

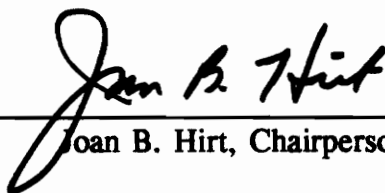
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND
INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AFFECTING SPRING-SEMESTER
COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS

by

Lori E. Walker

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ART IN EDUCATION

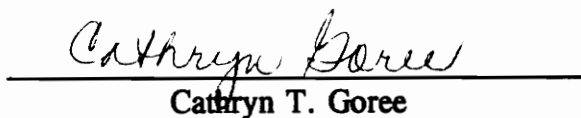
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May 1996

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Transfer, Mid-year, Community College, Transition, Integration

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Student Personnel Services

(ABSTRACT)

The majority of the present research conducted on community college transfer students has focused on students who transfer at the start of the fall semester. However, many four-year institutions also admit transfer students to matriculate in the spring semester. These students enroll mid-year and generally do not receive even the limited services provided to fall semester transfer students. To explore the spring semester transfer process, students' experiences were studied through focus groups, and institutional practices were examined through personal interviews with administrators and staff of various departments on campus involved in the transfer process.

The results indicated that the majority of the concerns of spring transfer students were in the academic and personal category. The social aspect of the transfer process was discussed the least, but was an issue that continued to affect the transfer students after seven weeks at the institution under analysis. Although fewer in number, there were also comments regarding experiences that promoted all three aspects of the transfer process, especially in the academic category.

The institutional policy most affecting the transfer process was the time frame between the date of application, transfer credit evaluation, admission notification, and actual enrollment at the institution. The deadlines imposed by the institution created many of the impediments described by the students. However, students assumed some responsibility in the process, specifically related to the date they applied for admission, and the date on which they requested a final transcript from the transfer institution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Don G. Creamer and Dr. Cathryn T. Goree, and especially my thesis committee chair, Dr. Joan B. Hirt. The time and effort you dedicated to my thesis is greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank my family and my friends, especially Jon, for the endless encouragement and support I received in the past few months. I could not have done it without any of you.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

One and a quarter million students have matriculated at community colleges each year in the 1990s, and 130,000 of them transferred to four-year institutions within four years. This number is predicted to increase over the next several years (Cohen, 1994). This increase in the transfer rate has been attributed to several factors. According to Cohen (1994), "community colleges have expanded opportunity for people to matriculate in higher education. The key to that expansion is lower tuition, acceptance of part-time attendance, forgiveness for past academic sins, and, not least, location" (p.102). Many students enroll in community colleges to complete the first two years of their education in a cost-effective and convenient manner.

Overall, the number of community college students enrolled in four-year colleges has increased in some states, and is expected to increase in other states (Cohen, 1994). Because transfer students from two-year colleges constitute a growing portion of the undergraduate enrollment, their successful transition to four-year institutions has become a significant issue.

On the state level, for example, the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) in the Commonwealth of Virginia predicted an increase of 65,000 students who will seek higher education in Virginia by the year 2002. To accommodate this dramatic growth in the number of students, while concurrently battling a sharp decrease in state funding, SCHEV recommended that high school students enroll in

two-year colleges and then transfer to four-year colleges. SCHEV also advocated that four-year colleges raise their admission standards so that less-prepared students would be forced to attend two-year colleges before becoming admissible to the Commonwealth's four-year institutions (SCHEV, 1993). Thus, for the four-year institutions in Virginia, future enrollments increasingly will depend on transfer students, if the prediction holds.

As other types of funding for higher education diminish, revenues from tuition and fees assume greater significance for colleges and universities, which, in turn, prompts campuses to focus on enrollment trends. Four-year colleges depend on two-year colleges to supplement or increase their enrollments (Cejda, 1994), rendering the transfer function of community colleges increasingly important to four-year institutions. Consequently, increasing and stabilizing enrollments has become a crucial issue in higher education.

However, transfer students cannot help stabilize enrollments if they do not remain at four-year institutions. Considerable research has documented the difficulties transfer students experience adjusting to the four-year institution (Bauer & Bauer, 1994; Cejda, 1994; Diaz, 1992; Jacobs, Busby & Leath, 1992; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986; Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993; Vaala, 1991). These difficulties impact the adjustment of transfer students, and directly relate to persistence rates for transfer students at four-year institutions. A review of the

literature suggests that the difficulties encountered by transfer students can be characterized as academic, social, or personal challenges.

Academic integration is a vital consideration for the transfer student in the transition process (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986). Many studies have documented the inferior academic performance of two-year college students at four-year institutions. Transfer students have often experienced "transfer shock," a decrease in the grade point average (GPA) between the last semester at the two-year college and the first semester at the four-year college (Cejda, 1994; Diaz, 1992; Jacobs, Busby & Leath, 1992; Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993). Two-year transfer students have also demonstrated lower persistence rates, graduation rates, and academic achievement at four-year colleges (Bauer & Bauer, 1994; Graham, 1987; Holahan, Green, & Kelley, 1983; Hughes & Graham, 1992; Johnson, 1987; Vaala, 1991). Higher academic expectations, new rules and regulations, and the increased difficulty between the general education courses taken in the two-year college and the specialized major courses in the four-year college have negatively affected many transfer students' academic adjustment (Graham, 1987).

