when compared to students attending secular institutions (Small & Bowman, 2011). Therefore, students entering Catholic institutions did not experienced any increased religious desire.

Regardless of the religious affiliation of the institution, students interacting with peers with similar religious beliefs displayed a strengthening of their religious commitment (Small & Bowman, 2011). Nevertheless, increases in religious skepticism occurs when encountering learning environments in which faculty supports religious participation (Small & Bowman, 2011). Students from religious minority groups (i.e., non-Christians), experienced doubt or religious skepticism when exposed to a college environment where multiple religious ideologies were being represented (Small & Bowman, 2011). In addition, non-Christian students’ perception of the Christian privilege present in Christian-affiliated institutions, led these students to develop greater religious skepticism and difficulty reconciling diverging beliefs with others (Small & Bowman, 2011).

Catholic postsecondary institutions are distinct from their secular counterparts because of its emphasis on spiritual development. Core to Catholic institutions is the merging of philosophy and theology in its curriculum, in imposing the importance of intellectualism and morality on students and staff (Merrigan, 2015). Catholic postsecondary institutions provide a campus climate where faith is primary to its institutional objectives. These institutions typically provide its students with small
instructor to student ratios and an environment for spiritual and identity development (Rafael, Pressley, & Kane, 2013).

The presence of Catholicism is deeply rooted in the daily lives and traditions of many Latinos, as they account for 34 percent of Catholics in the United States (Lipka, 2015). Therefore, it is not surprising that many Latino students enroll in Catholic universities in the United States. Many Catholic universities in the United States are Hispanic serving institutions (HSI), that is at least 25 percent of their total enrollment are Latino students (Contreras, 2016). Adding to Latino’s interest in Catholic postsecondary institutions is their historically high completion rates at those institutions in comparison with public institutions (Contreras, 2016). Completion rates at Catholic Universities for all students at the four- and six-year rate are considerably higher than at public universities (54.1 and 66.0 versus 37.1 and 65.6, respectively) (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011, as cited in Contreras, 2016). In addition, data show that Catholic postsecondary institutions’ completion rates exceed the national average for all postsecondary institutions (Contreras, 2016).

Transition challenges and outcomes. The majority of the literature on college transition has focused on first year college students (Pratt, Hunsberger, Pracer, Alisat, Bowers, Mackey, Ostaniewicz, Rog, Terzian, Thomas, 2000; Mattanah, Lopez, Govern, 2011). Nevertheless, transfer students face similar transition issues as first year college students, as well as their own distinct challenges (Renn & Reason, 2012). Research has concluded that college transition can disrupt existing social networks causing students to feel isolated (Mattanah et al., 2011). Social networks function as key support groups that can alleviate the stress of a transition (Mattanah et al., 2011). Overcoming a transition
challenge was linked with persistence, academic self-efficacy, career development, personal identity development, social competence, and relationship satisfaction (Mattanah et al., 2011; Renn & Reason, 2012).

**Intervention programs.** Various intervention programs exist to address the transition challenges of college students. One form of intervention are orientation programs that are typically offered to new students. New student orientations typically focus on: improving students’ chances of academic success, establishing connections with peers, assisting students adjust to the social environment, and providing information about college environment to students and family (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). Students that participated in orientation programs indicated having greater success integrating with the social and academic environment of the institution than nonparticipants (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Institutions also offer bridge programs over the summer to expose new students to the academic and social environment of the institution (Renn & Reason, 2012). The summer bridge programs often involve having students reside on campus for a few weeks and having them get involved with developmental coursework (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The bridge programs also provide new incoming students the opportunity to interact with academic and career advisors and other new students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students that participated in summer bridge programs displayed increased engagement with the campus life, better sense of institutional fit, and easier adjustment to the campus environment (Muraskin & Lee, 2004; as cited in Renn & Reason, 2012).
Another intervention program is learning communities where the institution uses the full extent of its academic components to aid students that cannot reside on campus with their transition (Renn & Reason, 2012). Learning communities facilitate academic and social integration by helping create peer groups (Tinto, 1997). Two-year institution and commuter students benefit from learning communities because it provides them with an opportunity to engage more than in the classroom (Renn & Reason, 2012).

Lastly first-year seminars provide new students with information on institutional resources that focused on increasing the level of community and institutional commitment (Renn & Reason, 2012). In addition, first-year seminars were found to increase students’ perception of the quality of advising and their satisfaction with the institution (Hendel, 2007). To be successful in helping students with their transition, first-year seminars need to be a collaborative effort between faculty and student affair professionals that regularly monitors student outcomes (Renn & Reason, 2012).

**Transfer student transition.** Researchers began focusing their attention on how institutions, both the two-year institutions and the four-year institutions, were affecting the transition of transfer students. The key input on how successful institutions were in facilitating transfer student transition and success, was the students themselves and therefore studies were geared toward understanding the experiences of the students. Research on the transition experiences of transfer students identified three major themes, which include: (1) transfer preparation; (2) academic adjustment; (3) social environment (Townsend, 1995; Laanan, 1996; Pascarella, 1999; Flaga, 2006; Ishitani & McKitrick, 2010).
**Transfer preparation.** Townsend (1995), determined that contrary to their experience at the two-year institution, the transfer students found the university advising resources to be very helpful and knowledgeable, even though none of the students sampled attended the university’s transfer orientation session. In addition, Davies and Dickman (1998) determined that more transfer students were pleased with the advising they received at the two-year institution than their receiving four-year institution. Furthermore, they concluded that most of the transfer students were satisfied with the two-year institution’s preparation for the academic demands of the four-year institution (Davies & Dickmann, 1998).

The researchers also determined that transfer students expressed mix thoughts regarding their advising experience at the large, four-year institution, with some expressing that the advisors were knowledgeable and others stating that the advisors were disinterested with their concerns (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). In addition, Davies and Casey (1999) identified that transfer students perceived their university to offered little in support services to aid their transition. The students expressed that the institution’s staff were unhelpful and treated them as “second class citizens” (Davies & Casey, 1999, p. 7). They also concluded that the poor social, financial, and academic support from the four-year institution impeded the transfer students’ transition and detracted from their college experience (1999).

Berger and Malaney (2003) determined that the students that were most prepared for their transfer to the university, demonstrated having the highest satisfaction. Conversely, those students that spent the most time studying expressed the least satisfaction (Berger & Malaney, 2003). The lack satisfaction by those students seeking
academic support, signified that they were likely not adequately prepared for their transition to the four-year institution, due to poor advising (Berger & Malaney, 2003). The conclusions of Berger and Malaney (2003) signify that the greatest predictor of institutional satisfaction is the transfer students’ preparation for their transfer to the receiving four-year institution.

Flaga (2006) found that exposing transfer students to the academic expectations and the campus environment early in their academic program will significantly enhance their transition experience. Transfer students indicated that better communication between the two- and four-year institution would have greatly improved their transition experience by increasing the knowledge available to them (Flaga, 2006). Flaga (2006) concluded, that increased attendance by advisors from two-year institutions at four-year institutions could facilitate the exchanging of information between the institutions. According to Flaga (2006), transfer students would be better psychologically prepared for the transition if both the two- and four-year institutions were more proactive in advising students before their transfer. The study also proposed that transfer advisors could function as a key learning resource and support system that the transfers can utilize to minimize the stress of the transition (Flaga, 2006). Flaga (2006) determined that the transferability of credits was the main factor causing the most frustration on transfer students.

Austin (2006) concluded that the interaction with pre-transfer advisors and orientation sessions facilitated transfer students’ transition by easing some of their concerns. Additionally, the students expressed that the guidance the orientation sessions provided were valuable, and it eliminated the stress they felt in trying to navigate the
campus and its services (Austin, 2006). Austin (2006) also determined that transfer students highly valued the ability to discuss personal difficulties with members of the university staff. The students expressed, that having access to someone in which to consult difficulties and challenges (both in the classroom and in their personal lives) eased the stress they felt (Austin, 2006).

Austin (2006) also found that pre-transfer advising eased the students’ fear of not being able to balance school and personal responsibilities. Balancing responsibilities was a challenge, but the transfer students were motivated to persist for their children (Austin, 2006). Transfer students found it important to have access to advisors that could align prior coursework with the curriculum of their new institution (Renn & Reason, 2012).

Townsend and Wilson (2006) also uncovered that the majority of the transfer students felt that they did not receive assistance from the two-year institution and needed to navigate the transition on their own. Most of the transfer students expressed that their receiving university’s new student programs eased their transition. Regarding the university’s services and orientations, Townsend and Wilson determined that some students preferred gaining input from other transfer students that previously experienced the same process, rather than attending the institution’s orientation sessions (2006). Other transfer students expressed that the university’s transfer orientation should be tailored to discuss the exclusive needs of transfer students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). The researchers concluded that the transition experience divided into two sections: academic and social (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Research also identified that the eligibility of transfer credits was a major concern for transfer students (Townsend, 2008). Students expressed the importance of having all
their college credits transferred towards both the institution’s core curriculum and their academic major (Townsend, 2008). Unfamiliarity with the number of credits that would transfer into their academic program at their receiving institution was major concern that impacted their transition to academic environment (Townsend, 2008). Transfer students also expressed frustration with the admissions and financial aid process, as information regarding the transfer process was limited (Townsend, 2008). The need for institutions to provide pre-transfer advising on admissions, financial aid, and credit transferability was critical to facilitate students’ transition (Townsend, 2008).

**Academic adjustment.** Regarding the transfer students’ perception of the academic environment, Townsend (1995) determined that most of transfer students expressed finding the university to be more rigorous than the two-year institution. Although most of the students felt the two-year institution did a poor job in preparing them for the academic demands of the university, they preferred the writing assignments and testing formats at the two-year institution (Townsend, 1995). In addition, Davies and Dickman (1998) determined that the majority of the transfer students described the academic life of the two-year institution as having a lower standard and greater emphasis on homework assignments than their receiving four-year institution. In addition, Townsend and Wilson (2006) concluded that older transfer students felt that the two-year institution’s stricter policies concerning attendance and regular class assignments forced them to better focus on their academic responsibilities than the four-year institution.

**Faculty interaction.** Townsend (1995) identified, that transfer students found the faculty at the university more accessible than the faculty of the two-year institution. Nevertheless, the students expressed mixed feeling regarding the university faculty’s
willingness to assist them, even finding them to be dismissive (Townsend, 1995; Townsend, 2008). Davies and Dickmann (1998) determined that transfer students expressed having difficulty establishing relationships with faculty and found the personalized attention to be absent at their receiving four-year institution. Davies and Casey (1999) concluded that transfer students expressed more positive experiences at the two-year institution than at their receiving university. The students felt that the instructors at the two-year institution demonstrated having a more genuine desire to teach rather than instructors at the university who seemed to be more concerned with research (Davies & Casey, 1999). They also determined that the transfer students felt the instructors at the two-year institution were more concerning of their needs, unlike the “dispassionate” responses they received from the faculty at the university (Davies & Casey, 1999, p. 60).

*Learning environment.* Townsend (1995) determined that transfer students felt the classroom environment at the university to be highly competitive between students and had trouble asking questions and gaining assistance from peers. The classroom experience at the two-year institution was described as more cooperative and encouraging, where students were willing to engage with each other (Townsend, 1995). In addition, Laanan (1996) found that classroom sizes of 100 students or more and the absence of a dedicated advising team, caused adjustment difficulties for the transfer students. Transfer students were accustomed to the personalized academic experience that the two-year institution provided (Laanan, 1996). Transfer students also demonstrated having lower levels of social and academic involvement and feelings of marginalization at their four-year institution (Laanan, 1996). Laanan (1996) determined, that although transfer students participating in a transition preparation program expressed
less social and academic involvement at their receiving four-year institution, they did express a higher sense of satisfaction and belonging at the four-year institution than non-program participating transfer students (p. 79).

Davies and Dickman (1998) found that most of their transfer student participants felt more comfortable at the two-year institution because of the smaller learning environment and personalized attention they received. Although the transfer students preferred the learning environment of the two-year institution, the researchers determined that transfer students found the faculty at both the two- and four-year institution to be of similar quality (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). They also concluded, that the transfer students had mixed perceptions regarding the academic life of the four-year institution, with some more prepared for the demanding learning environment and others feeling marginalized by the large class sizes (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). Additionally, they determined that the majority of the transfer students expressed dislike with the following aspects of their receiving four-year institution: parking, overcrowded atmosphere, student litter, disrespectful students, lack of personal attention by instructors, and the competitive classroom environment (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). Furthermore, Townsend and Wilson (2006) identified that transfer students felt more comfortable in smaller classroom settings because of the more individualized attention instructors gave them. Additionally, Townsend and Wilson (2006) concluded that for many transfer students, classroom sizes of 100 students or more made it difficult to interact with peers regularly.

In addition, Davies and Casey (1999) determined that most of transfer students enjoyed the ease, accessibility, fun, and comfort that the institution afforded. Regarding the students’ experience at the large university, they concluded that many transfer
students felt overwhelmed and lost because of the bigger environment (Davies & Casey, 1999). Davies and Casey (1999) determined that the students’ classroom experience varied between the two-year institution and the university, with the transfer students being more satisfied with the more individualized learning environment of the two-year institution. The transfer students felt that the university alienated them (Davies & Casey, 1999). Additionally, Austin (2006) concluded that individualized attention and pretransfer advising programs, were crucial to the transition of transfer students.

**Social environment.** Socialization is the process by which a student familiarizes himself with the campus environment through the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Weidman, 1989). Tinto (1975) stated that part of the process of becoming fully integrated with the institution’s academic and social environment, a student must separate from their home environment. This separation may present challenges for nontraditional college students because of their external responsibilities and commuter status (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) proposed that students from nondominant cultures take on academic bioculturalism as a form socialization. Bioculturalism involves locating and strengthening shared cultural characteristics of the academic and home environment (Renn & Reason, 2012). Museus and Quaye (2009) argued that bioculturalism will permit a student to integrate with the campus culture without abandoning their home culture (as cited in Renn & Reason, 2012). Peer groups are essential for new students to facilitate their college transition, yet for transfer students, establishing peer groups may be difficult because of their differing interests with first-year students (Renn & Reason, 2012).
Laanan (1996) identified that transfer students in transition preparation programs engaged less than non-program participants in student organizations (20 percent versus 23 percent) (p. 77). The students also participated less in meetings or programs (16 percent versus 21 percent) and were less likely to engage with faculty about course material (33 percent versus 38 percent) (Laanan, 1996, p. 77). Additionally, Davies and Dickmann (1998) determined that transfer students experienced a “cultural shock” during their first semester at their receiving institution (p. 550). The students disliked the emphasis and the abundance of extra-curricular activities and student clubs at universities (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). They found the social activities to be distracting and negatively affecting their academic performance (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Davies & Casey, 1999). Transfer students on academic probation, expressed feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and at times dehumanized at their receiving four-year institution (Davies & Dickmann, 1998).

Duggan and Pickering (2008) concluded that academic and social integration were found to be challenges for transfer students in each of the academic levels. Additionally, Townsend and Wilson (2006) identified that the majority of transfer students studied believed that the two-year institution presented better engagement opportunities. The students also felt out-of-place at the university (Townsend & Wilson, 2006), expressing that they aligned better with other non-traditional students at the two-year institution (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Conversely, Austin (2006) determined that transfer students were satisfied with their academic and social integration upon transferring to the university.
**Time balance.** Davies and Casey (1999) found that transfer students felt more welcomed at the two-year institution. The students felt that the institution took the time to discuss their needs (mainly those outside of the classroom), unlike the university which was less accommodating and put a strain on the students’ ability to balance their school/life responsibilities (Davies & Casey, 1999). In addition, Berger and Malaney (2003) concluded that most students transferring to a four-year institution were forced to reduce personal and social activities to keep up with their academic obligations. Additionally, employed students were forced to lower their work schedule by an average of 7.54 hours and the time spent taking care of family obligations by an average of 3.43 hours (Berger & Malaney, 2003). They also identified that transfer students increased the time they dedicated to studying per week by an average of 4.49 hours and their socializing by an average of 4.65 hours (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Duggan and Pickering (2008) determined that the obstacles to academic success varied among transfer students in each class level, but the theme that was consistent with all, was the inability of the students to complete their assignments by its deadline (Duggan & Pickering, 2008). The transfer students' concern with meeting deadlines demonstrated that the greatest challenge for these students was the inability to balance responsibilities (Duggan & Pickering, 2008).

**Financial concerns.** Townsend (1995) concluded that most transfer students withdrew due to financial difficulties and poor institutional fit (i.e., unavailability of desired academic program). In addition, Davies and Casey (1999) concluded that transfer students felt that the two-year institution was more supportive of their financial needs because of scholarships and more flexible class offerings that allowed them to seek
employment opportunities (Davies & Casey, 1999). Additionally, Austin (2006) found that scholarships were crucial for easing the financial burden of transfer students. The scholarships also allowed the students to eliminate their part-time employment in order to dedicate more of their time to their academics (Austin, 2006).

**Transfer knowledge and institutional treatment.** Townsend (2008) identified that transfer students attending a traditional, residential, and four-year institution, expressed their unfamiliarity with the institution and its regulations, even though they already had freshman experience. Transfer students felt that the institution was not differentiating between first-year students and transfer students in its assessment of their transition challenges and that it needed to make better efforts in focusing on their unique concerns (Townsend, 2008). Transfer students felt that the institution needed to provide exclusive advising and orientations to address their specific questions and concerns (Townsend, 2008). Because transfer students sense the differences of interests with first-year non-transfer students, the institution should consider housing transfer students in a separate dormitory, which provides transfer students with the opportunity to socialize and network with like-minded individuals (Townsend, 2008).

**This Current Study**

Various research on the transfer students identified the need for research on their experiences as many students incur transition challenges at the four-year institution (Townsend, 2008, Austin, 2006; Davies & Casey, 1999; Cedja, 1997). Therefore, the goal of this study was to understand the transition experiences of students transferring to a small, private, and religiously affiliated university. Empirical evidence on transfer students in large and public universities demonstrated that transfer students are taking
longer to graduate and have higher attrition levels than non-transfer students for reasons outside of academics (Cedja, 1997; Anglin, 1993). Since academic performance is not the primary reason for transfer student’s low completion and high attrition rates, the need to assess the transition experiences of transfer students is vital to better understand the factors impeding their transition (Glass and Harrington, 2002).

Schlossberg’s (1984) Transition Theory provided a lens to understand the possible stress and psychological discomfort a transfer student may experience when transferring to a new institution. The theory also discussed the 4S system, which are the four factors that influences a student’s perception of a transition. A transition for transfer students occurs when they transfer to the new academic and social environment of the four-year university. The uncertainty of the new environment and its expectations may cause transfer students stress. This stress is compounded by the fact that these transfer students are still wholly accustomed to the environment of their previous institution. Based off the Schlossberg’s (1984) theory, transfer students in transition may look for support mechanisms such as, family, peers, faculty, and academic advisors to ease the difficulties and stress.

In addition, Tinto’s (1987) student departure theory addressed the need for students to become involved with the academic and social environment of their new institution to become more fully integrated with it. Tinto (1987) expressed, the more a student interacts with faculty and advisors, the greater the student’s integration with the institution. Integration with institutional agents such as faculty and advisors, can facilitate student integration and reduce the level of stress that is associated with a transition. Although Tinto (1987) provided a lens to understand the correlation between
involvement and integration, the theory presents challenges to non-traditional and commuter students such as transfer students, due to their limited interaction with the institution and their non-collegiate obligations.

Lastly, Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model provides a lens to evaluate nontraditional college students, such as transfer students, likelihood of persisting and remaining at their current institution. The model focusses on the effect of a student’s external environment on their level adjustment and integration with the social and academic environment of the institution. Transfer students’ limited exposure to the campus environment makes it essential for researchers to take significant account of the impact of the external environment on students’ transition experiences.