Social integration has been recognized as an important issue to the transfer student as well (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986). Making new friends and maintaining general self-confidence are just two concerns reported by transfer students (Bauer & Bauer; 1994; Vaala, 1991). Other concerns include opportunities for extracurricular involvement in clubs and organizations, the variety of off-campus

social events that are available, opportunities for dating, and the social atmosphere of the institution in general.

Other issues have not been as widely researched in the transfer process, but are significant nevertheless, and were labeled personal. Lack of financial aid and work opportunities were cited as concerns by transfer students (Jacobs, Busby & Leath; 1992). Other concerns could include availability of student services and the dissemination of general information, finding roommates, feeling out of place or older than other students, and adjusting to a new atmosphere in general.

In addition to the academic, social, and personal issues experienced, transfer students have encountered many institutional practices negatively affecting the transition process. Loss of credit, late notification of admission, and limited housing availability are examples of institutional barriers to successful transitions by transfer students. These campus practices can also be categorized according to their academic, social, and personal impact on students.

Institutional practices have promoted or prohibited the transition of transfer students to four-year schools. Academically, several practices affect the transfer student's transition. Unlike most freshmen and native students (i.e., students who enrolled at four-year schools as freshmen), transfer students had to ensure that their academic transcripts from the two-year college were evaluated, and that their credits were transferred to the four-year college. Many transfer students cited scheduling classes and registration as serious concerns in their transition (Conklin, 1993). Some

students found the impersonal atmosphere of the four-year university difficult to adjust to (Vaala, 1991) and reported that faculty were not as helpful at four-year institutions (Conklin, 1993).

Institutional practices also may affect the social integration of the student. The social atmosphere of the four-year institution was reported as difficult to adjust to by many transfer students (Conklin, 1993). Having to adjust to another social atmosphere was a concern voiced by transfer students as well (Vaala, 1991). Most four-year institutions did not provide the same social opportunities for transfer students as they did for freshmen through orientation programs and activities, and transfer students did not have the support of a large cohort experiencing similar issues, as freshmen did.

In addition to the institutional practices affecting the academic and social integration of transfer students, personal issues arise as well. Financial aid was reported more difficult to receive at the four-year institution (Conklin, 1993). Many transfer students also had trouble leaving their former jobs and having to find new positions after they transferred (Vaala, 1991).

Statement of the Problem

An impressive amount of research has been conducted on the academic, social, and personal integration of community college transfer students, and on the institutional practices that affected their transition to four-year colleges. However, the majority of the research conducted to date has focused on transfer students who enroll in four-year institutions at the start of the fall semester (Avakian, MacKinney, &

Allen, 1982; Graham & Dallam, 1986; House, 1989; Volkwein, King, & Terenzini, 1986). Many four-year institutions also admit transfer students who matriculate in the spring semester in order to stabilize their enrollment. These students enroll mid-year, and generally do not receive even the limited services provided to fall-semester transfer students. Sufficient time to process necessary paperwork is usually not allowed. There is often not an extensive spring orientation program, if one exists at all. Additionally, spring transfer students may feel more isolated due to the mid-year transition and the smaller cohort admitted in the spring. What other factors affect the spring-semester community college transfer students' adjustment to the four-year school?

For the purposes of this study, there are two perspectives from which to explore the transfer process. First, the spring transfer students' academic, social, and personal experiences will be studied. Second, the institutional practices affecting the academic, social, and personal integration of spring transfer students will be examined.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the study and are defined as follows:

Academic integration refers to issues such as the difficulty of classes, academic performance, and interaction with faculty.

Social integration alludes to issues such as opportunities for social interaction with other students, involvement in clubs and student organizations, and the process of making friends.

Personal integration issues involve the availability of financial aid and housing and other factors that cannot be described as academic or social.

Research Questions

The present research was designed to explore the following research questions:

1. What were the spring transfer students' academic, social, and personal experiences in transferring to the four-year institution?
2. What were the institutional practices related to the academic, social, and personal transitions of spring transfer students to a four-year institution?
3. How did the institutional practices affect the spring transfer students' experiences?

Purpose of the Study

The changing demographics of higher education and increased importance of the transfer function of community colleges suggested that an investigation of community college transfer functions was relevant. Little research has been conducted on the institutional practices affecting community college transfer students' experiences, and even less research has been conducted on spring-semester transfer students. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to examine the student and

institutional variables that affected the transition of spring-semester community college students to a four-year institution.

There are several implications for the present research. By identifying factors that impact persistence among transfer students, institutions of higher education can better serve themselves and their students. The institutions may better stabilize their enrollments and the students may more readily complete their education. The study can inform university administrators and enable them to design services and programs to aid the transition of spring transfer students. The study can also inform prospective transfer students to assist them in making the transition from two-year to four-year schools.

Organization of the Study

The present study was organized in five chapters. Chapter One presents the significance of the phenomenon under investigation and the purpose of the study. Chapter Two offers a review of related literature, focusing on student experiences and institutional practices. Chapter Three presents the methods used to obtain the data on spring transfer students, including focus groups and interviews. Chapter Four reports the results from the focus groups and interviews. Chapter Five discusses the results, describes the relationship between the students' experiences and the institutional practices affecting them, discusses the limitations of the study, and suggests the implications of the study for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

To examine the experiences of spring transfer students in transition from community colleges to four-year institutions, and the institutional practices that impact that transition, several bodies of literature were studied. Characteristics of transfer students and their persistence rates were examined first. Then, student experiences and institutional practices that pertain to academic, social, and personal integration were explored. Finally, studies were investigated for references to spring-semester transfer students.

Characteristics of Transfer Students

An analysis of transfer students was necessary to determine the general characteristics they share as a whole. A significant amount of research has been conducted in the past decade on transfer students, and whether they differ from first-time freshmen. Other studies explored the differences between community college transfer students and native students. A review of each follows.

Transfer students versus first-time freshmen. Transfer students have historically been clustered with first-time freshmen students when addressing adjustment issues. The assumptions generally held about first-time freshmen might not be applicable to transfer students, however. Transfer students felt more academically prepared for college and had stronger educational and vocational goals than typical freshmen. Transfer students' main concern was not academic ability, but the transition

from one institution to another (Jacobs, Busby, & Leath, 1992). In another study, first-time freshmen were more likely to persist to graduation than transfer students (Avakian, MacKinney, & Allen, 1982). Ironically, freshman students were more likely to be concerned about adjusting to academic matters than transfer students (Miville & Sedlacek, 1995). Though it has been demonstrated that transfer students were more likely to encounter academic difficulties, they were less likely to be concerned about it (Jacobs, Busby, & Leath, 1992).

Transfer students also reported that elements of their social lives affected their adjustment to university life, and those elements differed from the expectations held by first-time freshman students. Transfer students reported greater interest in occupational and personal counseling, and less interest in conventional freshmen activities such as intramural sports (Miville & Sedlacek, 1995).

In addition to academic and social issues, transfer students reported other adjustment concerns in their transition experiences, and these were labeled personal. Issues such as the availability of financial aid and housing were reported as areas of concern for transfer students more so than for first-time freshmen (Dougherty, 1992). Additionally, transfer students expressed greater anxiety about the finding work opportunities than first time freshmen (Conklin, 1993).

Community college transfer students versus native students. An examination of the differences between community college transfer students and native students was conducted. Research has demonstrated significant differences between transfer

students and native students. Transfer students had lower persistence rates, inferior academic achievement, and more unrealistic academic and social expectations than native students and first-time freshmen. For example, over a two-year period, transfer students from all types of institutions (community colleges and four-year colleges) were more likely to be on academic probation than native students (Graham & Dallam, 1986).

Though research has reported that community college transfer students faced more obstacles than native students, the results were somewhat mixed. One study found no difference in academic achievement between community college transfer students and native students (Al-Sunbul, 1987). This study was limited, however, in that the sample was confined to students from one community college and one four-year institution, so the results may be indicative only of academic achievement for the students and institutions studied. One possible explanation for the disparity between these results might be that there were optimal relations between the community college and four-year institution examined in Al-Sunbul's study that were not present at other institutions.

Persistence of Community College Transfer Students

To explore the transition to four-year institutions by community college transfer students, it was important to consider the success they had after transferring. Success was defined as persistence and graduation rates. For example, community college students were less likely to persist after their first, second, and third semesters

than native students. However, such differences decreased with each semester until there was no significant variation in fourth semester persistence rates between community college transfer students and native students (Graham, 1987). Thus, the transition process was important in determining the initial success of transfer students. What happened upon arrival at the four-year institution was crucial in determining whether transfer students remained in school.

Graduation rates of community college students were also relevant and included in the search. Graduation rates were a common way of demonstrating the success or failure of community college transfer students at four-year institutions. Some research has found no difference in the graduation rates between students transferring from two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and native students (Holahan, Green, & Kelley, 1983).

Other studies, however, have found significant differences. Students who attended a two-year institution before transferring to a four-year college were less likely to receive a bachelor's degree than native students. The community college transfer students who did receive a degree identified clear goals, were self-motivated, took demanding courses, and were involved in college life (Kinnick & Kempner, 1988). They also valued their education as helpful to their future employment plans, were integrated academically, and planned on completing their education (Johnson, 1987).

Tinto (1975) developed a model that has helped explain the persistence/withdrawal behavior of students, largely at four-year, residential universities. The model demonstrated that the academic and social integration of college students was central in their decisions to persist or withdraw. Academic integration was defined as intellectual development and academic performance, while social integration was defined as student interaction with faculty and peers. Lack of academic integration (e.g., inferior grades, poor attendance, little faculty or student contact, and the absence of a sense of intellectual development) combined with a lack of social integration (e.g., little participation in extracurricular activities, infrequent non-academic faculty contact, and limited friends on campus) significantly contributed to the dropout behavior of college students (Tinto, 1975). Other research has validated the model for transfer students, reporting that academic and social integration were positively related to degree completion for the community college transfer students (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986).

Consequently, research on student experiences and institutional practices affecting the academic and social integration of community college transfer students was warranted. Personal integration was examined because it was reported in previous research as another significant factor affecting the transition of transfer students.