Literature on transfer students is abundant, but the majority of studies addressed the academic and transition challenges of those students transferring to a large public university. Assessment of the transition experience to a small, private, religiously affiliated university is needed, since research is limited in that area. This study focused on assessing the transition of transfer students at a single small, private religiously affiliated university that offered smaller classes, personalized student learning experience, and a greater focus on ethics. On-the-other-hand, the institution offered little-to-no student integration and involvement programs and the institution's religious affiliation may present challenges to those students that hold opposing beliefs. Considering the limited qualitative studies on the transition experiences of transfer students at small, private, religiously affiliated institutions, an assessment of the experiences of transfer students at this institution would add to the existing knowledge on transfer students.
Chapter 3: Method

Purpose of the Study

The literature on transfer students highlighted the need to assess how transfer students are transitioning into a small, private, religiously affiliated, four-year institutions by giving voice to their transition experiences (Ishitami & McKitrick, 2010). The purpose of this study was to fill this gap in the literature. Utilizing grounded theory analysis, the aim of this study was to develop a mid-level theory to explain how students’ perceive their transition into a small, private, religiously affiliated institution and how their past experiences at their previous institution influence their transition experiences.

Participants

The participants consisted of undergraduate college students pursuing a baccalaureate degree that transferred from a regionally accredited institution of higher education and enrolled at SAU. The study defined a transfer student as a student that completed a minimum of 12 collegiate credit hours at an institution of higher education and transferred to another postsecondary institution to complete their degree program. The transfer students in this study had to have completed a minimum of 12 collegiate credit hours to be considered a transfer student. No requirements were placed on the maximum number of credit hours the student completed at their previous institution or having completed an Associate degree. All transfer students 18 years or older, regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social-economic status (SES), marital standing, employment status, residential option, enrollment status (full- or part-time), academic major, and academic class level were eligible to participate in the study. This study did not limit participation by the students’ previous institution. Students transferring from
either two- or four-year postsecondary institutions were eligible to participate, as a primary aim of this study was to gather a better understanding of the shared lived experiences of all transfer students entering a collegiate environment like SAU.

Although there is no set rule on the minimum sample size for qualitative research, the researcher attempted to sample 12-15 transfer students to obtain a robust sample. Two criteria are typically considered when determining a sample size: (1) the extent to which the sample is representative of the population and, (2) when data saturation is met (Mills & Gay, 2016). In this study, purposive sampling was used to select participants that best represented the population. Only those students who met the inclusion criteria were considered. Further, maximum variation was also considered in the selection of students. Maximum variation refers to the selection of a diverse sample, to capture the range of experiences that could represent the phenomenon of interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mills & Gay, 2016).

Thus, the researcher sought to obtain a robust sample of participants to gather a more genuine and accurate depiction of the experiences of the transfer students transitioning to SAU (Mills & Gay, 2016). The age of the participants varied, with the youngest being 20 years old and the oldest being 32. The group mean age was 25 years. Of the participants, six considered themselves to be Hispanic, one was Asian, one Jamaican, and one from Ukraine. Although six of the nine participants identified as Hispanic, it does accurately reflect the student population of SAU, as the total undergraduate enrollment of Hispanics account for 54 percent (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2015). Five of the participants identified as female, and four as male. The highest G.P.A. provided was a 3.90 and the lowest was 2.76, with a mean of
3.34. The academic program majors also varied with two Business Management majors, one Accounting, one Biology, one Chemistry, one Education, one Nursing, one Political Science, and one Sports Administration.

All the participants were enrolled full-time, taking at least 12 credit hours. Five of the participants transferred in as Juniors, two as Seniors, one Sophomore, and one Freshman. Six of the participants transferred 60 credit hours or more, with three transferring less than 60. Of the nine participants, five completed their Associate in Arts degree prior to transferring to SAU. Six participants transferred from a large, public 2-year institution, one from a large, private 4-year university, one from a small, private 4-year university, and one from a large, public 4-year university. All but one of the participants resided off campus. Only one of the participants had parents that did not earn a college credential. Five of the participants were employed during the time of data collection, with the highest working 35 hours a week, the lowest working 10 hours a week, with a group mean of 21 hours a week. Table 1 contains all the demographic information with the pseudonym of each participant.

Finally, in this study, saturation of themes was sought. Saturation, in qualitative research, refers to the process in which the research attempts to ensure enough data collection, such that any new data collection would not yield new themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In the current study, after collecting data from nine participants, the researcher determined saturation of themes was met. That is, the researcher found after conducting seven interviews, the same themes were being discussed by the participants as part of their transition experiences and no new themes emerged. After saturation was
reached, two additional interviews were conducted as a safeguard. Thus, it was determined after the ninth interview that no further data collection was needed.

**Data Collection Procedures**

After gaining approval from the target setting’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted the Assistant Director of Admission Processing at SAU who provided a list with the contact information of potential participants. Part of the admissions application for SAU requires the student to list previously attended post-secondary institutions, along with submittal of official transcripts from each institution. Therefore, the admissions department had the ability to provide an accurate list of potential participants. The researcher then verified the list to ensure that all students met the requirements for participation in the study. Utilizing purposive sampling, the researcher selected those students from the list provided that best represented all possible student demographics to receive a more accurate representation of the sample population.

To participate in the study, participants needed to complete a minimum of 12 credit hours at their previous institution and transferred from a regionally accredited institution of higher education. Students needed to be 18 years or older. Participants needed to be current enrolled students at the target setting. No restrictions were placed on gender, race, ethnicity, academic major, or having an Associate degree. No restrictions on whether the student transferred from a two- or four-year institution.

Due to the low response rate associated with qualitative studies, an initial 114 students were contacted. Twelve participants agreed to participate. As mentioned above, saturation of themes was met with seven participants. An additional two participants were interviewed to assess whether new themes would arise, thus providing some assurance
for theoretical saturation. Thus, the current findings are based on the data of nine participants. The remaining three participants were not interviewed. All participants were contacted through email. The recruitment script (Appendix A) email contained information regarding the purpose of the study, expectations of the participants, data collection details, and the participant’s right to anonymity and withdraw. The final participants received a consent form (Appendix B) that outlined their rights.

The lived experiences of the participants were collected using one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2012). The participants received the option to interview through either face-to-face meeting in a private closed-door room at SAU, through telephone, or through internet video chat utilizing Skype. Single setting interviews provide the best environment for the participant to share their lived experiences in a private atmosphere where they can remain anonymous, and their shared information is free of judgment. The interview questions (Appendix C) were open-ended and semi-structured, which allowed the interview to remain focus on the central theme but also allowed the researcher the flexibility to probe the participant further for greater detail. The open-ended format of the questions were designed to identify possible common or shared themes that the transfer students were experiencing during their transition to SAU.

The interview questions were developed based on the literature on transfer students and the concepts outlined in Schlossberg et al.’s. (1995) Transition Theory, Tinto’s (1987) Theory of Student Departure, and Bean and Metzner’s Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition. The interview questions were framed around the primary concern of the study (e.g., "How would you describe your transition
Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Academic Major</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Weekly Work Hours</th>
<th>Transfer Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>Sports Administration</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiesha</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolce</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1
Participant Demographics (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Previous Institution</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Mother's Education</th>
<th>Father's Education</th>
<th>A.A. Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>4 Year, Large, Private</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>2 Year, Large, Public</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>2 Year, Large, Public</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Degree</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiesha</td>
<td>2 Year, Large, Public</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>Technical Certificate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolce</td>
<td>4 Year, Large, Public</td>
<td>On Campus</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>2 Year, Large, Public</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>4 Year, Small, Private</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>2 Year, Large, Public</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>2 Year, Large, Public</td>
<td>Off Campus</td>
<td>Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

experience to SAU?). Demographic information that was collected from the students included: gender, age, previous institution, academic major, and GPA (Appendix C). The interview sessions lasted approximately 60 minutes, which allowed the appropriate time for the participants to fully share their experiences and for the researcher to ask follow-up questions.
All interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and transcribed by the author and co-investigator of the study; no other individual was involved in the interview or transcribing process. To further ensure accuracy, all participant answers were validated using clarifying questions and member checks. To better gain the comfort and full contribution of the participants, a pseudonym was assigned to each of them. All data was stored confidentially in a password protected data storage file, in which access was limited to the researchers.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was conducted using a grounded theory approach. To facilitate data analysis, the data was organized using Microsoft Excel. Data were outlined in a visual form through tables, and were condensed (Creswell, 2012). Following Creswell’s (2012) suggestions for qualitative analysis, memos and notes were taken to aid the researcher through the coding process. The researcher’s notes in the form of phrases, ideas, or concepts that formed the initial categories based on the provided evidence, were collected during the interview sessions. These notes were entered in Excel to facilitate organization and analysis.

To better assess the single bounded nature of the study, a case study approach was used in connection with grounded theory analysis. A case study is qualitative approach that examines a real-life system that is bounded by setting or time through the collection of detailed information from multiple sources that is used to present a case description or themes (Creswell, 2012). A case study begins with the identification of a specific case, which may include: an individual, group, an organization or project (Creswell, 2012). The purpose behind a case study can be either intrinsic or instrumental. Intrinsic cases
involve studying a unique situation that requires a description. While instrumental cases involve studying a problem or a specific issue to better understand it (Creswell, 2012). This study took an instrumental case study approach that investigated the specific problem of transfer student transition at an individual four-year institution by understanding the experiences of those students. Since prior research identified challenges transfer students face when transitioning to the four-year institution, an investigation of this phenomenon at a specific institution made using an instrumental case study approach the most logical option. Regardless of the type of case study, the qualitative approach always has two components: a description of the case and themes or issues that were detected by the data. This study provided a rich description of the case with the identified themes in chapter four.

In addition, analysis of the data was conducted using the steps for grounded theory analysis outlined by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 2015). The primary aim of the study was to develop a mid-level theory to explain the causes of the phenomenon, especially regarding the interrelatedness of the themes detected from the participants’ lived experiences. The three phases of coding (i.e., open, axial, and selective) were utilized (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The open coding step involved a thorough examination of the data, in this study that consisted of the interview transcripts and audio recordings for salient categories. The researcher then continued to interview participants until the categories ascertained became saturated. Once the categories were identified, subcategories or properties were constructed that represented the various perceptions provided by the participants. Although Corbin and Strauss (1990) do not suggest the number of categories that should be identified, this study utilized the suggested amount
provided by Creswell (2012) of 25-30 which were condensed to five themes, to aid the researcher in connecting the data.

The type of information the researcher searched for to formalize the codes were specific forms of experiences, processes, actions, or interactions identified from the data that would lead to an understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding allowed for the constant-comparison of events and action/interactions to form categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As soon as the categories were developed, the researcher then selected the categories that were the most prominent in the participant's responses regarding their lived experiences, and it functioned as the central phenomenon of concern (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The main category or phenomenon was utilized as the central feature of the theory to be developed. Axial coding relates categories to their subcategories, analyzing its conditions, context, strategies, and action/interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Through selective coding, the categories were linked to five themes that the researcher used to develop a hypothesis that explained the relationship of the categories within the coding model (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The themes were linked to a central theme that functioned as the core phenomenon of the study and basis of the mid-level theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

**Trustworthiness**

This study implemented strategies laid forth by Guba (1981) that ensures trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Shenton, 2003). Guba (1981) suggested using four criteria to validate trustworthiness, which included: **credibility**, **transferability**, **dependability**, and **confirmability** (Shenton, 2003). **Credibility** is the measurement of
internal validity, that attempts to confirm that the study is measuring what it is intended to do (Shenton, 2003). Transferability is the measurement of a study’s findings applicability to similar situations (Shenton, 2003). Dependability is the measurement of reliability which validates the study results if the study was duplicated (Shenton, 2003). Confirmability is the measurement of the level of objectivity of the study results (Shenton, 2003). That is, ensuring that the study findings are formed by the participants’ experiences and ideas and not from the characteristics and biases of the researcher.

Credibility. Credibility was measured through the adoption of various strategies. First, the researcher utilized research methods that have been well-established in qualitative studies (Shenton, 2003). This study utilized a case study approach using grounded theory analysis outlined by Corbin and Strauss (1990). The second strategy the researcher utilized was understanding the culture of participants and of the setting (Shenton, 2003). The researcher’s role as both a transfer student admission advisor at the research setting and as a previous undergraduate transfer student, aided in forming an understanding of the participants. The third strategy used by the researcher was the use of a participant consent form that provided the right to withdrawal and anonymity (Shenton, 2003). The consent form was used to facilitate the honest flow of information. The fourth strategy utilized by the researcher was the use of iterative questioning to validate the truthfulness of the participant’s responses (Shenton, 2003).

The fifth strategy used by the researcher to validate credibility of this study was the utilization of debriefing sessions in which the data and its analysis was reviewed by multiple individuals (Shenton, 2003). These individuals included the researcher and colleagues who have training in higher education. The sixth strategy utilized by the
researcher was the use of member checks (Shenton, 2003). After data analysis, the researcher contacted the participants to have them review the themes and categories that were identified from the study for accuracy. The seventh strategy used by researcher was to list his thoughts and notes concerning the patterns that were emerging from the data during data collection process (Shenton, 2003). The eighth strategy utilized by the researcher involved having a level of experience with the participants as a result of his background as a transfer student admission officer; a role specifically tasked with directly guiding potential transfer students through the admissions process (Shenton, 2003). The ninth strategy used by the researcher included an examination of previous research findings as a reference point to compare the results from this study (Shenton, 2003).

**Transferability.** Additionally, transferability was met in this study by providing a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation so that the reader may have a better grasp of it and be better prepared to compare results with their own (Shenton, 2003). Furthermore, the researcher ensured transferability through the detailed description of the study's boundaries. The boundary descriptors included: a description of the target setting; information regarding participant restrictions; sample size figures; detailed information on data collection methods; data concerning the period and length of the interview sessions; the period in which the study occurred (Shenton, 2003). As a further measure of transferability, the study utilized data collection (i.e., interviews) and analyze methods (i.e., case study and grounded theory) well established in other research studies. The methods provide a higher likelihood of transferability of the study results to populations in similar settings (Shenton, 2003).
**Dependability.** Guba (1981) also discussed the issue of *dependability* in ensuring trustworthiness of a research project. *Dependability* is the guarantee that a study’s conclusions should be similar if the study is replicated using the same context, participants, data collection, and analyzing methods at a similar setting (Shenton, 2003). Therefore, to address greater dependability, the researcher provided detailed information on the study’s methodological process, to include: data collection method, data analysis techniques, study sample, research setting, researcher stance, and study limitations. Thus, this study addressed the effectiveness of the methodological process by thoroughly explaining two key areas highlighted by Shenton (2003). The areas include: (1) the research design and its implementation and (2) data gathering specifics and the particulars regarding the interaction with participants.

Another method of ensuring dependability that was employed in this study was the use of an external auditor (Shenton, 2004). Dr. Debbiesiu Lee, an Associate Professor in Educational and Psychological Studies at the University of Miami with over twenty years of qualitative research experience, served as an auditor for this project. She reviewed the creation of codes, categories, and themes, and at each stage of the coding process provided feedback which was incorporated into the subsequent coding.

**Confirmability.** Lastly, Guba (1981) discussed the need for *confirmability* to ensure a study’s trustworthiness. Confirmability refers to the level of objectivity present in the study and the absence of the researcher’s personal biases in forming the study results (Shenton, 2003). Shenton (2003) addressed the need for the researcher to provide the rationale for the selection of a certain data collection and analysis method. The researcher’s rationale was provided in the data collection and analysis sections of this
study. In addition, the need to provide an audit trail was expressed by Shenton (2003) to secure confirmability of the study parameters. The researcher kept memos to establish an audit trail and to organize thoughts which can function as both a form of validity and as a safeguard against researcher bias (Corbin & Strauss 2015). In addition, the feedback and verification of the study’s data analysis and results with the external auditor and dissertation committee members, helped guard against biases (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

**Researcher's Stance**

As means to provide greater trustworthiness, it is important for the reader to understand and communicate the point of view of the researcher (Wolcott, 1994). By understanding the researcher’s stance, the reader can better assess the study’s findings. As a prior undergraduate transfer student, the researcher can identify with the experiences shared by the study participants. Many of the same challenges and themes expressed in the literature on transfer student transition experiences have been experienced by the researcher as an undergraduate student. These experiences included the following: (1) absence of night or weekend courses, (2) time management difficulty because of full-time employment status, (3) academic unpreparedness for the demands of the four-year institution, (4) poor academic advising, and (5) academic and social shock due to the large classroom and campus environment.

The researcher, as a first-generation college student from an ethnic minority background, began his undergraduate coursework at a two-year institution. Upon completing an Associate of Arts degree program, the researcher transferred to the local large, public research university to complete a baccalaureate degree. The large classroom sizes, made it difficult to transition during the first academic semester at the four-year
institution. Also, during his undergraduate career, the researcher was employed full-time and was enrolled part-time at the university, and therefore, faced challenges balancing responsibilities. Furthermore, the lack of academic advising made it difficult to navigate the four-year institution at first encounter, until better knowledge allowed the creation of strategies.

Also, the researcher is currently employed as an Admission Officer at the target site where his primary role is interacting with prospective transfer students to discuss admission criteria to the four-year institution. Therefore, the researcher was fully familiar with some of the transition challenges transfer students expressed when discussing their transition experiences. Additionally, as an employee of the target site, the researcher has direct knowledge of the inner workings of the institution and some of the possible initiatives the institution will implement to facilitate transfer student enrollment and retention.
Chapter 4: Results

By introducing, once again, the primary research question, the study addressed the findings: How did transfer students perceive their transition experience into a small, private, and religiously affiliated university? In addition, the study explored how transfer students perceived their experience in light of their previous experience at their previous. Therefore, the study presented the following sub-question: What were the difference of experiences between each transfer student in relation to their previous experiences. From these sub-questions, the study presented data points that reflected the current and previous experiences of the transfer student. Table 2 provided a list of themes, categories, and their respective descriptions. Each variable, within the list, placed the current chapter in its proper setting. Each of the categories with its subcategory emerged from the shared experiences of the transfer students, while giving voice to how they perceived their time at both institutions.

Therefore, this chapter presented a discussion of each of the five themes and the corresponding categories that were identified by the participant’s responses. Each response included quotations from the participants, which allowed each participant to comprehend the scope of the participant’s experience. Consequently, the study amalgamated each theme and category of the participant’s experiences into their experiences at their transfer institution (St. Aaron University). The integration of the transfer student’s experiences at both institution was necessary. By synthesizing these experiences, the study explored which concepts were pertinent to the participants and how the participants experienced the environment.
### Table 2: List of Themes, Categories, and Subcategory Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flexibility</strong></td>
<td>Ability to Select Courses</td>
<td>By enrolling in courses, the institution affords students a degree of independence and flexibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Courses and Locations</td>
<td>More variety of courses that student may select from to fulfill program requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variety of Faculty</td>
<td>Granting students, the option of selecting from a larger pool of faculty members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus Engagement</strong></td>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>The student's perception that the institution has a robust and socially active campus and their desire be involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Student Life</td>
<td>The students' perception that they can collaborate with peers on projects and study sessions, as well as their ability to form genuine relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration and Relationships</td>
<td>The students' perception that instructors helped and displayed a genuine desire to form relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family-type Environment</td>
<td>The perception that the institution is providing a friendly and welcoming environment in which students feel at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Interaction</td>
<td>The desire of students to be in a fully engaging classroom that incorporates group discussion as part of the learning environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamic Classroom</td>
<td>The students’ perception that instructors helped and displayed a genuine desire to form relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty Engagement and Care</td>
<td>The perception that the institution is open to and encourages the expression of divergent ideologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family-type Environment</td>
<td>The student's perception that the institution provides opportunities to be involved in activities that provide religious development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Activities</td>
<td>A religious ideology influences the culture or environment of the institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
<td>Campus Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Renovated Buildings</strong></td>
<td>Students' desire to have access to buildings and learning centers that are state-of-the-art and provide modern accommodations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clean Campus</strong></td>
<td>A student's need for the campus environment to be well kept and presentable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Resources</strong></td>
<td>The institution providing students with test preparation guides and critical thinking development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation and Development</td>
<td>The desire of students for the institution to provide internship and research opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>The student's need for the institution to provide electronic resources (i.e., projectors, smart boards, etc.) in the classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships and Research</td>
<td>Students' perception that the institution provides adequate academic advising and information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological Resources</td>
<td>Students' perception that during the transfer process, the institution's staff provided clear and smooth admissions information and processing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>The need for students to have access to information and guidance from the institution regarding career opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions Guidance</td>
<td>Students' perception that the institution's financial aid office provides adequate information and easy processing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Administration</td>
<td>Students' need for the institution to support students' initiatives in forming social clubs and activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and Support</td>
<td>The students having access to transportation to and from the institution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Options</td>
<td>The student having access to water filtration fountains and a wellness center.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Hydration</td>
<td>Students' desire for the institution to provide easy access of the student portal and that it provides clear and adequate information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Portal</td>
<td>Students' need for the institution to provide quick and convenient service, free of complications.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick and Efficient Service</td>
<td>Students' perception that the institution provides a value and their access to successful alumni.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni and Reputation</td>
<td>Students' need to either be physically close to their families and have access to their emotional support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to Family</td>
<td><strong>Stress</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td><strong>Finances</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Affordable Housing
Students' desire for affordable student housing either through lower pricing or financial aid.

Work Study
Students' perception that work-study opportunities provide adequate funding to cover their financial needs.

Scholarships
Students' need for the institution to provide adequate scholarship opportunities to make tuition costs affordable.

Employment
The students’ desire or perception that they can either maintain or pursue employment.

Pressure
Balance
The student's perception of their ability to balance school with external responsibilities.

Responsibilities
A classroom environment in which the student feels stressed because of the need to perform academically at par or above peers.

Competitive Classroom
Peer Hostility
Students experience bullying and hostility from peers in social settings.

Academic Rigor
Students' perception that the academic demands of the institution is too challenging to the point that it is affecting their ability to continue or engage socially.

Size

Individualized Learning
Cohort Style
A student's desire to be in a learning environment in which regular engaging with the same students occur.

Environment
Personalized Environment
A student's desire to be in an environment where the institution and the curriculum caters to their individual needs.

Population and Layout
Small Campus Size
A student's need to have a physically small campus that is easy to navigate.

Small Classroom
A student's preference for a small classroom environment of less than 20 students, where individual interaction can occur.

Small Faculty Pool
The need for a student to be exposed to the same instructors in multiple courses in order to establish relatability.

Small Student Population
A campus environment with a low student enrollment.
Resulting Themes of Perceived Transition Experiences

In regard to the participant’s shared experiences of their transition to Saint Aaron University, a private, small, religiously affiliated institution, the findings indicated that the following five themes were salient issues for the transfer students: Flexibility, Campus Engagement, Resources, Stress, and Size. Table 3 displays the frequency of the identified themes by number of participants. From the overall shared experiences of participants, concepts regarding the theme of Size were mentioned 66 times, Stress 105 times, Flexibility 107 times, Resources 114 times, and Campus Engagement 632 times. Therefore, the participants of the study identify campus engagement as the most salient concern.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Themes by Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flexibility. As mentioned above, topics expressed by the transfer students as being critical issues in their transition experience dealt with the theme of Flexibility 107 times. Flexibility was identified as the student’s ability to have greater control over both their academic and social experience at the institution of attendance. Four of the nine (44.4 percent) participants shared experiences that formed the theme. The subcategories that formed Options included: Ability to Select Courses, Course Offerings and Locations, and Variety of Faculty. Based on the participant’s responses, the Ability to Select Courses was the institution allowing students the ability to independently enroll in courses. Course Offerings and Locations was identified as having more variety of courses, times,
and campuses that students may select from to fulfill program requirements. The need to select from a robust pool of instructors formed the participant’s concern of *Variety of Faculty*.

**Ability to select courses.** Three participants discussed their desire to have the institution provide them with access to enroll in courses independently in order to better manage their schedule. Two participants discussed how they enjoyed the course selection process at their previous institution and how they wished SAU offered the same type of option. When describing her experience selecting courses at her previous institution, Keisha stated:

> Very easy. I could go in [to the student portal]. I could see. All right, when I logged in and clicked ENC 1020 I could see what the class was all about. So, you kind of know what you're doing.

For Keisha, it was important to have tools available that provided a description of each of the courses that were being offered during the semester, so that she could best balance her responsibilities. The ability to independently select courses was an important concern for Keisha, as she describes in her criticism of SAU:

> The problem that I am having are my classes. I don't get to choose my classes, they [SAU advisors] want to choose the classes I should take, which I don't really like because I like to do is, I like to go online. What is this ENC 1020 what is this? I want to know because my life is very hectic, and I like to choose two hard class and one easy...because I have three kids and I am by myself. You know what I mean. I want to know that I can get my assignments done. That I understand what I'm doing instead of my mind going crazy and I don't get that option here. You know what I mean. So that's the problem.

Keisha expressed her frustration with the SAU academic advisors for preselecting courses without her being able to learn more about the course curriculum. The ability to learn more about the courses being offered and having the option to select the courses for the semester, was a major concern for her because of her childbearing responsibilities. It
was vital for Keisha to be able to manage her schedule in a way that it would not infringe with the time she needed to dedicate to the needs of her children. The inability to select her own course schedule at SAU, also presented challenges for Cindy, she expressed:

Well I guess, you know, it does because they're [SAU] a smaller volume. I do understand the college as well, but I feel like sort of my schedule has been picked for me which gets a little confusing at times.

Not knowing what courses were selected prior to speaking with the academic advisor created a sense of confusion for Cindy, likely resulting from a lack of access to information regarding her program curriculum and course availability. She goes on to explain how much more convenient the course selection process was at her previous institution; she stated:

So basically, you can pick [courses]. It's also for unconventional students, I understand. So, so you're basically able to pick a class on Saturday morning or like Wednesday night at like 7:00 p.m. or something like that. So, there just many options.

Just as Keisha, the convenience of selecting from a variety of course offerings was an important factor for Cindy, as it provided her a chance to better organize her schedule.

Not all the participants found the course selection process at SAU to be a negative experience. Jennifer described enrolling in courses with the academic advisor to be enjoyable in comparison to the experience she had at her previous institutions, she stated:

You'll know what you're taking summer, spring, fall, for that whole year because they automatically do it with you. So, it's not like you're doing it independently, like I was at [previous institution II], but it's also not like [previous institution I] where they were picking courses and I didn't even know what I was taking. It's kind of a team thing. I would come and meet with my advisor and we would sit down and figure out what was, you know, what order I should be taking things and things like that.

Jennifer found the course registration process as a collaborated effort between the academic advisor and herself. She enjoyed that, unlike her previous institutions, she had
input into the courses she will be taking but was not completely left to her own to figure things out. Although Jennifer was the only participant to mention the course registration process as a positive experience, the other six participants did not discuss course registration and therefore, was likely not a salient concern at SAU.

*Course offerings and locations.* In addition, Julian discussed how he enjoyed the *flexibility* that his previous institution offered in course variety and locations, a factor that he found missing at SAU, he stated:

That campus [previous institution], basically campus had all the classes that I needed. So, I didn't need to go to Central Campus, or North Campus…So, in two aspects of flexibility. First is time wise. I can choose instead of having eight o'clock class…I traveled like one hour away and I had in the morning an 8 o'clock class, was crazy…I just dropped the class and chose another class that was like three o'clock. So, it was good for me. So, time wise it was good, and I could go to another campus. Example, I would choose to go to another campus then to wait till 8 o'clock.

Having the *flexibility* to select from multiple course times and campus locations provided Julian the convenience of both: not having to travel a long distance to take one course, but also not having to wait all day to take the course. When describing what *flexibility* in course offerings and locations SAU offered, he stated:

Right, not much flexibility, but if I had the chance to have sometimes courses offered by other university that would be the same thing for SAU, like campus wise, like I can go to another campus…So, if I had a chance to take it they would offer Biochemistry II in the fall or summer, I would think about taking that in the fall or summer.

The lack of course offerings and locations were so much of a concern for Julian that he expressed a desire to take courses at other institutions as transient student to expedite his degree completion.

In addition, Jennifer who earlier discussed how she enjoyed the collaboration with the academic advisor when it came to register for courses, mention how she was forced to
resign from her job because of the lack course availability and flexibility at SAU, she explained:

Well it's different now because when I was in [previous institution] I was working full time and then I was doing student full-time, so I was doing two full-time pretty much. So, the flexibility at [previous institution] helped me because they had night classes available I stayed in school until 10:00 at night so on and so on…. I knew that it was a daytime program, so I knew I wasn’t going to be able to be working unless I find some type a night job and I really didn’t want to do that.

The absence of evening courses at SAU, made it difficult for Jennifer to fathom the possibility of maintaining her current employment. When asked if she would have still given employment if more course times were available, she stated:

If I could have balance it, probably not because at least I would have gone down to part-time instead of staying, you know, instead of full-time but I would've stayed with a part-time just to have some financial cushion. Thank God, that I have, you know, a good support system if it wasn't for my support system, I wouldn't, I wouldn't make it, you know.

The ability to balance her school schedule with her employment was a salient concern for Jennifer, who needed the security of financial stability. If SAU would have offered more course times, Jennifer would have, at the very least, seek part-time employment. For the other five participants that did not mention the need for more course offerings, either SAU satisfied their scheduling needs, or the factor was not a pressing concern.

**Variety of faculty.** Another concern was the lack variety of instructors at SAU.

When asked if her previous institution allowed students to select courses, Keisha shared that it did, as well as instructors, she stated:

Yeah, and you get to pick your own teachers, you know, and you can do, what is it called, rate my teacher, rate my professor… I try to like to navigate myself on the internet and you know try to get to know who the professors are…

Keisha shared how she enjoyed being able to have the flexibility of choosing from a variety of instructors, as well as being able to check other students' experiences using a
third-part web site. The need to learn more about the instructors before registering for courses, was a necessity for Jennifer, as she described:

...so, I would do research and pretty much what class, you know, were required of me so that I would take classes that I don't I needed. So, I will do that and then once I have the time frame of what time I'll go see which professors were available and on what days and then I would, you know, pretty much look up their information to make sure that I was comfortable with it...Like on a scale of 1 to 10 how important was it, I mean maybe like six or seven.

Registering for courses was a process for Jennifer that involved researching the professors that were available, in order to find one that best fitted her needs. For Jennifer, having the flexibility to select from multiple instructors was an important concern, as she further explained when discussing what improvements SAU can make:

I think the main thing will be what I said right now, the opportunity for more courses, with more professors and also because one thing I noticed was that one professor will teach not only one class but they will teach another class or sometimes they get like, they must get overwhelmed to teach, you know, four different courses...for example my professor that I have difficulties with, I know that he teaches another course, because he said it and then sometimes he'll be in a lecture with us and he will be like, ‘didn't we discuss this’ and we will be like, ‘no.’ He's like, ‘I could've sworn’ and it's because he probably discussed it in the other class. So, I think that kind of like affects the teaching in a sense. So, maybe, you know, they can stick to their subjects and not worry too much about teaching other subjects. So, maybe having more professors...

Jennifer saw the need for more instructors to provide her with more options to better fit her learning needs, and to improve the classroom experience for other students. Jennifer also perceived the instructors as being overwhelmed from the multiple courses they taught each semester.

Campus engagement. The theme of Campus Engagement reflected the participants’ desire to be part of a diverse campus environment that provides various involvement and social engagement opportunities. All nine participants (100 percent) discussed topics dealing with the theme of Campus Engagement, which appeared 626
times throughout the participants’ responses. Forming the theme were four categories that included: Social Interaction, Academic Interaction, Diversity, and Religiosity. Each of the categories contained subcategories that provided more detailed description of the individual aspects of the categories.

**Social interaction.** The category of Social Interaction was identified as being the students’ desire to participate in activities on campus which provided social engagement and relationship building with peers. Two subcategories formed the category of Social Interaction, which included: Active Student Life and Collaboration and Relationships.

The subcategory of Active Student Life consisted of the student's perception that the institution has a robust, socially active campus and their desire to be involved.

*Collaboration and Relationships* was identified as the students' perception that they can collaborate with peers on projects and study sessions, as well as their ability to form genuine relationships. One participant, Sandra, described her prior institution to lack engaging opportunities. When asked to explain her experience with the social environment of her previous institution, she stated:

> Not existent. I meet a friend because she was from the same country I was from and she heard me speaking on the phone and she talked, and we started talking, but mostly like there's no like student life. There is a student program, but they don't do anything, they don't have any social meetings or anything. There's no clubs. It's complicated to make friends like when there is no like, like when the environment is or meet people that you like, build relationships or anything its complicated when the environment is not right and there's no, like opportunities to make that happen.

Sandra experienced a very low student life environment at her previous institution, mentioning that she felt the institution did not offer any social activities or clubs for students to participate in. She stressed the difficulty she faced trying to engage with peers and form friendships.
Adversely, when describing her experience with the social environment of SAU, Sandra expressed:

I feel like they [students] want to engage in all this like social activities I think, I think it's the student affairs sections very like involved with making students like take some, do some kind of like activity regarding like cheerleading and volleyball and like school even like what was yesterday, the common hour fiesta, something like that. They just they just want people to like form like connections and like to talk and to meet each other and stuff like that…You know there's like the community engagement center…and there's also clubs…

The experience for Sandra was completely different at SAU, she perceived the environment to be socially active with opportunities to engage with peers. She also enjoyed the initiative the institution was making in trying to get students to get involved and interact with others.

In contrast to Sandra’s experience, Keisha felt that her previous institution provided more of a college experience than SAU. When asked to explain, she stated:

At [previous institution] you can see kids working hard. You know…people are busy getting stuff done. You could feel school you know, there, and you know it's a good experience there…. Because it wasn't quiet, here it's so quiet. What is going on? Where are the kids, you know? Which I know it’s a private school, because I went to a private school as well, and it was very quiet, you know. And yes, because I lived on campus, I could would feel school because you know you live on campus you're going to feel school, but it's like an atmosphere where as everybody is busy getting their work done. You know you see people around campus even if they don't have class, you know, and they're to study, you know, stuff like that…it’s boring here…Kids don't do anything here like advertising their clubs, they don't have clubs here?

Keisha described how she enjoyed the busy campus environment of her previous institution, specifically seeing the groups of students studying together. She found the campus environment of SAU “quiet” and “empty” in comparison. For Keisha, SAU did not provide what she expected in a college campus environment.
Dolce, in her description of her experience at both her previous institution and SAU, provided a more mixed perception of the social environment, she stated:

There was a lot of people. The school [previous institution] is huge... Well to be honest...I'm better with people on campus in SAU because everybody knows everybody but obviously they don't have as much organizations then [previous institution], or as much as like social events or parties. They try, but obviously it's not never going to be [previous institution]. Because if we have 20 organizations here [previous institution] has 200. So, something is always happening at [previous institution]. But as that as far as far as people I think I've been able to gel with people more here than at [previous institution] ...Because it's the same people you're seeing every day. So, after that after a while you know who you want to talk to. You don't want to be around you know.

Even though Dolce found the environment at her previous institution far larger with more students and social activities, she felt she connected better with the students at SAU. The ability of being able to see and interact with the same group of students on a regular basis helped with forming relationships. Although the environment at SAU provided better relationship building opportunities, Dolce found the institution to be restrictive regarding certain social behavior, as she explained:

St. Aaron...it's a Catholic school. You can't sing this type of song. You can't have this type of party. There is too much restriction, so my excitement died from that. From [previous institution] to St. Aaron there's been no match because there's always this big Catholic institution barrier that comes whenever somebody comes you know, you just can't have anything here...I was in the band, at one time joked let's sing the Katy Perry's song I Kissed a Girl and my, literally, my director had a heart attack because he was like, 'no!' They took it seriously, like this is a Catholic institution, we cannot sing that song here.

Dolce felt evident frustration with SAU with their restriction on social activities that she found to be harmless. She found the religious identity of SAU to be a social barrier, to the point that it discouraged her from feeling enthusiastic about becoming involved in social activities on campus.
The lack of enthusiasm by the students to become involved at SAU was also expressed by Antonio when he discussed the lack of empowerment students faced at the institution:

It goes back to that issue of enthusiasm. Just having more student engagement...in a sense where students are empowered, and we do that already, but I believe that we don't do it enough and there are always constraints and not that those constraints might not be there but there is always those perceptions that they are there. Just allowing students to actually do more social events...where they're not extensions of the classroom...events where students are encouraged to socialize and get outside of their comfort zone and just socialize with other students...Yeah just creating a more open environment outside of the classroom. There is always more room for improvement in terms of having more student engagement because as a student I felt that some students here were always fearful to either add to what a faculty would say or to contradict something that the faculty would say...

For Antonio, the lack of enthusiasm on the part of students to be involved in social activities stemmed from the perceived constraint students felt from the institution. Antonio felt that SAU had to make more of an effort to demonstrate to students their openness to social activities and encouraging students be more engaged. The students’ fear to contradict or engage in a way contrary to what they perceived to be acceptable behavior was a major concern, one which Antonio felt added to the constraining social environment of the institution. Of the total number participants, three of the nine (33.3 percent) mentioned experiencing institutional restrictions on social activity at their previous institution. Two of the nine (22.2 percent) participants expressed finding SAU restrictive in regard to student social behavior and activities. Although three participants expressed negative factors regarding the social environment of SAU, all the participants except for one, found SAU to provide better opportunities for regular peer interaction and relationship building.
In her discussion about her experience interacting with peers, Keisha discussed how even though she had trouble relating with them, she found the students of her previous institution to be very collaborative, as she explained:

You know I am older than most of whom are going to school, because you know most kids they just finish high school then you taking classes there they tend to be more, you know, what do you say, they are a bit immature...Well one of the ones that I socialize with was the ones older than me and the people I meet in the class. People they say you're 32 you're young but I act more mature than my age...You know, and I've talked to other kids that were younger but mature and we would gather together, ‘let's meet up at this time before class.’ ‘What did you know, what did you not understand?’ And we studied together and stuff like that. We had that at [previous institution], you know, every time you go into a class at [previous institution] you always meet some friends, that you understand this we always meet up for to study and helping each other.

Keisha’s age and experience brought forth challenges in relating with her younger peers at her previous institution. She found at times her younger classmates to be immature but nevertheless, she was able to not only find peers she could connect with but also collaborate on various academic activities. When discussing the social experience at SAU, Keisha stated:

Here I found a student I met, like I'm very friendly, so I met a lot of students. That's why I get to know that some of them are and not understanding and that they didn’t like the class and would call each other, ‘do you understand this’ and have some of those.

Although Keisha found the environment at her previous institution to be collaborative, she also found the students at SAU to help each other.

Adversely, Cindy shared mix thoughts in regard to her interaction with peers and the social environment at her previous institution, she stated:

Yeah. Well there are a lot of people so it's good in that sense. Like it becomes fun like just getting to know a lot of people. I would say that more acquaintances are formed, more like social acquaintances. True friendships are like very few...sometimes I wanted something more like someone who actually you can connect with and that cares that you care about them.
Although Cindy’s prior institution had a robust campus life, she faced trouble relating with peers and forming genuine relationships. Cindy was looking for something deeper in her interaction with her peers, the possibility to form a friendship where one cares for another. When describing how she interacted with peers at SAU, she explained:

I feel like even in such a short time I have connected with a lot of people and they're even like, well I've started making meaningful friendships… so coming here and I found out that there was just people who are willing to help you know. And I had a girl e-mail me you know one day when I was just not in class for like a week, and 'she says you know is there anything I can help you with, are you ok?'

The environment at SAU was more a fit for the social needs of Cindy, as she was able to form connections with peers and establish friendships. Cindy wanted an environment where she can meet other students that had a genuine interest in establishing a friendship and she was pleased to see the genuine interest her peers demonstrated.

In addition, Jose expressed having a similar experience interacting with peers at SAU, he expressed the following:

It feels like everybody is supporting each other. That's what I like. Like everything everybody's like helping, helping each other, and that's why I really like it.

Jose experienced the same type of supportive environment as Cindy. The existence of a collaborative and supportive environment was enjoyable for Jose, a feeling that was also shared by Sandra when discussing her social experience at SAU, she stated:

Here [SAU] it is, I mean I sat right, right next to this girl I have never talked to and we started talking about it and was like we had this whole conversation about, ok. South-American, Native Americans…It was really random but like people are way more interested in getting to know you and getting to know, you're like how your perspective and even if you have different views about like, like how the world works. I mean I'm an atheist and like, I met people who are very religious and yeah there are some things that like we bump heads on but it's always with
Sandra was pleased to be in an environment where students demonstrated a desire to get to know her and her perspectives better. She was both surprised and relieved that although her perspectives may differ from some of her peers, they were respectful and willing to learn more about her. The ability to interact and connect with her peers at SAU differ greatly from her experience at her previous institution. When describing her interaction with peers at her previous institution and why she felt isolated there, Sandra shared:

I feel like...one part that has to do with me and the way. I'm very anxious socially. So, it's difficult for me. But there's another, there's another side that people are not there and like to meet other people or to create relationships with their peers that are just there because they have to and it's basically because they're trying, I mean I understand some people like are trying to earn their degrees and they're very focused. But some people are just they're like, they're like, "oh" and you talk to them and you ask them something and they're like, they don't answer just some. It's like indifference completely and they don't care about like the other person and it's just different.