Student Experiences

Student factors, especially academic and social integration issues, involved in the successful transition to a four-year institution have generated a considerable

amount of research. In fact, community college students reported less satisfaction with the academic and social aspects of life at the four-year institution than native students (Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993). Personal integration was also included because many studies found that certain issues not necessarily pertaining to academic or social integration (e.g., financial aid and housing) affected transfer students' ability to succeed at four-year institutions (Dougherty, 1992).

Academic integration. Community college transfer students had a difficult time integrating academically into the four-year institution. They reported many academic concerns both before and after transferring to four-year schools. Before transferring, some community college students were apprehensive that their mathematics, critical thinking, oral presentation, and reading skills were not as strong as they hoped. After transferring to four-year institutions, community college transfer students reported the same anxieties, and added study skills to their list of concerns (Bauer & Bauer, 1994).

Numerous studies found that community college transfer students experienced "transfer shock," a decline in grades after transferring to four-year institutions (Al-Sunbul, 1987; Cejda, 1994; Diaz, 1992; Jacobs, Busby, & Leath, 1992; Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993). Community college transfer students also reported lower levels of intellectual development and satisfaction with their academic programs at four-year colleges (Vaala, 1989). Larger class sizes, heavier workload requirements, and lack of interaction with professors at four-year institutions were major difficulties for community college students after transferring (Vaala, 1989). Thus, higher

academic expectations of four-year institutions detracted from the successful transition and integration of transfer students into the academic life of the four-year institution.

Class standing (eg. sophomore, junior, senior) at the time of transfer also had an effect on academic integration for community college students. Community college transfer students at all class levels experienced a decline in grade point averages after transferring. However, the community college students who transferred later, as juniors rather than as sophomores for example, reported a smaller decrease in grade point average. The grade point averages of community college transfer students who persisted eventually increased until they paralleled those of the native students who persisted. Additionally, the community college students who transferred with sufficient credits to be considered juniors generally had higher persistence and graduation rates (House, 1989). Students performed better in the academic environment of the community college than the four-year institution. Students who transferred later completed more of their requirements at community colleges and performed better at the four-year institution (Phlegar, Andrew, & McLaughlin, 1981). This could signify that transfer students were more academically integrated at community colleges than at the four-year institutions.

Additionally, some community college transfer students reported unrealistic academic expectations about the transfer institution. Hughes and Graham (1992) found that though 75% of community college students expected to receive a grade point average of 3.0 or better at four-year institutions, 40% either did not achieve

satisfactory performance or dropped out after the first semester subsequent to transferring. The research showed that transfer students had difficulties integrating successfully into the academic life of four-year institutions, as demonstrated through their reported academic concerns, lower achievement, and unrealistic expectations.

Social integration. In addition to the new academic environment, transfer students also had to adapt to a new social environment. Community college students indicated difficulties integrating socially into four-year institutions. Students reported more friendships and positive faculty relationships at the community college than at the four-year colleges they subsequently attended (Vaala, 1989). Before transferring to a four-year institution, community college students listed speaking during class discussions, giving a speech to a group, and general self-confidence as areas of concern. After transferring, they had the same concerns, but were also worried about making new friends (Bauer & Bauer, 1994).

Another area of concern to transfer students was the new social life expected at the four-year institution. Community college transfer students had a difficult time adjusting to the expanded social life at four-year institutions since the social experience was more narrow and offered fewer opportunities for involvement at the community colleges (Conklin, 1993). Since the community college transfer students who became socially integrated into the environments of four-year institutions were more successful, it was a relevant issue for the four-year institution.

Personal integration. Several other integration issues were uncovered in the research and classified as personal issues. Difficulty in obtaining housing was an example. Living on campus was an integrative experience for two-year community college students aspiring to a baccalaureate degree. Not only did on-campus housing contribute to the social integration of students by providing opportunities for involvement, but it added to their personal integration as well. Since on-campus housing was usually less costly, it affected the two-year college students' financial status, hence personal integration (Dougherty, 1992). However, most institutions did not guarantee housing for transfer students, and spring transfer students generally missed deadlines to apply for housing which occurred before spring transfer students were accepted for admission.

Not surprisingly, financial concerns were commonly cited by transfer students as critical to their transfer experience (Vaala, 1991). Community college transfer students had a difficult time because they received less financial aid than native students. Thus, not only did the community college transfer student face obstacles obtaining housing, they also had encountered difficulties with respect to financial aid.

Institutional Practices

In addition to student adjustment issues, community college transfer students also had to face institutional policies and procedures affecting their transitions to four-year institutions. Scholars have identified one barrier to the transfer students' adjustment to four-year institutions as "transfer shock." This refers not only to the

decline in grades that most transfer students experience as a result of more rigorous academic expectations and new social conditions, but also includes the new policies, procedures, and regulations that transfer students encounter at the receiving institution (Graham, 1987; Graham & Dallam, 1986). In fact, these policies had a direct affect on the transfer students' academic, social, and personal integration to the four-year institution. Practices related to academic adjustment included admissions procedures, transfer of course credit, and class registration (Weinman & To Dutka, 1993). Practices related to social adjustment included the timing of orientation programs, and the active promotion of opportunities for involvement in campus life. Practices related to personal adjustment issues included on-campus housing deadlines and availability, and financial aid awarding (Dougherty, 1992; Vaala, 1991).

Academic integration. There is an abundance of research on academic integration, probably due to the fact that it is directly measurable through grades and persistence rates. Institutional policies and procedures that hindered the transfer process began at the community college. Poor academic advising at the community college was frequently cited as a critical hinderance to the transfer process. Poor advising included insufficient information about the transfer process, such as limited written materials, and inadequate advice from other people, including counselors (Vaala, 1989). More effective academic advising was clearly suggested to improve the transfer process at the community college level (King, 1993, Vaala, 1989).

Inadequate academic preparation for four-year institutions was also a frequent complaint about community colleges. Community college transfer students reported that two-year colleges did not prepare them sufficiently for higher academic standards at four-year institutions (Townsend, 1995). Four-year institutions also faulted the community colleges for not consulting with transfer institutions when making curriculum changes, inadequately preparing students for upper division courses, and giving students inaccurate information (Remley & Stripling, 1983). Community college procedures were blamed for the decrease in the number of community college students who received degrees after transferring to four-year institutions. Such procedures included insufficient course offerings and material, and the failure of faculty to effectively prepare students for higher academic expectations at the university level (Pincus & DeCamp, 1989).

Other factors, such as loss of academic credits, were the result of the combined policies of community colleges and the four-year institutions. One of the primary factors that distinguished students who transferred and eventually graduated from those who did not was loss of credit. Students who lost a significant amount of credits when transferring were less likely to graduate (Pincus & DeCamp, 1989). Students held both the community colleges and four-year institutions accountable for credit loss, blaming inaccurate community college counseling and incorrect university requirements (Kempner, 1991). Hence, both community colleges and four-year

institutions were held accountable for the loss of academic credit that impaired the academic integration of community college transfer students.

In response to criticism, community colleges and four-year institutions adopted some joint policies to ease the transition. These included exemption exams, acceptance of the associate degree, and credit for life-experiences (Masat, 1980). Four-year institutions were compelled to enter into articulation agreements with community colleges as pressure to expedite the transfer process increased (King, 1993; Weinman & To Dutka, 1993). Articulation agreements were designed to allow students to attend community colleges to fulfill their general education requirements and then transfer to four-year institutions and begin their upper division courses. Under the parameters of articulation agreements, transfer students were assured that they would not have to take further general education courses after transferring. Though these policies have assisted the transfer process, improvements were recommended in many areas, especially for increased student services at both institutions (Breyer, 1982)

Four-year institutions have increasingly taken responsibility for facilitating the transfer process of community college students. Some four-year schools have expanded counseling and placement services (Masat, 1980). One four-year institution developed an automated system for assessing transfer courses that dramatically decreased the paper-work and turn-around time for transcript evaluations. The new system enabled transfer students to receive an evaluation in a single day's time (Kramer, Spencer, Black, & Peterson, 1992). Though progress has been made in

easing the transition to four-year institutions, much work still needs to be done. Communication between two- and four-year institutions concerning transfer policies and adjustment issues is still lacking at many institutions. As the missions of community colleges have expanded beyond simply the transfer function, they cannot justify directing significant resources to that function. As a result, four-year institutions must better support the integration of community college students to ensure a successful transfer (Breyer, 1982).

Additionally, a few four-year institutions have created orientation programs designed specifically to meet the needs of transfer students. However, these programs have primarily addressed the academic needs of transfer students, such as evaluating transfer credits, providing academic advising, and assisting with registration for classes. Only a few four-year institutions addressed the social or personal needs of transfer students, which are integral components of the successful transition to the university (Harrison & Varcoe, 1984).

Social integration. The institution can also have direct effects on the social integration of community college transfer students. Dougherty (1992) reported that community colleges did not adequately integrate their students into the social environment of the college. Additionally, community colleges did not provide frequent opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities and non-academic contact with faculty and other students (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983).

Thus, even at the community college, transfer students did not experience high levels of social integration.

At four-year institutions, Sandeen and Goodale (1976) recommended that orientation programs address transfer students' social acclimation and participation in campus life. Additionally, community college students listed the impersonal atmosphere of the four-year institution as problematic in their transition (Vaala, 1991). Transfer students would benefit from knowledge about how to become involved in campus life and become socially integrated, but little research has been conducted on this topic. Thus, it is important to study the practices implemented at four-year institutions that affect the social integration of community college students.

Personal integration. Several institutional practices that affected the personal integration of community college transfer students emerged in the investigation of the literature. Financial aid, admissions, and housing were identified areas in need of improvement (Remley & Stripling, 1983). Community colleges faulted four-year schools for awarding limited financial aid to transfer students and giving them lowest priority for on-campus housing. Some scholars reported that transfer students were particularly interested in finding out about living arrangements and financial aid during orientation programs to four-year institutions (Sandeen & Goodale, 1976). Though some four-year schools have increased financial aid packages, and created scholarships designed to meet the needs of community college transfer students (Masat, 1980), financial aid continued to be an issue of concern to transfer students.