Unlike her experience interacting with peers at SAU, her peers at her previous institution displayed no interest in wanting to interact or develop any type of relationship with her. According to Sandra, the students displayed a sense of indifference that made her feel isolated.

Overall four of the nine participants (44.4 percent) expressed facing difficulty collaborating or forming genuine relationships with peers at their previous institution, but eight of the nine participants (88.8 percent) found the environment at SAU to be the opposite. The only exception was Jennifer, who had trouble interacting with her classmates at SAU, she explained:
Ok. For the most part I realize that a lot are African-Americans and there is not a lot that are Hispanics and...I noticed that there is, like which I thought about the other day, like that African-Americans stick together and then like the other cultures kind of like, they stick to their own and I'm like why? Like in my mind I was like, why does this happen I've tried to like, you know, not necessarily create relationships but have like that school relationship like, how is studying? What is it that you're doing? and things like that and they're just not like for it. They just you know either don't answer me and they gave me a vague answer and another one of my classmates which happens to be Hispanic which we've gotten close because now we're studying, she's part of my study group and things like that, she realized it too...because we have a group chat with the whole cohort and in the group chat I wrote, ‘hey how are you guys studying for you know this class or whatever for the test?’ ‘The ones that are doing good, let me know’ and I never got a response. Nobody responded to me. I was like, ‘what the hell?’...But at the same time they're still nice they're still, you know, humble. I don't have any conflicts, like there's no conflict. But that's just something I realized.

Jennifer faced difficulties engaging with most of her classmates. She believed it to be based on cultural differences. She found those students to be indifferent to her questions or attempts to form collaborative relationships. Nevertheless, Jennifer explained that the experience was not all negative and that she was able to formulate a friendship with another classmate.

_Academic interaction._ The category of _Academic Interaction_ involved the students’ perception that the institution provides an academic environment where they are free to engage with instructors and share ideas in the classroom in an interactive matter.

Three subcategories formed the category of _Academic Interaction_, which consisted of: _Dynamic Classroom, Faculty Engagement and Care, and Family-type Environment_.

_Dynamic Classroom_ was determined as the desire of students to be in a fully engaging classroom that incorporates group discussion as part of the learning environment. _Faculty Engagement and Care_, reflected the students’ perception that instructors aided and displayed a genuine desire to form relationships. The subcategory of _Family-type_
Environment, refers to the perception that the institution is providing a friendly and welcoming environment in which students feel at home.

The need to better provide an interactive learning environment at SAU was expressed by Antonio when he shared his thoughts on his classroom experience at SAU, he stated:

Both the classes at [previous institution] and SAU were small but because of the limited number of professors and courses at SAU you are able to engage with the same students more often. That creates better engagement opportunities. I believe that the small classroom setting here at SAU is not utilized enough to its potential. The classes can be more dynamic and in terms of teaching methods that interact with students more... one of the observations that I made was that students are timid specifically to authority, they are just not confident enough to take the material make it their own, internalized it if you will and see things that were not seen before and that was back to my point of innovation and it just might be that the students feel constrained.

Antonio in his observation of the classroom environment, expressed how SAU had the potential to provide engagement opportunities because of the small class size but the faculty either did not encourage it or utilize it. He further expressed how he found his peers to be afraid to discuss issues in the classroom or to bring up points that differed from the instructor. For Antonio, the absence of a dynamic and interactive learning environment, was the reason behind the lack of confidence he had in internalizing the course material. Antonio’s perception of the classroom experience at his previous institution was noticeably more dynamic and engaging than at SAU.

In contrast to Antonio’s experience, Cindy found the classroom experience in her prior institution to be less dynamic and even hostile. When discussing her classroom experience at her previous, she stated:

I would say especially if you're asking a question in class and the professor just really does not like to answer questions so he either humiliates you or something like that...I would be fearful but I would raise my hand anyway, then I would get
humiliated but what I just learned to do, was that if the question popped up in my head I would just write it down, and then if I went up after the lecture and ask them privately and then they would be more open.

Cindy perceived the classroom environment and the interaction with the instructors to be hostile and intimidating. She mentioned how she would refrain from asking questions during class for fear of humiliation from the instructor. For Cindy, the learning environment at her previous institution was not dynamic or engaging, something she observed differently at SAU. When describing the classroom experience at SAU, she shared:

I would say all the professors were, at least have never had something like in [previous institution] where I would raise my hand and I would feel like I do it or should I not, like if I raise my hand, I have the confidence they wouldn't try to humiliate me. I was ok with asking questions... because there were less students in the classroom and I guess I had one professor for history of religion II, and she would just love us to talk to her, and she was like, 'am I talking to myself or something.' So, I like that she was so pro us talking in the class.

Cindy classroom experience at SAU was completely different from what she faced at her previous institution. At SAU she experienced a more dynamic learning environment with instructors that encouraged interaction in the classroom. Because of the encouragement from the instructors, Cindy felt more confident at SAU to ask her instructor questions on the material. Of the four participants that expressed the desire for dynamic and interactive learning environment, three found the environment at SAU to be more dynamic and positive than their previous institution.

Additionally, the participants displayed mix thoughts regarding their experience at their previous institution regarding their engagement with faculty and the assistance they provided. When describing her experience interacting with instructors at her previous institution, Keisha had this to say:
Oh, it was very good. The teachers were very helpful. They were like they give you all the information you need to succeed in this field elementary education, they go all out. When I say, all out, to make sure that you know what you know, you have what you need for it. Not just for school but just for when you get in your field… My classroom experience it was very, like the teachers share a lot with you. We communicate. I was able to communicate to my teachers very well. Their response was very good to me. They were very good to me… because they keep you up to date with your grades. ‘What can you do to improve this? This is what you need to work on.’

Keisha enjoyed that her instructors helped her understand the course work, as well as provide opportunities for her to improve her grade. The extra assistance and information the instructors at her previous institution provided on her career plans was something Keisha appreciated. Conversely, Keisha did not experience the same level of assistance from the faculty at SAU, she shared:

I think the professors I have right now are a headache. Everybody [classmates] is complaining, I'm sorry. I feel like I don't know what I am doing sometimes… When I come into classes like I want to get into what we are learning what the book is saying because that’s why we are here, that's why we teach. As a teacher, it doesn't matter what the child or the students, you have to teach because you don’t know what. So, my duty is to bring light, information, understanding which I don't really get in this class… I am not the only one because everyone that leaves the class is like, ‘do you understand?’ It is not me only.

According to Keisha, she found the professors at SAU to be a “headache” because of their inability to explain the lecture material in a way she could understand. Unlike her experience at her previous institution, Keisha felt that she did not receive assistance and support from the faculty. She felt that it is the responsibility of the instructors to provide the guidance and assistance necessary for a student to learn and understand.

Unlike Keisha, some of the participants found their interaction experience with the faculty of their previous institution to be negative. One of those participants was Sandra, who felt the instructors provided not only little assistance, but did not care about
students. When describing her experience with the faculty at her previous institution, she shared:

Depends on the professor because there's many professors that aren't very involved in everywhere. I mean my Sociology teacher there, it was awesome, and she was great and she was like, and she had opportunities outside her office hours but my math teacher she was like, ‘oh well.’ It depends on which teacher you're talking about. Some of them are very like, ‘I don't care, manage you're a college student, manage, look it up. Go to the library. I just it's not my problem.’…Yeah. I mean when I told my public speaking teacher I had an anxiety disorder and I took the disability thing and he was like, ‘I don't care.’ He was like, ‘oh, that sucks, sorry.’…It's like it depends on the professor of course because there's professors there are like very, very, very involved with the students and if they see it struggling you're going to help you, but some others are like, "just manage, I don't care, it's not my problem.”

The experience Sandra had at her previous institution depended on the instructor she interacted with. She found some, like her sociology professor, to be helpful and available to assist her, but her experience with another instructor was not as positive. The little care that some instructors at her previous institution displayed, regarding her academic struggles and learning disability, negatively affected Sandra’s ability to engage and relate with the instructors. Conversely, Sandra found her experience with the faculty of SAU to be more positive, she described:

…the professor is always trying to make people understand. He's always like, ‘are you guys understanding?’ If someone has questions he explains, like everything he just he doesn't just answer like, ‘oh it’s this,’ no he explains, he goes over stuff. Like in English II, it's with the same professor. So, I'm also taking religious studies for me so it's a new thing because I'm not religious or anything. So, for me it's a really new thing. It's been very like enlightening because there's a lot of perspective I didn't have, and I think the professors are very prepared for the things they teach. They are very like knowledgeable about their subject so it's really good…

Sandra was pleased with the interaction she had with the faculty of SAU. She found her professors to be interactive with students and genuinely concerned about them. She also found the instructors at SAU to be knowledgeable and prepared for the class discussion.
The genuine desire of the SAU faculty to assist students and to formulate relationships was also perceived by Daniel when he shared his experience, he stated:

I've seen my professors come to the events. Professors come out and spend time with us and just ask us questions and then just enjoy the moment with us as well… I think it just shows more of that presence they want to be in our lives not just our students but as individuals they want to be around to say, ‘you know what, if you need help with something other than the course, I'm here to talk to you. If you just want to sit down and laugh and hang out with us out here at our event that we have going on outside, you're more than welcome to.’ I just feel that these professors who really want to see us succeed. They really care for us as human beings.

Daniel was surprised to see how involved the faculty of SAU were with the students, not just in their participation of campus activities, but also socially. Daniel enjoyed how the faculty demonstrated their desire to assist students with any concerns even those that did not relate to the classroom. Daniel perceived the faculty’s genuine interest in establishing rapport with students enjoyable.

Eight of the nine participants (Keisha being the exception) found the faculty of SAU to be attentive and caring, as well as welcoming in their genuine desire to establish relationships with them. Dulce recollects on her first day at SAU and how the university staff was welcoming, she described:

…when I finally came to see SAU, I liked it more than I thought I would. And it's because, the people are so friendly at SAU, like where were ever whichever office you go to they just don't tell you oh do this do this do this. They actually help you they tell you come back to us, and I was so new.

Dulce was surprised by the friendly nature and helpful service of the university staff. The experience left a striking presence on her, as she was not accustomed to the same level of attention and kindness at her larger prior institution. In addition to Dulce, Jose also had a similar experience when he arrived at SAU, he explained:
...I just feel like everyone is friendly. I feel like anybody knows each other. It is a small school, everybody knows each other. I can get in touch together...It feels like everybody is supporting each other. That's what I like. Like everything everybody's like helping, helping each other, and that's why I really like it.

Jose enjoyed the environment of SAU, as he found the staff pleasant and welcoming. He found that the university community was like a family environment that supported each other. For many of the participants they felt that they were part of a family at the university because of the welcoming and caring behavior of the staff, as described by Daniel:

So, I come over here [SAU] and I've spoken to Janice and I spoke to John and the second I walked in I felt more like family than anything else. I knew that I wasn't able to get that within the sports anywhere else because...it's just very difficult for you to find that family environment...Everybody is just so friendly. So, like I said, family oriented... It's not just everybody out here. Its specifics. You have the students doing one thing, the professors doing another thing, the faculty the same thing, the maintenance people. Everybody is friends with the maintenance people here, they're so nice to so friendly and so warm and so welcoming. You just you can't help but to make friends with them or conversing with them especially in the sports area, in the gym, out here, in the library.

Daniel realized during his first visit to SAU, that he was experiencing a unique environment, that felt like a family environment. The kindness and caring response that he received daily from members of the university community, was something he believed he would not find at another institution. All seven participants that discussed their desire for a friendly and welcoming campus environment, expressed their satisfaction with the environment of SAU.

**Diversity.** Another category that formed the theme of *Campus Engagement* was Diversity which refers to the students’ perception that the campus environment has a diverse student body and that the institutional culture is inclusive. Six of the nine participants (66.6 percent) discussed topics concerned with diversity in their descriptions
of their experiences at both their previous institution and SAU. Diversity is constructed by two subcategories: Diverse Student Body and Divergent Thoughts. Diverse Student Body was identified as being ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and religious diversity. The subcategory of Divergent Thoughts was determined as being the perception that the institution is open to and encourages the expression of divergent ideologies. Topics regarding diversity were discussed by the participants in relation to both their experience at their previous institution and SAU. One discussion was shared by Antonio, when describing the absence of a diverse student body in his academic program at his previous institution, he shared:

The pressure to belong mostly emerged from the diversity issue and I felt that pretty much early on, I was probably one of the few minorities there and you probably put us in one hand, two hands. You can count us with two hands. There was very few of us. I would say diversity is an issue. A very important issue, but it can’t be viewed in isolation and the issue of opportunity is a multifaceted issue and I believe that having people there that brought an economic point of view, a historical point of view, a social point of view, would have been more beneficial than just having diversity as a monolith through which you can increase opportunities in the field.

Although his previous institution was large, Antonio’s academic program limited his interaction to only members of his program. Antonio was one of the few minorities there, but to him the issue of diversity at his previous institution was not limited to ethnic diversity but also diversity of various points of view. When reflecting on how he perceived the concern of diversity at SAU and his fit at the institution, he shared:

Yes, I would say that I fit better...not only because this university tailors to minority students but also because, maybe that’s, that’s a major factor, I haven't thought about it but maybe it is because you have many students who are coming from humble background. So that's something that you can easily transcend because those people have those individuals have an understanding or have a similar background to yours...Even though it's a smaller environment more people in the sense, people who saw things differently. Even though we're not as diverse as [previous institution] by a long shot, I think that this is a less diverse
environment because most of the people here are minorities and in [previous institution] there's people from again every everywhere. Here we do have international students many Chinese students but it's not the same...those Chinese students they tend to stay within their own groups...there is not a lot of mixing happening.

Antonio felt that he was a better fit at SAU not just because the institution caters to the needs of minority students but also because of the large presence of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, Antonio perceived SAU to have a less diverse student body than his previous institution and that the challenge that SAU faced was creating programs or a culture that encourages intercultural engagement.

The issue of diversity was also expressed by Julian, but he provided a different perception than Antonio on the issue of diversity at both his previous institution and SAU. He shared that he found the social environment of both institutions to be the same and when asked in what regard, he shared:

Diversity. So before [previous institution], I had a little bit more prejudice because people told me you know like black people like bad, like that you know, but when I was in [previous institution] the critical thinking part for me to see the difference inside of me, inside of others, you know. To question, to learn. I was more willing to cooperate with many diverse groups. I see that here [SAU] and that's kind of cool.

Prior to enrolling at his previous college, Julian’s exposure and knowledge of individuals from different races was limited to the description and opinions of people to whom he spoke. He was pleased to have had the opportunity to be exposed to and interact with a diverse student body at his previous institution, something he also found at SAU.

Concerns of diversity was not limited to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or even race but it also regarded religious ideology. When discussing the concern of diversity, Cindy discussed how diversity for her was mainly defined by ethnicity and religious
ideology. Cindy described how she viewed the diversity of SAU in comparison to her previous institution, when she stated:

We're also very diverse here. There's just like sort of less people, less volume but it's also diverse here. Let's see with the religious aspect there's many, feel sort of up there, but there are certain religious, like I would say it's probably a little more diverse in [previous institution] but a smaller volume of religious people than just many religions like Judaism and Muslims...I feel like sometimes it is a little less diverse and just because I haven't seen really like Muslim people here or Jews...Honestly I mean I sort of like it just like a lot of people who believe in Jesus.

Cindy experienced the social environment of SAU to be just as ethnically diverse as her previous institution but felt that her previous institution offered more religious diversity. Although she experienced an absence of certain religious ideologies (e.g., Judaism and Islam) at SAU, she preferred having a less diverse religious environment, where Christianity was the dominant identity. The Catholic identity of SAU and the mainly Christian composition of the student body, was a social environment that was relatable and provided a better fit for her. Of the participants that expressed diversity as a salient concern, all but Antonio, were pleased with the diversity SAU offered. For those five participants, SAU provided a diverse student body and opportunities for students to interact with students from various ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Religiosity. Completing the theme of Campus Engagement was the category of Religiosity which reflected the availability of religious activities, courses, and culture at the institution. Concerns regarding Religiosity was discussed by four of the nine participants (44.4 percent) and it was formed from two subcategories: Religious Activities and Religious Identity. According to the experiences shared by the participants, Religious Activities dealt with the students' perception that the institution provides opportunities to be involved in activities that offer religious development. Religious Identity regarded the
institution having a culture or environment that is influenced by a religious ideology.

When discussing her experience interacting with the environment of her previous institution, Cindy expressed how she had trouble relating because of the religious ideology of many of her peers, as she described:

Well I'll be honest. I think a lot of it stemmed from, I felt like a lot of college students were atheist and that's I know why, maybe that's where it started. We couldn't connect on certain things.

The absence of a religious identity in many of her peers at her previous institution, made it difficult for Cindy to relate with them because of her strong religious identity. When discussing the social environment of SAU and what has aided her in connecting better and forming relationships with her peers, she explained:

I guess it does go back to religion. I feel like there's a lot of you know people who believe in Jesus here [SAU] and just the whole religion thing in general and you know not just Catholic or Christian but just that belief in God. So, I think that has helped...Well I really enjoyed the missionaries and having them come and speak with you and that they have free coffee in campus ministry. And I think it's very cool and just I remember sitting one day alone in the cafeteria, one of the missionaries came to sit with me and I really appreciate things like that. And also, it's interesting, like every friend that I've met has a certain type of faith. I am yet to meet a single atheist on campus.

Being exposed to an environment where religion or a belief in God is part of the fabric of the institution and of a large percentage of its student body, provided Cindy with not just an enjoyable experience but has made it easier for her to establish relationships with her peers. SAU’s religious identity not only helped students like Cindy interact with other students, but it also provided opportunities for students to develop their religious identity. One student that enjoyed the opportunity the institution provided to practice his religious beliefs was Daniel, as he shared:

We have our chapel here. Everybody can walk past it and say, ‘you know I'm going to walk in today and say a quick prayer and continue on my day.’
Having accessibility to a place on campus where he can worship was an enjoyable attribute of SAU for Daniel. For the other two participants (Keisha and Jose) the religious identity of SAU where not deciding factors that motivated their decision to attend but both expressed that being able to discuss topics concerning God or the fact the institution embraces Christian values did provide a level of pleasure and comfort.

**Resources.** According to the participants’ responses, Resources is the student’s perception that the institution provides campus services that aid students in their academic and social well-being. All nine participants discussed topics that dealt with Resources and those concerns appeared 120 times throughout all the responses. Four categories formed the theme of Resources to include: Campus Infrastructure, Academic Resources, Advising, Services and Support.

**Campus infrastructure.** The category of Campus Infrastructure concerns the institution’s physical plant, campus grounds, and residential quarters. Campus Infrastructure is formed by the subcategories of Renovated Buildings and Clean Campus. The subcategory of Renovated Buildings reflects the students' desire to have access to buildings and learning centers that are state-of-the-art and provide modern accommodations. Clean Campus is a student's need for the campus environment to be well kept and presentable. When describing her experience living on campus, Dolce shared the following:

I like the dorms at [previous institution] better, much cheaper, much bigger… It's an apartment style like a four-bedroom apartment style so in your room there's just you. So, it's like one big unit with individual bedrooms and then a kitchen area. So, it's like an apartment. And you know you have to you get down take the elevator down. It's like an apartment literally.
When comparing the living arrangements at her previous institution, Dolce enjoyed the more private, larger dorm rooms it offered. To her, the dorms offered the conveniences of a standard apartment as supposed to the basic accommodations afforded by the traditional dormitories of SAU. Concerns over living arrangements were an important concern for Dolce as she was an international student that was visiting the United States for the first time.

The need for modern buildings was also addressed by Julian when discussing some of the factors that stood out for him at his previous institution and at SAU:

Many buildings are renovated. So, it's nice to be inside… I like the facility you know it reminds me of [previous institution]. So, facilities are meant for college. They have technologies and the campus, is like everything is available side by side next to each other… so it's like for me there is not much difference, but it was good. I liked them both…I didn't like the swimming pool, in here. I just feel that when they, when I swam, well there is no covering nothing just right next on the sun and next day I got sick very bad for a week… Was after rain maybe there were some bacteria inside so I'm not sure what in the pool.

Julian had a different perception of the state of the buildings at SAU. He found the building and their classrooms to be comparable to his previous institution, regarding technological resources available. He also like the convenient layout of the campus, finding it easy to navigate. His only critique was the pool area which he believed to be the reason behind an illness he suffered from probable lack of maintenance.

**Academic resources.** Apart from the *Campus Infrastructure*, the participants’ experiences identified *Academic Resources* as an important issue. The category of *Academic Resources*, consisted of the academic materials, study areas, and professional development programs offered to students by the institution. Four subcategories formed *Academic Resources*, to include: *Preparation and Development, Library, Internships and Research,* and *Technological Resources*. The subcategory of *Preparation and*
Development refers to the institution providing students with test preparation guides and critical thinking development. Library involves a student's need to have access to a campus library that provides various resources and areas for study. The subcategory of Internships and Research is defined as the desire of students for the institution to provide internship and research opportunities. Lastly, Technological Resources is the student's need for the institution to provide electronic resources (i.e., projectors, smart boards, etc.) in the classroom. One topic that was discussed by Julian when describing his experience at his previous institution, was the skills the curriculum help developed in students, as he described:

This is one of the things that [previous institution] does for students. The majority of the classes, you can, you have somebody who would encourage students to think critically, and those settings be like working together with other students. Would make you more capable to think critically and to develop some business, some projects.

The critical skill development that the institution provided students through its curriculum was an important attribute that Julian enjoyed about his academic experience at his prior institution. The critical thinking skills was a value for Julian because of the value it provided to his career development. In addition, Julian expressed that of all the academic services offered by his previous institution, he found the tutoring services to be the most critical, as he shared:

Very much tutoring center. I really loved tutoring center. This is probably. One of the things that I would consider most of all, I would say like this is number one the tutoring center. They have really strong tutors and variety. I could choose instead of like to choose like one or the second tutor.

Julian again praised the academic resources his previous institution provided students, mainly the tutoring center and their staff. He enjoyed not only having access to tutors that can provided him with supplementary academic aid but also having the option
to select from a variety of tutors that could best meet his needs. Julian had a mixed perception of the availability and usefulness of the academic resources available at SAU. He praised SAU for having technological resources in the classroom and for the opportunity to participate in the summer research program with the Biology department, but he also criticized the institution for not having adequate resources available in the library. Nevertheless, Julian admitted that he understood that it would be difficult for SAU’s library to match the resources that his previous institution provided because it was part of the state library system and had more access to resources, but that SAU should still try to understand what resources their students need.

In a similar fashion, Antonio discussed how academic resources were also important characteristics he desired in a learning environment. When discussing his classroom experience at SAU, he described how he enjoyed the critical thinking skills SAU developed in students, he explained:

While the courses that I enjoyed tended to open up creative thinking, critical thinking which again are skills in my opinion are, there in demand but yet students don't learn those skills and they don't learn how to think critically in school and based on the students that I've interacted with here many fall into the category of extrinsic rewards where they only care about the grade and that for that matters and I think that sometimes distorts their ability to see the goal or the bigger picture.

Antonio shared the value he had for the critical thinking development that the SAU curriculum focused on. He discussed the challenge the university faced in demonstrating to other students the value that critical thinking or other professional development skills can afford. Nevertheless, the developmental resources that SAU attempted to provide, was valued by Antonio because of the long term benefits he believed it provides.
For the participants that expressed *Academic Resources* as an important concern, each one of them perceived their experience at their previous institution to be positive, expressing how their respective institutions offered resources that they could utilize to either supplement or aid them in their academic development. Four participants expressed how they valued the academic resources at SAU and felt that the university was providing adequate resources to further develop their academic skills. They felt that the various resources available, whether it be internships, research programs, or study materials, were important factors they desired in their collegiate experience.

*Advising.* The next category under *Resources,* was *Advising* which dealt with the various guidance (e.g., admissions, academic, etc.) that the institution provided students. Four subcategories form the category of *Advising,* which included: *Academic Advising,* *Admissions Guidance,* *Career Advising,* and *Financial Guidance.* The subcategory of *Academic Advising* referred to the students' perception that the institution provided adequate academic guidance and information. *Admissions Guidance* reflected the students' perception that during the transfer process, the institution's staff provided clear and smooth admissions information and processing. *Career Advising* regarded the need of students to have access to information and guidance from the institution regarding career opportunities. Lastly, the subcategory of *Financial Guidance* was determined as students' perception that the institution's financial aid office provides adequate information and easy document processing.

Eight of the nine participants expressed topics concerning *Advising* during their reflection of their experiences at both their previous institution and SAU. One participant
was Sandra, who explained the frustration she felt every time she needed to speak with an academic advisor at her previous institution, she explained:

So if you want to talk to your counselor you have to probably go like at 6:00 in the morning because there's always waiting times or make an appointment beforehand, but like you have to make it like a month before and like you have to get earlier, like the closer you are to like the ending of the semester the earlier you have to make it because it's just crazy and you have to put your student number in a computer and they text you when it's ready and they're like, 'oh you have an hour and a half, so go do something else,' and or if you go to admissions or something like that, there's always lines. People are not very, I mean there's a lot more people but sometimes you see people sitting in desks and they're like on their phones or stuff like that and you're like there's a line outside. It's just there's a line that goes from the office door to the front door of the building it's just crazy… The staff was always very, very nice like they were always very nice…but like it was disorganized and…they were just like sitting on the computer waiting to be assigned to someone and that's it there was just like, you see people in line and you see a line that's like really long and… they're just chilling in their chair. It's kinda of crazy.

Sandra explained the challenges she faced in trying to meet with an academic advisor at her previous institution. She explained how she would need to book her appointment early in the morning and that she would often have to wait in a long line before she could speak with an advisor. She experienced greater frustration when she would witness the staff just sitting around and not being proactive in trying to meet with students quicker. Contrary to her experience at her previous institution, Sandra expressed having a far more positive experience with the advising team at SAU, she described:

There's never a line. I've never seen a line. Every time I come here it's just very fast everything is like, the only time I had to wait was to pay which was crazy. I was like that's crazy. That's really weird. That's it. Yeah. It was like 15 minutes, it wasn't a long time… It's been great. Like honestly everyone has been really nice to me. They have talked to me. They have explained things. It's very, very nice.

Sandra shared how she found the advising staff to be friendly and helpful and was surprised to see how quick and smooth the process was. Although Sandra did not state the
cause behind the quick advising at SAU, a likely reason could be that the smaller institutional size of SAU that allows more individual attention.

Conversely, Keisha expressed having a better experience with the advising staff, especially with the payment office, at her previous institution than at SAU, she explained:

Not admissions but were you make the payments... I like to know what am I paying for. What is left? What can I do? What's what? What's left? You know what I mean? At previous institution] I had everything. This is what financial aid paid for, this is how much, this is what you have and don't have. I don't get to see that. I'd like to know what I'm paying for, what's left, what's not left. Stuff like that. I don't get to see, like at one point went on my financial aid thing, and there you have everything, I don't understand what they are saying to me. So, I called but nothing. It’s different.

Keisha felt that her previous institution provided more information to students, regarding financial aid and payments options. She believed that she had greater accessibility to student information at her previous institution, information that she found easy to understand. At SAU, she was forced to call the financial office for information but still found the information confusing.

Overall, three participants found their previous institution to provide better advising than SAU. Three other participants found the advising service at SAU to provide friendly, quick, and adequate service that exceeded the advising experience at their previous institution. Jose experienced varied from the other participants, as he expressed mixed feelings regarding the advising at SAU. He expressed how he enjoyed that the staff was friendly and provided him with all the information he needed to make a smooth transition into the university, but he felt that the institution can be more proactive in gathering information from international students to better understand their financial needs. The remaining participant, did not discuss advising at either his previous institution or at SAU. Therefore, advising was not a salient concern for the participant.
Services and support. The last category to form the theme of Resources, was Services and Support, which referred to the non-advising services and conveniences the institution provided, along with any elements or groups, students utilized for support. Six participants provided information that indicated that Services and Support was an important concern in at least one of the five subcategories that formed it, which included: Transportation Options, Health and Hydration, Student Portal, Alumni and Reputation, and Proximity to Family. The subcategory of Transportation Options regarded the students having access to transportation to and from the institution. Health and Hydration involved the students having access to water filtered water fountains and a wellness center on campus. Student Portal reflected the students’ desire for the institution to provide easy online access to clear information regarding their account and records. The subcategory of Alumni and Reputation referred to the students’ perception that the institution provided a value and access to a successful alumni base. Lastly, Proximity to Family regarded the students’ need to be in a campus that was close to their family that afforded access to their support.

The participants’ perception of the Services and Support at both their previous institution and at SAU were mixed, with some expressing how they preferred the services offered at their previous institution. One example is Keisha, who described how she valued the student portal system at her previous institution because of its ease and clarity, she described:

Yes, everything that was needed was there. Everything, I logged onto my user and my account and everything is there, everything... You know, I don't have to feel confused, you know.
Keisha enjoyed having the ability to look up information regarding her account which provided her with a sense of clarity and comfort. Her experience with the student portal system at SAU differed greatly, as she shared:

> When I log in, I'm a very, I take my time with everything, you know, because maybe I said that I am new to logging on, you know you're new to the system you probably cannot navigate yourself around easily and it's kind of hard because I like to see all my classes and you know I have to go through these things. You know it's kind of hard...Yeah. If I log on to [previous institution] you see everything, everything that you got for this semester...Here [SAU] it's not like that, I don't even know how much I pay for my classes.

Keisha had trouble navigating the student portal at SAU, describing how the system felt foreign to her and how she had trouble accessing the information that she needed. Easy access to her records was critical for Keisha because of the clarity and convenience it provided.

Julian was another participant who discussed his confusion as to why SAU did not provide certain services that his previous institution did, he stated:

> At [previous institution] they installed filtered fountains, so you can just insert your bottle inside and I've seen it at the University A, I've seen it at University B. You can insert your bottle and you get filled with filtered water, but here water is nasty. I just do not know, understand why they wouldn't they install that fancy stuff. So that's kind of cool to have. It's actually was first in my mind when I came in here...St. Aaron should be better than [previous institution] but why does [previous institution] have filtered machines and St. Aaron doesn't have.

Julian was disappointed that SAU did not afford certain services or conveniences that he found at his previous institution. Julian’s disappointment and confusion stemmed from what he considered to be illogical, that is, the absence of resources and conveniences at a private more expensive institution that were readily available at his previous institution that was public and less expensive. Julian perceived, that the private and higher tuition cost of SAU equated with a higher quality and vast resources.
Conversely, there were other participants that found the resources and support at SAU to meet or exceed their experiences at their previous institution. One participant was Daniel, who when discussing the motivating factors that lead him to SAU and the experience had, shared the following:

I think the biggest deciding factor, was that I heard such great reviews about the community that comes out of St. Aaron, the community that is within St. Aaron, the networking that you can get, the network building that you can get within St. Aaron. Just last year at the beginning of this school year we had what was called the sports administration luncheon and, we had people from [professional basketball team] from the [professional football team], just I feel that there is a really big effort put in when it comes to the students here at St. Aaron University within the sports department, just fans of sports… So, John Almond works with the [professional basketball team]. He does some stats stuff for them, but when I look at that like oh the [University C], ‘oh we actually have someone who graduated here who is the AD over there’, so there's a connection there…not that many people can say, ‘I'm sitting next to the guy that does the official stats for the [professional basketball team] right now.’ I mean not many people can say, ‘I am sitting in the chair where Edward Smith once sate who is the GM for, the AD for the [University C].’ I'm sitting in the same chair speaking to the same people that Arnold Jacobs the VP of operations for the [professional basketball team], sat and spoke to.

For Daniel who was majoring in the Sports Administration program, the reputation of SAU's program coupled with the successful alumni base, where factors that not only influenced his decision to enroll but also were important factors that positively influenced his experience. The resources and alumni interaction and support that he found at SAU, were elements Daniel felt he would not experience at any other institution.

**Stress.** Another theme that was observed to be a critical concern to the participants at both their previous institution and at SAU was Stress. According to the participants, Stress was recognized as the emotional discomfort a student endured as result of pressure or external demands from either elements or agents the student interacted with during their collegiate experience. Eight of the nine participants expressed
topics that related to the theme of Stress, which appeared 105 times throughout the responses. Forming the theme were two categories, which included: Finances and Pressure.

**Finances.** The category of Finances reflected either the institutional costs incurred by the student or the availability of funding sources. Four subcategories developed the category of Finances, which consisted of: Affordable Housing, Work Study, Scholarships, and Employment. The subcategory of Affordable Housing reflects the students’ desire for affordable student housing either through lower pricing or financial aid. Work Study referred to the students' perception that work-study opportunities provide adequate funding to cover their financial needs. The next subcategory was Scholarships, which was identified as students' need for the institution to provide adequate scholarship opportunities to make tuition costs affordable. Lastly, Employment reflected the students’ desire or perception that they can either maintain or pursue employment.

A critical concern addressed by one of the participants, was the inadequate work study available at SAU, Cindy shared:

Well I would like maybe for a work study because I have been looking into that like if you guys could offer a little bit more hours and 15. Because maybe 15 isn’t enough for certain people...since I am commuting back and forth the gas and everything it be nice to have a little bit more than 15 hours...I'm not sure how it work-study goes here but I have heard that it's very stress free and it's something I want to look into but the 15 hours like maybe it's not going to be enough for me.

The availability of work study was an important concern for Cindy, as she required greater funding than what SAU provided in order to help alleviate her financial burden. Although she desired to participate in the work-study program at SAU, the lower
availability of hours provided less funding that she required and therefore, was forced to maintain employment at her previous institution, as she explained:

Yeah. Yeah. So, they offer a total, for the Summer I worked 10 because I was coming here as well full-time. The most they offer students is 27 hours at [previous institution]. So, I feel like even just 20 hours would be nice.

Cindy found that her previous institution was more flexible with the work-study hours and funding they provided, something that she could utilize to better meet her financial needs.

For some participants, their financial obligations and the availability of funding options, brought a certain level of stress that affected them emotionally. One student was Jennifer, as she described the stress and emotional discomfort she faced when she realized that her academic program schedule would not permit her to keep her current employment, she explained:

…I knew that it was a daytime program, so I knew I was going to be able to be working unless I find some type a night job and I really want to do that…Well it's the first time I don't work in like 15 years because I've been working since I was like 15 or 16, and I'm not going to lie, the last week of work before I started, because I worked up to Friday and I started school Monday, I didn't take a break and that last week at work, I mean I cried, I was nervous, I was worried about how to get money. How am I, you know, support myself? I mean, I remember really breaking down with my parents and everything. So, it was nerve wrecking.

Although Jennifer was aware before she transferred that her academic program at SAU was only available during the day and that she would be forced to resign from her current employment, the loss of her main source of income was a stressful event. For the first time since her teenage years, Jennifer would not be able to generate income and would have to rely on the complete support of her parents. The emotional stress of not having financial security and of the uncertainty of situation was too much for Jennifer to bare
and without the support of her parents, would not be able to continue her enrollment at SAU.

Although for Jennifer, the inability to continue her employment was a difficult and negative factor of her experience at SAU, for Dulce the experience was different. When discussing the motivating factors that influenced her decision to attend SAU, Dolce shared:

Oh well at first it was just the money. The scholarship SAU was giving me...SAU was covering a lot of my tuition which [previous institution] wasn't...it was just the money. I mean at that point I was like five or six weeks old in America and I didn't know schools or rankings and this like I didn't care, I just wanted it to be, I just I didn't care about this. You know [previous institution], SAU, it didn't matter to me. Because I didn't even visit SAU, it was all through e-mails and online. I haven't even visited [previous institution] before I came here. At that time, it didn't matter to me, if SAU was saving me a couple of grand, that's why I came to SAU.

For Dolce, finances were a salient concern, especially because of her status as an international student, who often may face higher expenses than a domestic student. She was pleased that SAU was providing her with a scholarship that was covering most her tuition expenses, a savings that was significantly more than her previous institution. The ability to pay for college and the stress that comes from meeting that need was something that Dolce felt SAU can assist her with and therefore, influenced her decision to transfer.

Seven participants discussed topics that related to Finances and the challenges and opportunities they had at their previous institution and at SAU. These participants’ overall experiences were mixed. Three students discussed facing challenges managing their finances because of the demands of SAU and the limited funding options. Two participants expressed facing both positive and negative experiences at SAU regarding finances. The last two participants expressed satisfaction with the scholarships and
funding opportunities available at SAU, expressing that the institution aided in alleviating their financial concerns.

**Pressure.** The last category under Stress was Pressure which reflected the unexpected demands of the institution or the negative behavior a student experienced from peers. Forming the category of Pressure where four subcategories, which included: *Balance Responsibilities, Competitive Classroom, Peer Hostility,* and *Academic Rigor.*

The subcategory of *Balance Responsibilities,* referred to a student’s perception of their ability to balance school with external responsibilities. *Competitive Classroom* was determined as a classroom environment in which the student felt stressed because of the need to perform academically at par or above peers. The next subcategory, *Peer Hostility* reflected a campus environment in which the students are exposed to bullying and hostility from peers in social settings. Lastly, *Academic Rigor* was the students’ perception that the academic demands of the institution are too challenging to the point that it is affecting their ability to continue or engage socially. Eight participants discussed topics reflecting one of the subcategories under *Pressure* from their experiences at both their prior institution and SAU.

When discussing her experience at SAU, Keisha described how she faced difficulties balancing her academic and personal responsibilities, she explained:

> Working and trying to go to school, balance, trying to balance both and then you are your teacher, you know, you want to make sure my kids are learning so you're trying to find that time. For me this schedule, I didn't get a schedule that I could say it fits me. One class I'm contemplating whether I should take the class or not because I have to be at work to do something in math class and my class ends at 2:45 pm. It's like, you know, I wish I had a schedule where you know it fits in my work and school because my first time working one part just because I say you know what, I just want to finish my bachelor's. So that's the problem that I am having. It's like most of the classes I think why you guys don't have classes like two, three, four, five. [previous school] has classes even on Sundays, you know.
And I don't get that option and it's killing me...School and work. Yes it’s a concern. I don't know. Like I probably don't even bother to finish because I'm thinking about it because I have to work.

The academic demands and lack of flexibility in her class schedule made it difficult for Keisha to balance her academics with her responsibilities outside the classroom. The lack of options in course availability and times, made it difficult for Keisha to create a schedule that was more manageable. Keisha being an older student with both childbearing and work responsibilities, found the schedule options at her prior institution more convenient. Her previous institution was a two-year institution who caters to non-traditional students like Keisha. Therefore, she found the more traditional environment of SAU to be a challenge.

Like Keisha but with some differences, Jennifer was describing her experience at her previous institution, describing how the pace and academic rigor of the program was causing a level of stress, she explained:

I didn't like the fact that the program is like one class once a month. That even the nursing program was one class for two months, and just a lot of material. Like I understand it was an accelerated program, but there's other accelerated programs like this one for example, that you know on taking full time but it's a three, a three-month course. So, you know that fit me better than a two-month quick program. I don't want to just take courses to memorize things and not learn what I needed to learn. So, that's why I decided to leave.

Jennifer found the intensity and speed of the program at her previous institution to be too overwhelming. She felt that the quick pace of the program was not allowing her the ability to learn any of the material. Since she felt that she was not gaining any knowledge and that she was becoming overwhelmed with the pace of the course, she decided to transfer to an institution that better fitted her needs. When describing the academic demands of SAU, Jennifer shared the following:
I haven't gone to any events or anything like that... because I have no time for it. I have to study. I wish. Yeah. I either... go to the library or I go straight home. So, I normally go to class, either during my break for class, which is either an hour or an hour and a half, if I can squeeze in the gym, I'll go there and then I come back to class, to the afternoon part of my class, and then I either stay in the library studying... or I go home and I study and that's like basically my routine every day.

Although Jennifer desired to get involved in social activities, the rigor of the curriculum of her academic program forced her to dedicate her out-of-class time to studying.