Receiving limited financial aid and housing inhibited the personal integration of community college transfer students to four-year institutions.

Fall Versus Spring Transfer Students

In the numerous studies reviewed, the sample of transfer students examined consisted of either the general population of transfer students, or transfer students who enrolled in the fall semester. No mention was made of the differences that fall and spring-semester transfer students might experience in their transition to four-year institutions. Students who transfer mid-year may have different academic, social, personal adjustment issues than fall semester transfer students. For example, spring transfer students might experience a larger initial decline in grade point average after transferring to a four-year institution than fall semester transfer students because they do not receive the same academic support services. They may also have a more difficult time making friends and becoming a part of the social life of the university than fall-semester transfer students because they transfer with a smaller cohort. Spring-semester transfer students also may experience more difficulties obtaining financial aid and housing because they transfer after deadlines for eligibility for such services have passed and nothing is available for them.

Therefore, institutional policies and procedures become particularly important when evaluating the transition experienced by spring-semester transfer students. Institutional practices, such as loss of credits or delays in transcript evaluations, that dramatically affect spring-semester transfer students may serve to inhibit their

academic integration. The lack of orientation programs provided for spring-semester transfer students may reduce their knowledge about, and chance of becoming involved in extra-curricular activities on campus, hence restricting their social integration. Additionally, institutional practices such as financial aid and housing application deadlines that disregard spring-semester transfer students may negatively affect their personal integration. Many basic services and programs are ill-equipped to deal with the needs of mid-year transfer students.

An extensive search of the literature revealed only one study that addressed institutional differences in the fall and spring-semester transfer process. Sandeen and Goodale (1976) suggested that orientation programs for transfer students be offered throughout the year so that the students who transfer mid-year could benefit from them. However, no research was found that examined the student experiences and institutional practices of both fall and spring transfer students.

Summary

Community college transfer students differed from first-time freshmen, and native students in many respects. The major difficulties were categorized into academic, social, and personal integration issues. Successful transfer students were found to be more adequately integrated in to campus life of the four-year institution, and certain institutional practices were found that affected their integration. No significant research was found, however, that addressed the needs of spring-semester transfer students. The present research will add to the existing body of research on

transfer students by focusing on the spring transfer students, and identifying their adjustment needs. Institutions might then better serve the spring transfer students by recognizing their needs and implementing programs and services to accommodate them. Therefore, research on the academic, social, and personal integration of spring-semester community college transfer students from both the student and institutional perspective would be a significant addition to the existing body of literature on transfer students.

CHAPTER 3

Method

To understand the process that spring-semester community college students experience when entering a four-year institution, a case study was conducted. The focus of the case study was to investigate spring-semester community college transfer students' experiences and the institutional practices that affect the transfer process. The students' experiences and institutional practices were examined overall, and from academic, social, and personal perspectives.

Sample

The population for this study consisted of community college students who transferred in the spring semester of the 1995-96 academic year to a large research institution located in the southeast United States. Based on the number of community college transfer students in 1994-95 (59 for the spring semester) and an increase for 1995-96 projected by the Admissions Office based on a conscious decision to stabilize the spring semester enrollment, it was predicted that there would be more than 70 community college transfer students enrolling in the spring, 1996 semester. The study was limited to one institution so that an in-depth analysis of the student experiences and institutional practices could be conducted. Since specific experiences and practices were examined for a distinct group (spring transfer students), limiting the analysis to a single institution enabled a thorough investigation.

Methodology

Before any research was conducted that involved humans as research subjects, approval was sought, and granted by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects of the four-year institution under investigation. All participants reviewed and signed informed consent forms, as required by the board.

Student experiences. To understand the students' perspectives on transferring, focus groups of spring-semester community college transfer students were conducted. According to Carnaghi (1992), focus groups ideally consist of seven to ten members each. The goal of the focus group is to encourage interaction among the participants. The researcher acts not so much as an interviewer, but more as a facilitator who guides the interaction (Carnaghi, 1992).

To assemble the focus groups, the list of community college students who transferred to the four-year institution in the spring, 1996, semester was obtained from the Admissions Office. All spring semester transfer students from community colleges were invited to participate in the focus groups through invitations mailed in the fifth week of the spring semester (Appendix A). The invitation indicated that the transfer students would receive \$10 for participating in a focus group. In addition, the sessions were held on campus to ensure easy accessibility and free parking for participants. The focus groups were scheduled to last for approximately ninety minutes each.

The students were asked to confirm their participation in the focus groups by the sixth week of the semester. After that deadline, the transfer students who had not responded to the letter were contacted by telephone. The calls were placed to encourage students who might not ordinarily volunteer to participate after this more personal invitation. Students were contacted until at least four groups were formed. It was attempted to schedule twelve students for each session to allow for attrition and ensure at least seven to ten participants were present for each focus group. The focus groups were scheduled for the seventh week of the semester. This ensured that the students were enrolled long enough to have had meaningful experiences on campus, yet were still able to recount their transfer experiences clearly. This time frame also avoided the rush of activity that inevitably occurs later in the semester.