Additionally, the rigorous demands of his academic program as his previous institution was also a concern for Antonio. He discussed how the curriculum of his academic program overwhelmingly consumed most of his free time and because of it, he was unable to engage in social activities on campus, he described:

Ok, because of the curriculum that the school of architecture had was so grueling and so intensive, you basically spent all your hours in that specific building. Um, sometimes you barely went home, you barely slept, you barely socialized. Um and even when you had a chance to socialize, those where the moments where everyone else left and you were alone on the campus. Um like Spring Break, that's when most of the people left and we stayed, but the isolation mostly comes from combining the intensity and grueling nature of the curriculum with the fact that you are not able to balance both the curriculum and your social life and your connection with other students beyond the realm of the school or college.

For Antonio, the curricular demands of his program prevented him from socializing with his peers at the university, as well as infringing his ability to navigate other aspects of his personal life. The intensity and grueling nature of the program eventually left Antonio feeling isolated, as he was not able to socially engage with students outside of the classroom. Antonio was the only student to mention having difficulties in his previous institution caused by the rigor of the curriculum. Experiences regarding rigorous academic demands seemed to be isolated to those students majoring in STEM fields. All three students that expressed dealing with a rigorous curriculum that consumed their out-
of-class time were majoring in STEM related programs (Architecture, Nursing, and Chemistry) at the time they experienced those challenges.

*Pressure* took on other forms besides *Balancing Responsibilities* and *Academic Rigor*, for Jose, he faced stress from the hostility he incurred from his peers at his previous institution, he explained:

I was meeting that people and they were, like kind of a racist against me. I was confused because it was supposed to be, like a Christian school and they were like racist to me...I have a couple of friends that they speak Spanish and I was talking to them in Spanish and the people were like, 'oh this is America you can't speak Spanish here,' or with the baseball team I have traveled to all the other cities and they were like oh I don't want to give you my seat because you're not an American, something like that. So, it was kind of racist against me.

Jose faced hostility and hurtful remarks that he interpreted as racism from his peers at his previous institution. Jose was shocked by the reaction he received from his peers because he felt that he was entering a warm and welcoming environment because of the Christian identity of the institution. According to Jose, his peers at his prior institution was making derogatory remarks and were even denying him basic accommodations because of his use of his ethnic language. The negative experience he faced at his previous institution was the cause that inevitably led to his transfer to SAU. When describing his experience with his peers at SAU, Jose shared the following:

I don't know, I just feel like everyone is friendly. I feel like anybody knows each other. It is a small school, everybody knows each other. I can get in touch together...in this school, there are a lot of Hispanic people like in the baseball team. It feels like everybody is supporting each other. That's what I like. Like everything everybody's like helping, helping each other, and that's why I really like it.

Jose found a completely different environment at SAU, an environment that he experienced as being friendly and supportive. He found comfort in that there were many
other Hispanics at SAU that he can relate and interact with. For Jose, SAU provided a more collegial environment, where he no longer feared or experienced racism or hostility from other students. Overall, two participants experienced SAU to cause more Pressure than at their previous institution due to difficulties in balancing the academic demands of the institution and their non-academic responsibilities because of the lack of scheduling options at SAU. Five participants experienced the environment of SAU to provide less pressure and a more enjoyable environment than their previous institution.

**Size.** The final theme that was identified from the shared experiences of the transfer students, was Size. For the participants, Size referred to the campus population and the students’ perceived individualized learning experience. Topics concerning the theme of Size appeared 66 times in the participants’ shared experiences. Two categories formed the theme of Size, which included: Individualized Learning and Population and Layout.

**Individualized learning.** The category of Individualized Learning regarded how institution was creating intimate and personal learning opportunities. Individualized Learning was formed from the subcategories: Cohort Style Environment and Personalized Environment. The subcategory of Cohort Style Environment reflected a student's desire to be in a learning environment in which regular engaging with the same students occur. Personalized Environment involved a student's desire to be in an environment where the institution and the curriculum caters to their individual needs.

When discussing the enjoyment, he experienced from the personalized environment at his previous institution, Daniel shared the following:

Well the first year when I was in the honors college it was definitely more personal, definitely more intact. There was a lot of group organization. They were
Daniel enjoyed the experience he had during his time in the honors program at his previous institution because the small learning environment provided regular interaction with the same group of students. The personalized learning environment that the institution created was an atmosphere that Daniel wanted in an institution. Unfortunately, the positive experience he had at his previous institution changed dramatically when he lost his admission to the honors program and was forced to continue his education at the normal institution, he shared:

So, the classroom experience the first year was very close tight knit. I'm still friends with a couple of those people who we literally had every single class together. But then when you go into [previous institution] as a whole, it just it was just a different environment. So, sometimes a teacher would know my name, sometimes they wouldn't. When it came to the other [previous institution] honors college they knew my name. Some of them actually I knew personally from high school and from work, but you can definitely see the difference within that and I looked at it more as this is the real world. So, when I first got into those classes in [previous institution] after the honors incident, I just looked around and I was like this is huge classroom, the teacher doesn't know my name. This is a real shocker to me. This is something different.

As soon as Daniel transitioned to the non-honors part of his previous institution, he began to see the difference in the learning environment. The smaller classroom size and the regular interaction that it provided was something he found absent at the non-honors version of his prior institution. Those characteristics were attributes that were salient concerns for Daniel and something he was able to experience at SAU, he explained:

My student experience here has been definitely wonderful... It's all in all though it's, it's been a great experience to be around so close to everybody. Like I said when he came to [previous institution] honors college, I saw a lot of the same people everywhere. I'm seeing a lot of the same people everywhere here because right now especially now, I'm going to be taking pretty much all sports courses.
So, everybody gets within that sports classes with me are going to be in the sports field at one point in time. So, we're just building the unity within all of the students that are in the same classes. I get a flashback of [previous institution] honors when I see that I'm taking the same courses with a lot of the other people. So I see a lot of the same people in every single class of mine and that's awesome. For me, I personally, I'm enjoying what I'm doing now and I'm happy with the process... The athletics is small. The group of people is a small group, so you get more inclined to knowing them on a much better basis, on a much closer basis. The professors here they're not here just to teach you, they're there to help you, to help you learn.

The learning environment of SAU provided Daniel with the cohort-style atmosphere that he enjoyed and was accustomed to from his previous honors college. The close-knit interaction with peers and instructors that the cohort-style environment of SAU provided was an experience that Daniel enjoyed. The opportunity to not just establish a bond with his peers but to learn from them, increased his perceived value of the learning environment. The low enrollment size of SAU, allowed the possibility for students to take various courses together and where instructors can interact and establish closer relationships with their students.

**Population and layout.** The final category forming the theme of **Size** was **Population and Layout**, which referred to the institution’s total enrollment size, as well as the physical size of the campus. Four categories form **Population and Layout**, which include: **Small Campus Size, Small Classroom, Small Faculty Pool, and Small Student Population.** The subcategory of **Small Campus Size** reflected a student's need to have a physically small campus that is easy to navigate. **Small Classroom** regarded a student's preference for a small classroom environment of less than 20 students, where individual interaction can occur. The next subcategory, **Small Faculty Pool**, consisted of the need for a student to be exposed to the same instructors in multiple courses in order to

Seven participants discussed at least one of the four subcategories mentioned above as part of their shared experiences at both their previous institution and SAU. One of those participants was Cindy, who discussed how difficult the learning environment was at her previous institution because of its large class size, she explained:

I think is a problem with like professors might be overworked and they have like many classes and they have many students and I mean if you had 200 students sometimes you can't correct all and you can't be like detailed and go like and talk to each of your students sometimes very hard and I understand that and it's a big school and it's normal that those things happen but that like lowers the quality of the education you're getting...at [previous institution] mostly I think it's the number of students and like, they [instructors] have so many classes they just want to just get over it.

Cindy found the level of quality at her previous institution to be lower than what she expected, and she felt that the large number of students was the cause. She described that instructors are overwhelmed with the large class size and are unable to provide as much attention to each student as they would like to. Conversely, Cindy had a different experience when she transitioned to SAU, she explained:

…it's a small school. It's a small school like, you know, I don't know how many students there are but it's a small school, and I just I like being one to one with a professor like getting to talk to them and then they get to know you and who you are and stuff like that... I feel like the classes are way smaller. I am taking, the biggest class I have is probably my math class. It's like maybe 25 people but it doesn't feel like it, the class is at 8:00 am so people usually don't go because they are asleep, but the professor is always trying to make people understand.

Unlike her experience at her previous institution, Cindy found the classrooms at SAU to be a lot smaller than those at her previous institution. She the benefits of the smaller learning environment, as she found the professors to be more concern about students and the progress they are making in the class.
Similarly, Dolce when describing her experience at SAU, expressed how small the institution was and how positive the interaction with instructors were, she described:

You can't hide from people at SAU. It's too small, it's too small of a school but apart from that you know, I like SAU their education quality is good. Their teachers are really good. The classrooms are small. Teachers are giving you attention. They are actually, they know what you're struggling with and they give you the correct guidance on how to be better at that...Well you know the classrooms are small there's not too many professors. It's the same people in your program that you see every class. It's probably the same professor for a like person who's teaching business is also teaching economics or something like that...I think it's easier to win once you know your professor and once you're in good terms with your classmates it's easier to do better in that course.

Dolce described the institution as small and that people at the university all seem to know each other. She explained how she found the quality of the education to be good and how she enjoyed that she has multiple courses with the same professor. She felt that the institution’s small faculty pool provides a better opportunity for the students to establish a relationship with the instructors and therefore, increase their likelihood of performing better. Cindy and Dolce were not the only participants to express having a positive experience at SAU because of the institution’s size, in fact all the seven participants that discussed size as a salient concern, found their learning experience to be improved from their previous institution because of the smaller environment of SAU.

**Summary.** Overall the need for greater *flexibility* at SAU was expressed as a concern by four of the nine students interviewed. Each of the four students expressed that the environment of SAU lack *flexibility* in at least one area that was shared as being a salient concern to them. A likely explanation as to why these four students regarded having *flexibility* as critical need for them, may result from their experiences transferring from two-year, public institutions. The four students expressed having multiple options in courses, campus locations, and instructors at their respective two-year institutions. These
two-year institutions provided the students with the independence and flexibility for them to customize as much as possible, their learning experience. The greater convenience that the two-year institutions provided was a factor that significantly influenced the participants’ satisfaction with the institution.

All nine participants expressed engagement, whether with their peers or with faculty as an important concern for them. All the participants expressed their satisfaction with the interaction they had with their peers, faculty, and staff, expressing how friendly they found the environment at SAU and how easy it was to socialize with other students. Nevertheless, concerns were expressed by one participant, Jennifer, who did face difficulty collaborating with a group from her academic program, but she admitted that the challenge was limited to just that one group not to other members of the institution. In addition, both Antonio and Keisha shared that they wished the institution were more liberal in how they let students express themselves and socialize. They both felt the religious or conservative environment of the institution, at times hindered social engagement. Nevertheless, both shared that they found the environment at SAU to be welcoming and a better fit for them than their previous institutions. They also shared how the structure of the environment allowed for better engagement opportunities and relationship building. Lastly, one participant (Keisha) shared how she found the social environment ‘boring’ at SAU because of the lack of student activity. Although she felt that SAU was less socially active than her previous institution, she did admit that it was consistent with her previous experience at another small private institution and that she understood that the size of the campus does play a factor.
All nine participants discussed the importance of institutional resources for their transition and academic development. All but one of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the advising services of SAU, stressing how they enjoyed the individualized and knowledgeable service they received. Some of the satisfied participants shared how easy the admissions and financial aid process were because the guidance they received from the advising team at SAU. Those participants transferring from two-year institutions were particularly pleased with the quick and attentive service they received from the academic advisors and university staff at SAU. These participants found the advising at the two-year institutions to be burdensome and unhelpful. When discussing other resources, the institution provided two participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of study aids and the difficulty accessing their student account. The two participants felt that the higher tuition of SAU in comparison to their previous two-year institutions should afforded them a better learning experience by providing greater academic resources and technology.

Eight participants shared experiencing stress because of the financial difficulties and pressure they faced from peers and the demands of their academic program. Financial challenges because of the academic demands and restrictions of the institution caused seven participants to incur stress as they were concerned with their ability to afford either their education or personal expenses. Some of the participants were forced to give up their employment because of their class schedule conflicted with their work hours. For four other participants, the hostility and pressure they faced from their peers at their prior institution. The participants shared how competitive they found the classroom experience and for some, they were constantly bullied by peers.
Seven participants specifically discussed the need for a smaller learning and social environment. Some participants discussed the challenges they faced understanding the lectures and relating with their peers because of the large class sizes. For some the large campus environment caused them to feel isolated as it was difficult to regularly interact with peers. All seven participants shared how the smaller campus environment of SAU allowed them ability to form relationships with peers and how the small classrooms allowed for an individualized learning experience. The greater confidence and interaction they had with faculty and peers helped the seven participants with their transition to the new environment of the university.

Overall, six of the participants found the environment of SAU to satisfied most of their concerns. Although they faced some challenges, the difficulties they faced transitioning were minimal. They felt confident enough that the university would provide them with positive experience and that they will be successful in completing their academic objectives. For two participants, the environment and resources of SAU exceed their expectations. They felt completely at home at the new institution, expressing how the institution provided them with a far more positive experience then their past institution. These students faced no difficulties transitioning and became fully committed to the institution. One participant found her transition experience at SAU to be mostly negative. She shared having trouble balancing her academic and external responsibilities and she found the campus life to be not existent. Unlike the other participants, this participant had childrearing responsibilities and was older than the others. Her external commitments and age may account for the dramatic variance in her perception of her transition experience from the other participants.
Resulting Models

The data analysis concluded that transfer students transferring into a small, four-year private, religiously affiliated university expressed various salient themes that were either concerns or needs. These themes that were constructed from various categories and subcategories captured the essence of the lived shared experiences of the transfer students at SAU. The five themes that formed the students’ experience were impacted or linked to size, specifically institutional enrollment size. The small enrollment size of SAU impacted students’ experiences of the academic and social environment of the institution. The relationship of each of the five themes and the impact size had on them is illustrated below in the Transfer Students’ Experience Connectivity Model (Figure 2). This model, and the overall explanation of transfer students’ experience, is directly influenced by their preconceived thoughts and expectations prior to entering their new institution.

A student’s experience at their previous institution affected which themes they presented as salient factors in their collegiate experience. The students’ perceived experience at the institution determines the academic path a student may take in their collegiate career. The various paths a transfer student can take based on their perceived experience, is illustrated in the Transfer Students’ Path of Transition Experiences. Both the Transfer Students’ Path of Transition Experiences and The Transfer Students’ Experience Connectivity Model will be further explained in the sections below.

Transfer students’ path of transition experiences. The shared experiences of the participants uncovered the process that transfer students in their transitioning from their previous institution to their new one. These experiences influence their perception of their new institution and their transition (see Figure 1). The participant experiences
demonstrated that students take one of two paths when transferring to a new institution. Each path is determined based on their perceived experience at their previous institution. The student either perceives their experience at their institution to be either positive or negative which then determines which path the student chooses in their transfer process.

*Satisfied pre-transfer student.* If the student is satisfied with their experience at their institution, the student only transfers to complete a baccalaureate degree. The satisfied transfer student, enters the new institution without any preconceived thoughts. The student’s perception of the new institution and their ability to transition is based on the attributes of the new institution. Those institutional attributes can influence the perception of the student in one of three ways. The first, involves having a highly positive experience that exceeds the student’s predetermined expectations. This event occurs when the institution provides opportunities or resources that were absent from the student’s prior institution and therefore creates a new level of satisfaction and expectation in the student. These positive attributes of the institution were identified as *opportunities* to establish institutional connectivity (fit) and commitment.

The next way that the institutional attributes can affect a student’s perception of their experience at the institution is neutral satisfaction. In this situation the student perceives their transition from their previous institution as a continuation of their academic path, not differentiating in the level of quality or experience. A student in this pathway is likely not to transfer to any other institution.
Figure 1
Transfer Students’ Path of Transition Experiences

Note. Arrow sizes reflect the frequency of participants. Thicker arrows represent a larger portion of the participants.
The third and final way institutional attributes can influence post-transfer experiences is negatively. In this pathway, the transfer student identifies a salient factor that is absent at their new institution and was available in their prior institution. The inability of a student to transition with the distinctively new environment of the institution causes the student to develop a form a stress that negatively influences their experience at the institution. Two possible paths can be taken by a student depending on how successful the student is able to overcome the stress experienced at the institution. One path has the student transitioning and overcoming challenges by utilizing what is available at the institution. Although the student is not fully satisfied, the student adapts and settles with the new environment of the institution. In the other path, the student is unable to cope with the stress incurred from the new environment and therefore, begins to investigate possible transfer options.

**Dissatisfied pre-transfer student.** If the student found their experience at their prior institution to be negative the student enters the new institution with predetermined salient concerns which then influences how the student perceives the new environment. Depending on how the new institution's attributes are able to satisfy the concerns the student brings with them, the student can either perceive the experience as positive or neutral. This study identified, that transfer students whom had negative experiences at their prior institution, did not perceive the environment of the new institution to be negative and face little challenges transitioning. If the student that perceives the new institution to be positive, that demonstrates that the institution’s resources or attributes were able to overcome any stress that the student experienced at the prior institution. By relieving the stress of the student, the institution through its positive attributes
opportunities was able to develop an institutional fit with the student, thus establishing a student committed to the institution.

The second path that a student may take after having a negative experience at their previous institution is the neutral path. In this path the student’s concerns are only partially addressed by the attributes or resources of the new institution. Therefore, the student is unable to fully relieve the stress they came in with and therefore, does not fully transition. Although the student is unable to fully overcome the stress from their past institution, the student is able to relieve part of it which provides a level of comfort. This level of comfort is enough to establish a neutral perception of the new institution. A neutral student may be unsatisfied but is likely to remain at the institution until completion of their academic program.

Transfer students’ experience connectivity model. The Transfer Students’ Experience Connectivity Model was developed to explain how the theme of size affected the other themes identified from the students’ experiences and how each provided either stress or opportunity factors. The shared experiences of the participants at SAU revealed five salient themes. One of those themes, size impacted three of the themes (campus engagement, resources, and flexibility) (see Figure 2). The three themes of campus engagement, flexibility, and resources can either provide the student with stress or opportunities depending on their transition experience at the institution.

Campus engagement. Institutional size had a direct influence on how transfer students were able to engage with the SAU’s environment. The low enrollment size of the institution allowed for more frequent and personal interaction from the staff, in regard to admissions and advising. In addition, the small classroom size afforded faculty the
ability to interact with students in a more personal way. This gave students a more personalized and dynamic learning environment. The smaller enrollment size of the institution also afforded more frequent interaction within the student body, which granted transfer students with greater confidence and relationship building. Both stress and opportunities derived from campus engagement, which depended on how students perceived their experience and whether it met their needs. If the student was not satisfied with the engagement opportunities of the institution, that student experienced a stress response. The stress factors that were identified included: competitive classroom, peer hostility, and academic rigor. Those three factors hindered a student’s ability to interact with the campus environment, which negatively influenced their perceived experience. Both competitive classrooms and peer hostilities affected students at their prior institutions, where the institutional size was large.

As identified by researchers, Academic rigor affected students in STEM programs because individualized attention was limited. The opportunities that were identified as providing a positive experience for the transfer students were the following: faculty engagement and care, family-type environment, religious activities and religious identity. For those transfer students whose religion was a salient aspect of their identity, the religious activities and religious identity of the institution provided an opportunity to engage and connect with institution and its culture. Both faculty engagement and care and family-type environment were directly impacted by the enrollment size of the institution. The small size of SAU, provided faculty with the opportunity to interact with students in a more personal way, which the students perceived as genuine connection. The smaller size also allowed other members of the institutions (i.e., staff and students) to
engage more regularly with each other which allow greater possibilities for genuine relationship building. The smaller enrollment size also provided the faculty and staff with the ability to invest more in their students.