The focus groups were conducted by the researcher, who served as the facilitator and recorder. The sessions were tape-recorded which allowed the facilitator to focus attention on the discussion at hand while creating a record for future reference and analysis. The facilitator began the focus groups explaining the purpose of the dialogue and asking the participants to introduce themselves. A focus group protocol was employed in an attempt to treat all focus groups in the same manner (Appendix B). Suggestions were adapted from Carnaghi (1992) to design a protocol that encouraged open and on-going dialogue between the participants. Throughout the dialogue, the facilitator used broad terms so as not to lead the participants.

The facilitator asked the transfer students to think about all the steps and experiences they encountered when they transferred to the institution under study. The facilitator then distributed 3x5 index cards and asked the students to write each experience on a separate card. The facilitator hung several large sheets of paper on the walls of the meeting room. One sheet was labeled "academic," one "social," and one "personal," and the rest were blank. The participants were instructed to attach each of the note cards they had written on to the appropriate sheet. Participants were told that if they had an index card which did not seem appropriate for any of the three pre-identified areas (academic, social, personal), they should create a theme for the experience, put that theme at the top of one of the blank sheets of paper, and then attach the index cards to that sheet. In this manner, students assigned experiences to some pre-identified themes, but also had an opportunity to create new themes as their experiences warranted.

A discussion of the emergent issues followed. The facilitator guided the discussion only as necessary, and tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, letting the students speak freely about the topics at hand.

Institutional practices. To examine the institutional practices relevant to transfer students, two phases of interviews were conducted. The first phase included interviews with administrators of various departments on campus that affected the students' experiences, and the second phase involved interviews with office staff in the same departments who had frequent student contact. The purpose of the interviews

with the administrators was to discover the overall transfer process and procedures employed with respect to spring transfer students. The purpose of the interviews with the staff was to obtain a more detailed picture of how office staff handled transfer students on a daily basis, from the personnel who actually interacted with the students.

The campus directory was examined to identify offices or departments with which a transfer student might have contact. The following were identified as offices that were relevant to the study due to their necessary interaction with transfer students: admissions, registrar, financial aid, student accounts, residential and dining programs, orientation, and academic advising. Academic advising and transcript evaluations are conducted by the nine individual colleges that comprise this university. Therefore, the colleges that students most frequently transfer to were determined using data from 1994-95, and the offices of the two colleges enrolling the most transfer students were selected for inclusion in the sample.

The director or dean of each office or college, henceforth referred to as director, was contacted and an interview was scheduled. If the director was unavailable or unwilling to be interviewed, the name of an alternative top level staff member who would agree to an interview was requested. The focus of the interviews with the directors or designees was to develop an overall picture of the role the office or college played in the transfer process. The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes each, and examined the institutionally-driven practices of each office that

affected the transfer students' academic, social, and personal integration to the university for the spring semester.

The second phase of the institutional analysis was to interview staff members who delivered services to transfer students in each office or college. These interviews were conducted to discover additional aids or barriers to the transfer process about which the directors or top level staff might not be aware, or willing to describe. The reality of the transfer process, as opposed to the ideal situation that the directors might articulate, was the targeted outcome of the second interview process. The questions to the service deliverers emphasized the transfer student. The protocol used in the interviews appears in Appendix C.

Results

Since the research was exploratory in nature, the focus groups were conducted in the most unstructured manner possible, and the results were explored for overall themes. The researcher reviewed the audio tapes and notes from the focus groups and identified frequently recurring experiences. These experiences were grouped into themes, and continua within those themes. Recurring themes and attitudes were identified and evaluated for intensity and level of effect of the issue at hand. The number of note cards, the number of comments, and the number of words were counted and analyzed by sub-theme and continua to reveal areas of concern. Verbatim comments were cited to illustrate points made by the transfer students.

The interviews of each office or college were analyzed and summarized according to the policies and procedures articulated that affect spring transfer students. Additionally, a time line reflecting the student experiences and institutional practices was constructed detailing the process that spring-semester community college transfer students experienced from the time of application to the university, through matriculation, to the experiences of the first seven weeks of the semester. Discrepant areas between the student expectations and institutional practices were identified and illustrated through verbatim comments made in focus groups and interviews.

Authenticity and Trustworthiness

Since the research was qualitative in nature, the authenticity and trustworthiness take the form of triangulation. By examining the activities employed in the focus groups and the questions asked in the interviews, the reader can determine whether the data obtained allowed reasonable conclusions about the transfer phenomenon.

Researcher bias was another issue of concern. The researcher had worked with transfer students in prior studies. Though the experience was helpful because it created an interest in the topic, it also may have influenced the attitudes and expectations of the researcher. To address this concern, the emerging themes and categories were discussed with a second, unbiased, researcher who determined if they were accurately identified and relevant.

Limitations

The case study was conducted at only one institution and by only one researcher, so the findings cannot be generalized to other populations or institutions. However, because the constructs and methods employed in this study were carefully described and defined, they may be understood and replicated in other settings.

Another limitation included the selection and nature of the sample. Though all spring transfer students were invited to participate in the study, the sample may not have been representative of all spring transfer students. The students who volunteered to participate in the study (37.9%) might have had different characteristics from the general transfer student population (Borg & Gall, 1989). Despite these limitations, the study presents relevant information about spring transfer students and adds to the existing body of research.