**Resources.** Size also influenced the theme of resources on both positive and negative ways. In regard to the shared experiences of the transfer students, these students experienced stress under the salient concern of resources and faced challenges in the following areas: affordable housing, work study, and scholarships. The smaller enrollment size of the institution afforded limited financial strength to the institution, which in return, limited the discount opportunities of the institution. These limited discount opportunities mainly affected the areas of scholarships and housing. Because of the institution’s dependence on tuition, the small enrollment size pressures the institution to maintain high tuition costs and student fees with limited scholarship opportunities for transfer students. If financial resources were limited, the scenario places much of the financial burden on the student who then incurs stress. This also limited the work-study opportunities the institution could provide, which was another factor the students expressed as causing stress. The small institution size of SAU, created in an environment where the demand for work-study was high but the supply was low. The three areas of affordable housing, work-study, and scholarships, emerged from financial concerns. In addition, the study identified stress as the principle stress factor under resources.
Figure 2
Transfer Students' Experience Connectivity Model

Stress
- Competitive Classroom
- Peer Hostility
- Academic Rigor

Opportunities
- Faculty
- Engagement and Care
- Family-type Environment
- Religious Activities
- Religious Identity

Campus Engagement

Resources
- Affordable Housing
- Internships and Research
- Work Study
- Academic Advising
- Scholarships
- Admissions Guidance
- Supportive Administration
- Quick and Efficient Service
- Alumni and Reputation
- Proximity to Family

Size
- Low enrollments lower the amount of funding available for academic and recreational resources. The smaller volume of students allows for more personalized
- Low enrollments affect funding for faculty. Limited course availability because of class size. Limited campus/locations because of low population/funding.

Flexibility
- Balance Responsibilities
- Employment

Negative Experience
- Stress

Positive Experience
- Opportunities
The study identified *opportunities* that provided positive experiences for transfer students and included the following: *internships and research, academic advising, admission guidance, supportive administration, quick and efficient service, alumni and reputation,* and *proximity to family.* These opportunities also influenced by the institution’s small size. Consequently, the transfer students in the study expressed how participation in academic internships and summer research programs were key to influencing their decision to enroll at SAU, but also were influential in their perception of the value of their academic experience. The small institution size of SAU allowed for a larger percentage of qualified STEM students to participate in the institution’s summer research program. In addition, the smaller scale of the institution allowed the staff to dedicate more individualized attention to students in the areas of admissions, financial aid, and academic advising. The majority of the transfer students discussed how enjoyable the advising process was at SAU and how positive the level of attention and service was at this institution. By providing quality services and addressing the concerns of the students, institution increased the level of student satisfaction and commitment.

The small institution size also created a perceived “family-type” environment, where students felt at ease to form relationships with peers and faculty. This type of relationship continued beyond graduation, which afforded the institution with a dedicated alumni base that acted as a resource for current students. By interacting with the institution’s alumni base, current students added to the perceive value and overall experience of the transfer students. The only opportunity identified that was not directly influenced by *size,* was the proximity or the ability to be located close to the student's family.
**Flexibility.** On an exclusive basis, *transfer* students negatively perceived flexibility. No institutional commitment or opportunities were identified in the study. *All* the participants indicated experiencing a level of stress associated to the lack of options the institution provided in course selection and offerings. The lack of scheduling flexibility resulted in the following stress factors: *balancing responsibilities* and *employment*. The small institution size of SAU limited the number of financial resources the institution. Consequently, the scarce financial resources limited SAU’s ability to hire more professors and offer more courses. The result was a limited number of courses, which caused a strain for students with childbearing or employment responsibilities. This situation mainly effected transfer students because many of these students were older or derived from lower social-economic backgrounds. Therefore, many transfer students often have responsibilities outside the classroom. Because of their various responsibilities, transfer students tended to be more critical of scheduling options. All of the participants who experienced stress, as a result of inflexible scheduling, transferred from a larger two-year institution.

**Summary.** The Transfer Student’s Experience Connectivity Model demonstrated how an institution's enrollment size influenced each of the themes that were identified as salient factors impacting a transfer student’s experience and transition. An institution’s small size created opportunities in each of the themes that also facilitated the satisfaction level of transfer students, which eased their transition. Unfortunately, the small institution size also created areas of stress for some transfer students, mainly due to the lack of financial resources. By creating new opportunities for transfer students to, the institution could have made the necessary investments to reduce these stress triggers.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter begins with a summary of the study, including its purpose, rationale and research questions, followed by a discussion of the findings and the conclusions that can be drawn. It then provides practical implications as well as recommendations for research based on the findings and the study’s limitations.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of students who transferred to a small, private, religiously affiliated university in the southeastern United States. Specifically, salient factors relating to the students’ transition were examined. Nine transfer students were interviewed individually using semi-structured questions. The responses were analyzed using grounded theory, and five themes emerged about their transition, adjustment, and integration.

This study attempted to address a gap in the literature about transfer students. While numerous quantitative studies have been conducted on the transition and adjustment of transfer students (Anglin, 1993; Cedja & Kaylor, 1997; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Berger & Malaney, 2003; Duggan & Pickering, 2007), there is a dearth of studies using qualitative inquiry and even fewer on experiences at small, private, religiously affiliated institutions. This study is significant because it is critical to the exploration of the challenges and issues that transfer students face. This group is projected to increase by 21 percent from 2014 to 2025 (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2016). Two questions guided this study:

1. How do transfer students perceive their transition experience into a small, private, religiously affiliated university?
2. How do transfer students’ experiences at their prior institution affect their transition experiences at their new institution, if at all?

Summary of Findings

The data analysis resulted in five major themes: (a) Size, (b) Campus Engagement, (c) Flexibility, (d) Resources, and (e) Stress. Size referred to both the physical and psychological aspects of the institution, such as the number of students enrolled and student perceptions of the learning environment. Campus Engagement includes the participants’ desire to have many academic and social involvement opportunities. Flexibility was the students’ perception that the institution lacked convenient course offerings and a variety of faculty. Resources were those components students determined as being necessary for their academic and social well-being. Stress was associated with the emotional discomfort students felt as the result of pressures and demands.

Linking Study Findings to Theory

The five themes this study identified as most representative of the participant experiences reflect not only structural components of the institution but also respondents’ perceptions and reactions to the institutional environment. As such, these findings correlate with major elements of the three theories that formed the framework of the study.

Schlossberg’s transition theory. Schlossberg’s model (1984, 1995) evaluates the stress and challenges incurred during a psychosocial transition. The model has two main constructs: (1) The Transition Process and (2) The 4S’s of Transition. The Transition Process is a series of phases in which the individual enters a transition (moving in),
searches for methods to deal with the transition (*moving through*), and is experiencing success in his ability to effectively handle the transition (*moving out*) (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). The *4S’s of Transition* are the factors that impact the way a person experiences a transition: *Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies* (Patton et al., 2016).

The results from this study support Schlossberg’s (1989) postulation that transfer students incur a level of stress when transitioning into their transfer institution. During the student’s transfer to a new institution, the 4S’s can influence his perception of the environment and thus his ability to cope. During this transition the students’ experience at their prior institution influences their appraisal of their transition to the new institution. Two forms of appraisal are conducted by each student, which in turn determines their coping process (Patton et al., 2016). During the primary appraisal, the student determines whether the transition experience is positive, negative, or neutral (Patton et al., 2016). Students’ primary appraisal of their transition experience at their prior institution determines which transfer experience path they will take. Their transition experience at their new institution is then influenced by their prior experience and how they appraise the new environment.

After that primary appraisal of the transition, students conduct a secondary appraisal of their access to coping resources. These coping resources are the various opportunities the institution provides to facilitate the students’ transition and commitment to the institution. The 4S’s are the four factors that frame the students’ appraisal. Students’ undergo the appraisal process until they move through the transition. The
students’ appraisal of their transition experience determines whether they will remain enrolled or transfer to a new institution.

There are several ways in which the present findings could be understood in relation to Schlossberg’s 4S’s. First, support was identified as the desire of all participants for engagement opportunities on campus, including becoming part of a “family-style” environment where peers, instructors, and staff interacted with them and were caring. The students used the campus engagement opportunities to gain support and comfort that facilitated their transition.

Strategies were formed by some of the students who used various resources that the institution provided. These resources included academic resources, advising, services and support, and campus infrastructure, and were observed as essential elements that impacted the students’ transition experience. The academic and financial advising the institution provided the students enabled them to form strategies that eased the transition and overcame some of the challenges they faced.

The Situation in which the transition occurred was also identified from the students’ responses as impacting their transition. For one student, the timing of the transition made it easier to balance academic and personal responsibilities, as she had access to support from her family. For another student, the level of control he had over the transition provided a level of psychological support, which he used to focus his attention on finding positive elements within the transition that developed into a form of optimism. Using various factors afforded by the institution (opportunities), the transfer students were able to transition to the new environment (moving out) and overcome the challenges they faced.
Lastly, for some students, their demographic characteristics and psychological resources impacted their appraisal of the transition. For two students, their religious beliefs seemed to influence their perceptions of the transition to a new school and thus aided in it. The religious identity and Catholic development activities the institution provided created an environment in which the two students felt that they could relate to peers. For the students whose stress resulted from the financial burden created by their inability to balance employment and academics, their optimism and self-efficacy eased the burden of the transition and functioned as a motivator to continue.

**Tinto’s theory of student departure.** Tinto’s (1987) model posits that college students arrive with individual characteristics, ambitions and intentions, and goals. These pre-college characteristics directly and indirectly (through their goals and institutional commitment) influence their likelihood of persistence (Renn & Reason, 2012). In the institution, students assess how their values fit with those of the institution through the feedback they receive from their social and academic interactions. Depending on students’ perceptions of their social and academic integration, they then reevaluate their goals and institutional commitments and decide whether to remain at the institution (Renn & Reason, 2012).

**Lack of resources.** The results from this study support Tinto’s (1987) construct that students enter institutions with certain ambitions and intentions. Students transfer to institutions seeking resources that were absent from their prior institutions, particularly resources that are salient to their ability to transition and reach their intended goals. The availability of those resources influences students’ perceptions of the environment and their ability to transition. These resources were identified in the current study as
opportunities (e.g., advising; faculty interaction; family-style environment) that the institution provided to facilitate the students’ transition and overall experience.

**Desire to be engaged.** The results also demonstrate that transfer students have a desire to be engaged and be in an environment where relationship building can occur. Their ability to interact with peers and instructors and engage in activities that align with their values supports Tinto’s (1987) model. Tinto (1987) said that a student’s assessment of institutional fit occurs through engagement. The engagement opportunities at the institution provided students with the ability to understand the school’s characteristics and values and whether it could provide an experience to facilitate their transition and ultimately affect their desire to continue or transfer.

**Bean and Metzner’s attrition model.** The Conceptual Model of Non-Traditional Student Attrition posits that the most distinguishable feature of nontraditional college students is the limited interaction with the social environment of the institution they attend (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Therefore, as Bean and Metzner (1985) state, nontraditional students, like transfer students, do not consider social interaction to be important to their college experience. The perception of how the external environment is affecting their college experience is the most important factor to nontraditional college students in their decision to remain at the institution.

Results from this study confirm that external factors (e.g., financial concerns and balancing responsibilities) affected transfer students’ transition to their new institution. External factors coupled with the institution’s lack of resources created stressors that hindered the transfer students’ ability to transition. Regardless of how well the students were performing academically, external factors tended to take precedence. In addition,
the impact of the external environment was more critical to those students who were older with varied personal responsibilities.

Where the results differed from Bean and Metzner’s (1985) conceptualization was in the impact of social interaction on the students’ transition experience. Although the majority of the participants commuted to campus, all expressed the importance of interacting with faculty and peers. For some, the negative experience with the social environment at their prior institution was a factor in their decision to transfer. Most of the participants expressed how they valued the care that faculty and peers displayed and how they felt at home at the institution. This study demonstrated that regardless of lessened exposure to the campus environment, social interaction with faculty and peers was an important factor for transfer students’ transitions.

**Linking Study Findings to Research**

This section includes a discussion of how the five themes and their respective categories fit within the broader literature on transfer students. This section will highlight the extent to which the results of this study are consistent or inconsistent with findings from previous studies.

**Size.** The results of this study revealed that *size* impacted each of the themes that were salient factors influencing the transfer students’ perception of their experience at the institution. *Size* was found to encompass both physical and psychological size. Physical size refers to the institution’s landscape, enrollment, and classroom size. Psychological size refers to students’ perception of the level of individual attention they are receiving and their access to interactions with faculty. *Institutional size, academic engagement,* and *individualized attention* will be individually linked to the relevant research below.
**Institutional size.** Results from this study indicated that most participants expressed a desire for a small campus environment. This finding supports research that transfer students at large institutions felt isolated and marginalized in large classes (Davies & Dickmann, 1998; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) and were overwhelmed and lost in the large environment (Davies & Casey, 1999). Institutional size was important for this study’s participants. The overwhelming majority expressed that they were more comfortable in the small campus environment of their new school.

**Individualized attention.** Study findings also suggested that having a smaller learning environment provided individualized attention that was important for transfer students. This conclusion supports research findings indicating that individualized attention is the most important factor in a student’s satisfaction with and perception of institutional quality (Noel-Levitz, 2012). In addition, Bryant and Bodfish (2014) concluded that students perceived that four-year private institutions placed a high priority on classroom experience and student satisfaction, a conclusion that was supported by the results of this study. Eight of the nine participants expressed having positive classroom experiences at their new school. Of those eight, seven said that the smaller environment of their new school allowed more focus on their individual needs than their previous experiences at the larger institutions from which they transferred. Five of the six participants who transferred from two-year institutions found the smaller class sizes allowed for more interaction than their prior institutions. Participants praised the individualized attention they received and the “caring” environment of the institution.

**Academic engagement.** Most participants placed a high priority on faculty and peer interaction. Eight of the nine participants found the smaller environment of their new
school to be interactive and collaborative. This finding supports research that faculty/student interaction and peer collaboration were important factors that transfer students said were absent from large institutions (Townsend, 1995, 2008). The current study also found that the majority of those transferring from two-year institutions found smaller environments to provide greater interaction with faculty. This finding partially supports research that indicated that students found instructors at two-year institutions to be more interactive with them than those at large universities (Davies & Casey, 1999). Transfer students perceive small learning environments as providing greater faculty/student interaction and relationship building.

**Flexibility.** This study found that size affected the transfer students’ perception of the level of flexibility and options that the institution was providing. It seems that the small enrollment size of their new institution limited the financial resources available to provide more course offerings and times. Therefore, the lack of flexibility in course selection and limited course offerings were concerns for the majority of participants who had transferred from two-year institutions. Research has addressed the challenges for transfer students in balancing school and life responsibilities, a challenge that participants transferring from two-year institutions described having because of the limited course offerings at their new institution (Davies & Casey, 1999; Berger & Malaney, 2003; Duggan & Pickering, 2008). This study found this desire for flexibility in course section and more course variety resulted from some of the transfer students’ need to take more courses to expedite graduation.

**Stress.** Size also had an impact on the factors that generated stress for some participants, particularly those transferring from two-year institutions, in that the new
institution’s small size limited its financial resources and caused them to worry. This study indicated that some transfer students were forced to forgo employment because of the academic demands of their programs, which placed a financial strain on them. Concerns over finances impacted students’ perceptions, and their satisfaction decreased as financial concerns increased, which prior research also found (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014). Those students with children found it difficult to dedicate time to both academics and their children. Results support research that concluded that transfer students felt that unlike their two-year institutions, universities did not fully understand the needs of transfer students and placed a strain on their ability to balance school and life responsibilities (Davies & Casey, 1999; Berger & Malaney, 2003; Duggan & Pickering, 2008).

**Resources.** Most participants identified advising services as necessary for success and were satisfied with the services at the transfer institution, finding the helpfulness and level of attention to be pleasant. Prior research also found advising to be an important concern for transfer students and that their perception of advising’s helpfulness was more positive at the four-year institution than at the two-year institution (Townsend, 1995). Results from this study do not support research that indicated transfer students had greater satisfaction with the academic preparation of the two-year institution, as some participants expressed finding the two-year college to be of lower quality (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). Results from this study found that the participants did not express the same difficulties with the transfer process (i.e., admissions, financial aid, and credit transferability) as expressed in prior research at large institutions (Townsend, 2008). Therefore, the results indicate that transfer students are finding the
more individualized advising at small institutions more effective in addressing their concerns.

**Diversity.** Participants indicated that they desired an environment that offered not only ethnic and social class diversity, but also diversity of thoughts and ideas, noting they wanted to be in an environment that questioned their prescribed way of thinking. Participants saw the university not only as a prerequisite for a good career but also as a place where they can develop as individuals and learn more about others and society. These study conclusions on the importance of diversity for transfer students seem to not have been addressed by prior research.

**Role of religion.** This study indicated that religion was an important factor for some of the participants. Being in an institution with a Catholic identity created an environment in which some participants felt greater relatability and connectivity with peers. Those participants also expressed their increased desire for religion because of the various religious activities and services on campus. The results from this study, therefore, do not support research that has indicated that students attending Catholic institutions displayed no significant growth in level of religious commitment or involvement (Small & Bowman, 2011). This study suggests that for most participants, the religious identity of the institution was not a major factor in their transition, but that for some it did positively impact their experience at the institution.

**Effect of cultural capital on transition experiences.** Research on first-generation students indicate that they face various challenges in the college transition because of their lack of access to cultural capital (Zalaquett, 1999; Arnett, 2001; Sy, Fong, Carter, Boheme, & Alpert, 2011). First-generation college students often face
financial difficulties because of their lack of knowledge on college funding options (O’Shea, 2015), and they often experience a sense of isolation and trouble relating with peers (O’Shea, 2015). In addition, first-generation college students suffer from lower levels of academic preparation, familiarity with the campus environment, and guidance (Thayer, 2000). Cultural capital is “the information, values, norms, standards, and expectations for education as communicated to individuals through the interpersonal relationships they share with others” (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012, p. 246).

Although scholars vary on their definitions of a first-generation college student, according to Choy (2001), a first-generation college student is an individual whose parents never attended college.

Of the participants in this study, only one was a first-generation college student. This is significant as the majority of first-generation students begin their postsecondary education at the two-year institution (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). The access to cultural capital for all but one participant can explain the divergent findings in this study from most of the literature on transfer students’ experiences. Unlike research that found that transfer students from two-year institutions found the advising services at the four-year institution to be unhelpful, the participants in this study found advising to exceed their expectations (Davies & Dickmann, 1998). In addition, the findings from this study demonstrated that participants were mainly satisfied with the support services and helpfulness of the staff at the four-year institution. This finding differs from prior research on transfer students’ transition to the university in which transfer students criticized the support services of the four-year institution (Davies & Casey, 1999).
Prior studies have also found that students transferring from two-year institutions lacked academic preparation that negatively affected their transition to the four-year institution, a finding that is not supported by this study (Berger & Malaney, 2003). None of the participants mentioned transfer preparation as a transition challenge. Instead, the participants expressed how easy the transfer process was and how helpful the guidance received from the admission and financial aid advisors at the four-year institution. It is likely that the satisfaction of most of the participants and their comfort with the transfer process were a result of both the small environment of SAU that allowed for individualized guidance but also from the cultural capital to which most of the participants had access.

**Implications for Practice**

This study’s findings have implications for both two-year colleges and four-year universities, and for transfer students themselves.

**Four-year institutions.** This section will first discuss how higher education professionals at four-year institutions might address the five themes revealed from the shared experiences of transfer students: *campus engagement, resources, flexibility, stress,* and *size.*

**Campus engagement.** Participants indicated campus engagement was the most important factor in a successful transition, noting a desire to interact regularly on campus and develop more rewarding relationships. Institutions can implement several engagement opportunities that can assist transfer students’ transition experiences, including peer interactions and mentoring, transfer student organizations, cultural awareness and inclusion initiatives, and academic engagement.
**Peer interactions and peer mentoring.** Research identified that transfer students desired having engagement opportunities with other transfers to aid them with their social and academic adjustment (Townsend, 2008). Participants indicated that if they could regularly interact with peers and develop more genuine relationships, it would mean a great deal to their transition and adjustment. According to Astin (1999), the single most potent factor in student success is peer interaction. Institutions should consider early peer mentoring programs linking first-year transfer students with second-years. Such programs could include new student luncheons and meet-and-greet sessions scheduled at times when transfer students are most available, as many are commuters.

**Transfer student organizations and groups.** Transfer students expressed a desire for institutional memberships or activities in which they were differentiated from first-year students (Townsend, 2008). Transfer students felt their interests differed from those of first-year students, which made it difficult for them to relate and interact (Townsend, 2008). Participants who were older with external responsibilities also expressed difficulty relating to their more traditional-age peers. Therefore, institutions should consider establishing transfer student organizations in which students can interact online before their first semester to foster relationship building and a sense of belonging. Students can then remain members of the transfer organization throughout their enrollment and college career. The transfer organization can function like any other social or academic club, where students with similar interests can interact. Membership in transfer student-exclusive organizations have been found to improve the students’ academic and social integration (Townsend, 2008).
Cultural awareness and inclusiveness. Some transfer students described challenges transitioning because of peer hostility. The hostility these students faced derived from racist or derogatory remarks from their classmates or peers. Institutions should consider establishing offices of multicultural affairs and inclusion to broaden their efforts in cultural enrichment. An Office of Multicultural Affairs and Inclusion can create cultural awareness programs on campus in which participants learn about ethnic and cultural differences. The institution can also establish a student diversity center that functions as a space where students congregate to discuss issues concerning diversity.

Academic engagement. Participants expressed facing transition challenges because of the lack of faculty interaction and limited individualized attention from advisors. Institutions should encourage faculty to create dynamic classrooms that encourage interaction and collaboration. Faculty can also facilitate interaction with students by providing the option to use virtual communication software, like Skype. Institutions can also increase individualized attention by designating advisors to work exclusively with transfers. These advisors can provide academic guidance, and they can offer support for those students needing to discuss difficulties.

Faculty engagement has been found to help transfer students with their academic adjustment and integration (Townsend, 2008). Institutions can provide greater engagement opportunities with faculty through faculty/student luncheons or departmental receptions. These social functions can bring transfer students and faculty together outside of the classroom in a less formal environment. Building relationships with faculty also can increase transfer students’ confidence in adjusting to the academic demands of the institution.
**Resources.** Study participants also reflected a great concern about the need for resources to support their transition and adjustment, particularly financial resources. Thus, institutions should explore such resources as targeted scholarships for transfer students, on-campus child care centers, and funding for orientation programs and bridge programs.

*Targeted scholarships.* Transfer students are often minorities from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who require financial support for college, yet institutions often direct their scholarships to first-year students or those transfers with an A.A. degree (Townsend, 2008). Therefore, institutions should consider setting aside funds to provide scholarships exclusive to transfer students. Targeting successful alumni with similar backgrounds also could aid in raising funds for scholarships.

*On-campus day-care centers.* The ability to balance academic and personal obligations was a major concern of some participants, who said it affected their academic performance. Among the resources institutions may provide are on-campus day-care centers for those students with small children.

*Funding for advising and student and family orientations.* Participants said advising was a critical resource, not only in their academic planning but also in alleviating the stress of their transition. Apart from having academic advisors exclusive to transfer students, the advising team can get parents involved by establishing parent nights or other information sessions in which both students and families gain information about the resources and opportunities the institution provides. Having this knowledge can help alleviate some of the transition challenges transfer students face when forced to navigate a new environment. By involving students’ families in the transition process, institutions
can create a new source of support that students can turn to for guidance. Additionally, institutions may set aside funding for the creation of transfer student-exclusive orientations that focus on resources, financial support options, course scheduling, and post-graduation options. These exclusive orientation sessions would also create an environment in which new transfer students can meet and interact with other incoming transfers.

Transfer bridge program. Bridge programs have successfully aided first-year students in increasing their level of engagement with the campus environment and their likelihood of persistence past the first semester (Muraskin & Lee, 2004). Bridge programs aimed at assisting transfer students with their transition to their new institution can also be beneficial. Renna and Reason (2012) stated that transfer students often face similar transition issues as first-year students but with additional challenges that are unique to them. Creating a program to bridge the knowledge gap between both institutions can assist transfer students in adjusting to the new environment. Institutions should consider dedicating transition advisors to work closely with transfer students the semester before their transfer to prepare them for the transition. The bridge program can provide admitted transfer students with early access to the new campus environment and its resources. Early access to campus can help incoming transfer students become acclimated to the academic and social environment, thereby minimizing possible transfer shock. The transition advisors can also help transfer students to align their academic coursework with the curriculum of the new institution, as well as provide the individualized attention students will need as they progress through the transfer process.
**Flexibility.** Lack of flexibility in course selection and scheduling was a major concern of the majority of participants. The students transferring from two-year institutions expressed the need to select courses using an online student portal. Institutions should consider providing an online option for students to select courses and access information on their student account. The inability to select their courses placed a burden on the students, who wanted greater flexibility and freedom. In addition, institutions should provide greater flexibility in the courses students can take to fulfill their academic program requirements. Furthermore, institutions should consider structuring course registration as a collaboration between the student and advisor in which, after consulting with an advisor, students have the knowledge they need to select their own courses. By empowering students to select their own courses, the institution ensures that students can better manage their schedule, which would relieve some of the stress involved with balancing responsibilities, as described below.

**Stress.** Participants cited balancing responsibilities and financial concerns as the main stressors during their transition and adjustment to a new campus.

**Balancing responsibilities.** Transfer students often have personal obligations that put a strain on their time available for academic responsibilities. Therefore, it is critical for institutions to provide more course scheduling options to minimize the stress involved in trying to balance responsibilities. Institutions without the financial means to provide more courses might still aid students by restructuring existing courses to have online components to provide more flexibility to students struggling with outside responsibilities. Such “hybrid” courses might include in-class lectures, with discussions or lab sessions administered online. Faculty can also help students with balancing their
responsibilities by using cloud-sharing software like Google Documents for multiple students to work on projects online. The greater use of technology can help provide greater flexibility and convenience for students with scheduling challenges. Institutions can also ease the stress of balancing responsibilities by providing students with tutors who are available at night or on weekends to help with academic concerns.

Financial stressors. Transfer students expressed experiencing stress due to financial hardships. The main cause of financial hardship was students’ inability to keep or seek employment because of the lack of convenient course times. Unemployment put a financial strain on these students, resulting in stress that affected their transition adjustment and academic performance. Institutions can alleviate some of the stress by offering on-campus employment opportunities that provide students with another source of funding that is convenient. The institution also can help provide guidance to students on how to seek outside scholarships and funding.

Size. The five other themes discussed above were all affected by the institution’s size. The students discussed the comfort they felt being on a small campus that was easy to navigate, and they indicated that the easy navigation helped smooth their transition. Therefore, institutions should consider providing new transfer students with guides to help them learn the campus layout. Institutions can also offer tours during new student orientation sessions to familiarize the students with campus terrain and the location of institutional services.

An important concern for the participants was for small classroom sizes, which would enable them to regularly interact and form connections with peers. Small classrooms may not be possible for all institutions, but it is possible to create
opportunities for students to form connections. Institutions can create an area or center where students can meet and socialize in a casual way. This student area can provide a space where peers can regularly meet between or after classes.

**Implications for two-year institutions.** A vast number of transfer students started their collegiate careers at two-year institutions. Since many who attend two-year institutions are nontraditional college students, these institutions provide a variety of services and resources (e.g., variety of course times, online courses, and multiple campus locations) that cater to these students’ unique needs. Nevertheless, two-year institutions also often adequately prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions, particularly private universities. One of the themes identified in the research is a lack of transfer preparation that hinders a successful transfer to a four-year institution. Preparing students for the expectations of the four-year institution cannot be the sole responsibility of four-year institutions.

Academic advisors at two-year institutions are often the first campus professional new students meet when planning their academic path. Therefore, academic advisors at two-year institutions need to become more proactive in understanding the academic ambitions and needs of their students and procure information about the desired transfer institutions. With this knowledge in hand, academic advisors at two-year institutions can ease the transfer shock that students may encounter by providing them information about financial aid opportunities, academic expectations, credit transferability, academic resources, and the campus environment of the four-year institution (Laanan, 1996; Flaga, 2006). While it is not feasible for advisors to have complete dossiers of information relating to these resources, they should at least have basic information. Most transfer
students are commuters who are more likely to transfer to four-year institutions in close proximity to their two-year colleges (Davies & Casey, 1999). Therefore, academic advisors at two-year institutions must develop partnerships with academic advisors and admissions professionals at local four-year institutions. Collaboration between two- and four-year institutions would create a much-needed pipeline of information that can assist students with their transfer preparation.

The findings of this study revealed that the perceptions of transfer students of their transition experiences at their new institution were influenced by their experiences at their prior institution. This relationship was described in the Transfer Students’ Perceived Path of Transition model discussed in chapter four, which described the expectations and concerns of a student at a new institution as being heavily influenced by experiences at the prior institution. There were heightened concerns from students who transferred from two-year institutions in areas such as the level of flexibility at the new institution.

The model suggests that there is a need for two-year institutions to better align their academic and social environment with that of the four-year institution and for academic and student affair advisors to provide better guidance to potential transfer students about the differences in the four-year college environment. Advisors at two-year colleges can provide orientation at different points in time during the two years as well as information sessions that prepare transfer students for the potential challenges that may affect nontraditional college students. This will help to bolster their cultural capital as it relates to college-going norms and will help to reduce the stress and anxiety they may experience without knowledge of critical information.
Implications for transfer students. Transfer students’ experiences at their prior institutions influenced their experiences and transitions at their new institution, as evidenced by the findings of this study. Some students faced transition challenges that were similar to those of their prior institution. Transfer students need to use their prior experiences and coping mechanisms to guide them as they navigate their new transition. By proactively identifying the similar challenges, transfer students may be able to quickly identify and find the institutional resources that might assist in their efforts. If needed institutional resources are lacking, the students may need to actively voice their concerns as a group to campus administrators. Student advocacy is usually an effective means of bringing attention to concerns. The absence of institutional resources is often not based in negligence, but on ignorance on the part of relevant campus administrators. By utilizing social media or online discussion boards, transfer students can share their experiences and voice their concerns to inform higher education professionals about their adjustment and transition experiences.

Transfer students at two-year institutions. While transfer students could express their concerns to campus administrators at the new institution, however, they can also be proactive about securing early information while at two-year colleges to learn more about the academic demands and expectations of four-year institutions. As the results of this study have identified, participants who attended two-year institutions faced challenges in transitioning to a four-year institution. Because of the lack of convenient course offerings, transfer students could not balance their personal responsibilities with their academic responsibilities. Transfer students at two-year institutions became accustomed to the schedule and the resources that their two-year colleges provided. Two-year
colleges catered to the needs of their large proportion of nontraditional college students who required greater academic support and created an environment characterized by convenience. By facilitating students’ needs and in some cases lowering their academic demands, two-year institutions can be accused of not aiding their students, but instead lowering the preparedness of their students. That is why it is critical for students at two-year institutions to take the lead in becoming better informed about the expectations of their transfer institution and use that information to prepare themselves (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Cuseo, 2001). Two-year college students must remain academically focused and utilize resources to build cultural capital that would enhance their experiences at the transfer institution. Although an intention of two-year institutions is to place their students on a transfer path, these institutions often have limited resources and staff to meet the needs of the high numbers of students who are enrolled (Cohen, 2003). Therefore, it is vital for transfer students at two-year institutions to not only rely on their academic advisors but to exhibit self-efficacy behaviors that would serve them well in their transfer institutions.

In addition, many students at two-year institution are unaware that options exist at the completion of the associate degree. Many have been socialized into thinking that their only avenue for a baccalaureate degree is the four-year college or university. However, another option may exist at their two-year institution or another two-year institution, since many are now also baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Students may be unaware of the “mission shift” of two-year institutions and may need to be educated about such offerings. With dwindling state funding, public institutions are urged to create new streams of revenue, and two-year institutions are expanding many of their programs
by offering a baccalaureate option in hopes of retaining some students who would typically transfer. Majors in popular career tracks such as health care, business, computer sciences, and education are now being offered at the baccalaureate level at many traditional two-year institutions. Students majoring in those areas may be able to reach their academic goals without having to face the possible transition challenges of transferring to a four-year institution.

As identified in this study, some transfer students preferred the environment and convenience of their prior two-year institution. One example was Jennifer, who stated that she would have remained at the two-year college if it were not for the nursing program’s lengthy waiting list. The preferred environment and resources of the two-year institution would have provided Jennifer the convenience of course times, online instruction, multiple campuses, and numerous flexible options to which she had become accustomed. Transfer students like Jennifer may transition and perform better in a baccalaureate program at a two-year institution. Therefore, students with external responsibilities who require a more flexible collegiate experience should consider academic pathways toward the baccalaureate at two-year institutions. Remaining at a two-year institution with a greater variety of course offerings and lower tuition costs may be a viable option for many students. Because financial concerns hinder transition and academic success, such worries may be offset by obtaining a bachelor’s degree at a two-year institution (Austin, 2006).

**Limitations of the Study**

The focus of this study was to capture the shared experiences of students transferring to a small, private, religiously affiliated university. With this focus, the study
sought to understand how transfer students’ experiences may be similar or different to the prevailing theory and empirical findings currently available in the extant literature. There are several possible limitations to this study to consider, as detailed below.

**Robustness of sample.** Although purposive sampling was utilized to maximize the robustness of the sample, the low response rate of potential participants limited the group from which the researcher could select. Though the final sample closely reflected the enrollment profile with respect to ethnic composition of the target setting, an overwhelming majority (six of nine) of the participants identified as Hispanic. Having a more varied sample could have presented experiences and themes not identified in this study.

**Researcher’s potential influence.** Each of the participants in this study at some point during the transfer process was in contact with the researcher in the role of administrator. This is because the researcher was the primary point of contact for the target institution regarding admissions. The researcher was also the target institution’s primary representative who communicated admission decisions to the participants. Because the researcher communicated admissions decisions to the participants, the researcher’s role at the target setting may have influenced the participants’ perceptions of their transition experiences. This potential bias was mitigated by efforts made by the researcher to communicate to the participants through the recruitment script and consent form that the researcher’s role in this study was as an independent agent conducting a study at the target setting. The participants were assured that their participation or lack of participation did not affect their status at the target institution. All participants were reassured that any sharing of their transition experiences would be kept confidential. All
of these efforts were made to encourage the participants to speak freely and accurately about their transition experiences.

**Future Research**

This study examined the transition experiences of transfer students at a small, private, religiously affiliated university to expand the knowledge on transfer students attending similar institutions. This study did not consider the effects of ethnicity or other demographic characteristics on the students’ experiences and their ability to transition. Therefore, future research should look at the impact of student demographic characteristics on the students’ perceptions of their experiences and how they are able to transition at their new institution.

Future research can also consider whether the transition experiences of transfer students differ by academic major. This study identified that those students majoring in a STEM-related major experienced stress related to difficulties adjusting to the academic rigor of their program at their new institution. Therefore, a more comprehensive study on the effects of academic major on the students’ transition experience may present new insights on the factors affecting transfer students’ transition.

Furthermore, to assess the veracity of resulting models and themes, researchers may also conduct comparative longitudinal studies on the transition experiences of transfer students at differing periods at their new institution. Future research can also conduct follow-up interviews with the sample participants. This line of inquiry would provide knowledge on how the students’ perceptions of their experiences changed over the course of their time with the institution, and on whether the factors or themes the students found important to their transition changed over the course of their tenure. A
longitudinal study would enable researchers to possibly identify what challenges the students were able to overcome and which continued to hinder the students’ transition. In addition, more qualitative research on the transition experiences of transfer students at various institutional types can provide more insight on how students perceive their transition in the unique environments the institutions provide. This knowledge can help higher education administrators to understand what institutional resources and characteristics are providing transfer students with the best opportunities to transition and become committed to the institution.

Conclusion

Higher education professionals must anticipate the challenges that transfer students may face when transitioning and adjusting to a four-year institution. As the literature and this study suggest, transfer students have unique needs that place a tremendous burden on their ability to transition successfully. Furthermore, a student’s ability to transition to a four-year institution is heavily influenced by the prior experience at a two-year institution. The challenges that transfer students face at their two-year institutions may influence students’ ability to seek resources that could assist their transition. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for higher education professionals to be vigilant about the varied challenges that transfer students experienced at their prior institution to help them avoid similar challenges at the new institution and to acquire much needed resources for success. By understanding their experiences and concerns, institutions can provide transfer students with facilities, services, programs, and resources to aid academic and social integration, which in turn will lead to retention and success.
References


Blackwell, E., & Pinder, P. J. (2014). What are the motivational factors of first-generation minority college students who overcome their family histories to pursue higher education? *College Student Journal, 48*(1), 45-56.


Cuseo, J. (2001). The Transfer Transition: Student Advancement from 2-year to 4-year Institutions. ERIC ED 462130.


Appendix A

Recruitment Script

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Debbiesiu Lee, PhD. in the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies housed in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami. I am conducting a research study to understand the transition experiences of students transferring to St. Thomas University (STU). The purpose of the study is to better understand how transfer students perceive their experience at STU. The goal is to discover both the positive and negative experiences students have had during their time transitioning to the university.

I am recruiting individuals to be interviewed about their experiences transitioning to STU. The interview that I am asking you to participate in will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Additionally, if you are interested and available, you will be asked to participate in a supplemental review of the results of your interview for clarification and accuracy of the content. The interviews and supplemental activities are entirely optional. Consenting to the initial interview does not require subsequent participation in any other research activity mentioned.

Your participation in this study will not affect any role you have at the university. Participation is voluntary, and your identity will be confidential. Only my advisor and I will know your identity. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me via phone (305) 389-2829 or email at yxv29@miami.edu.

Thank you
Appendix B

Consent Form
University of Miami
Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Phenomenological Case Study of the Transition Experiences of Transfer Students

The following information describes a research study in which you are being asked to participate. Please read the information carefully. At the end, you will be asked to indicate if you agree to participate.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand the transition experiences of students transferring to St. Thomas University (STU).

PROCEDURES: We will have a conversation in which you will be asked several questions about your experience at St. Thomas University, to include learning environment, social environment, transfer process, and any thoughts or experiences you wish to share about your time at STU. The conversation will be audio recorded. This conversation should take between an hour and an hour and a half. If you do not want to answer a particular question, you do not have to answer. If you would like to end the conversation at any time, you may do so and there will be no adverse consequences to you.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS: We do not anticipate that you will experience any personal risk or discomfort from taking part in this study. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer. If necessary, a list of local counseling centers can be made available upon request.

BENEFITS: No benefit can be promised to you from your participation in this study. The study is expected to benefit researchers and higher education administrators by helping us better understand the experiences of students transferring to St. Thomas University.

ALTERNATIVES: You are not required to participate in this study. Your participation will not affect your academic or social standing at the university.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your information will be confidential. All data collected will be stored on a password protected and secured server. Efforts will be made to avoid collection of identifiable information. Your information will be listed under a pseudonym and any identifiable information that may have been utilized for recruitment purposes, will be deleted after participation. The faculty investigator and the student investigator consider your records confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your records may also be reviewed for audit purposes by authorized University or other agents who will be
bound by the same provisions of confidentiality. Finally, the results of this study may be published. However, your identity will remain confidential in all published works. No identifying information will be included in the publication.

**RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You also have the right to withdraw any information that you provided. Once again, your participation will not affect your academic or social standing at the university.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Yasdanee Valdes (305-389-2829 or yxv29@miami.edu) will gladly answer any questions you may have concerning the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project. You can also contact the primary investigator, Dr. Debbiesiu Lee (305-284-6160 or debbiesiu@miami.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami, at (305) 243-3195 or eprost@med.miami.edu.

**PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT:**
By signing my name below, I acknowledge that I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study.

____________________________________  __________________
Name of Participant                    Date

____________________________________  __________________
Name of Person Obtaining Consent      Date
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Experiences
1. What factors motivated you to transfer to St. Thomas University?
2. Describe your experience at your previous institution.
3. What was it like for you to transfer to St. Thomas University?
4. Describe your experience at St. Thomas University.
5. Explain what improvements the university can make to better help transfer students (or all students)

Demographics
6. Age:
7. Gender:
8. GPA:
9. Major:
10. Class level/year in college:
11. Full-Time/Part-Time (number of credits per semester):
12. Employed/unemployed:
13. Number of hours spent at work per week:
14. Live with parent or on your own:
15. School of attendance:
16. Previous Institution:
17. Did you earn an Associate’s degree?
18. How many credits did you transfer to St. Thomas University?
19. Type of institution you transferred from (e.g., two-year; four-year; public; private; small; large):

20. Highest Education Completed by Mother (please select one):
   - High School Diploma or Less
   - Some College Coursework (but no degree)
   - Technical Certificate
   - 2 Year Associates Degree
   - 4 Year Bachelor’s Degree
   - Graduate/Professional Degree

21. Highest Education Completed by Father (please select one):
   - High School Diploma or Less
   - Some College Coursework (but no degree)
   - Technical Certificate
   - 2 Year Associates Degree
   - 4 Year Bachelor’s Degree
   - Graduate/Professional Degree