Summary

The spring transfer process was evaluated by examining the transfer students' experiences and the institutional practices affecting them. Focus groups were conducted to determine the academic, social, personal, and other experiences of spring-semester transfer students. Interviews were conducted with administrative and service-oriented staff to discover the institutional practices that affect transfer students. These two perspectives were then compared to learn about discrepancies between the students' experiences and the institution's practices.

CHAPTER 4

Results

In order to explore the student experiences and institutional practices affecting spring semester community college transfer students, focus groups were conducted with transfer students, and interviews were conducted with administrators and staff. The results from the focus groups are reviewed first, followed by the results from the interviews.

Student Experiences

Description of the Sample

To assemble the focus groups, letters were mailed to all spring semester transfer students from community colleges (Appendix A) at the end of the fifth week of the spring, 1996 semester. The list was provided by the Admissions Office. Students were considered community college transfer students if they listed a community college as the last institution attended. Sixty-six out of 151 total transfer students met that criteria. The students were contacted by phone during the sixth week of the semester to solicit their participation, and the focus groups were conducted during the seventh week. Though the goal was to obtain 7-10 participants per focus group, the small number of students transferring from community colleges allowed for only 5-8 participants per group. Twenty-five out of the 66 students (37.9%) participated in four focus groups. The demographics of the groups are listed on Table 1.

Table 1

Gender, Housing, and Age of Focus Group Participants

Characteristic	Group 1 n=5	Group 2 n=8	Group 3 n=7	Group 4 n=5	Total N=25
Males	5	6	4	4	19
Females	0	2	3	1	6
On-Campus	3	3	6	2	14
Off-Campus	2	5	1	3	11
Average Age	23.2	20	20.6	21.8	21.2

Overall, the participants transferred to the following academic colleges at the institution under study: 1 to Agriculture and Life Sciences, 2 to Architecture and Urban Studies, 12 to Arts and Sciences, 5 to Business, 1 to Education, 3 to Forestry and Wildlife Resources, and 1 to Human Resources. No students transferred to either University Studies (undeclared majors) or Engineering. Appendix D lists each of the majors of the sample.

Twenty respondents attended one of the community colleges within the state system of the institution under investigation. Thirteen of the twenty attended the community college within the state system located in the most populated area of the state. There were several other institutions that only one student attended. See Appendix E for a list of the institutions the participants reported attending. Further, 14 of the participants previously attended only one previous institution, six of them previously attended two institutions, and five of them previously attended three institutions.

Focus Group Analysis

The focus groups were conducted using the protocol previously described (see Appendix B). After introducing the participants, reviewing the purpose of the focus group, and receiving the respondents' consent to participate in the study, the participants were instructed to record issues related to the transfer process on note cards, and then take part in a discussion revolving around the themes on the note cards. The note cards and transcribed text were then analyzed.

Note card analysis. Group 1 produced 24 cards, Group 2 produced 52 cards, Group 3 produced 34 cards, and Group 4 produced 27 cards, for a total of 137 cards, each of which represented a single issue related to the transfer process. The note cards were analyzed for overall themes, and grouped according to academic, social, and personal categories by the respondents, and then the researcher. The participants had been instructed in the discussion to categorize each note card according to the academic, social, and personal themes suggested by the facilitator, but were encouraged to create their own categories if warranted. The respondents added a fourth category, labeled administrative. However, those administrative experiences also appeared to fit into either academic, social, or personal categories, and thus were incorporated into the three pre-established categories. For example:

I would have liked to have had a time, perhaps over winter break, to have a more thorough orientation like they have in the summer.

Unfriendly transfer counselor.

These issues, which had been assigned to the administrative category by the respondents, were reassigned by the researcher to the personal and academic categories, respectively. The administrative note cards generally referred to institutional policies and procedures in each of the three categories, instead of representing a new category.

The participant-assigned categories were used as a guideline, but note cards were reassigned when appropriate. The researcher assigned each note card to one

category based on the overall focus of what the participant had written. Thus, one card was recorded as one issue. Then, each note card was assigned to a sub-theme within each category, and was further assigned along a continuum. Note cards that suggested experiences that hindered a student's transition to the four-year university were categorized as "impede." Note cards that suggested experiences that had no effect on the transfer process were categorized as "no effect." Those cards reporting experiences that facilitated the student's transition were classified as "promote." This same continuum (impede, no effect, promote) was used in subsequent analysis for all sub-themes. Table 2 provides details on the number and percentage of note cards assigned to each of the categories (academic, social, and personal), each of the sub-themes within the categories, and the placement of each sub-theme along the continuum.

Transcribed text analysis. All focus group discussions were audio taped, and respondents were aware of, and agreed to, this recording process. The audio tapes of the focus groups were transcribed by the researcher. After the audio tapes of the focus groups were transcribed, the text was analyzed for overall themes in the same manner as the note cards, and grouped according to academic, social, and personal categories.

Universal themes were identified for each comment. If the speaker changed the topic or idea in the middle of the comment, it was recorded as two distinct comments and classified by theme. Four types of comments and words were eliminated from the

Table 2

Distribution of Note Cards Across Categories, Sub-themes and Continuum by Number and Percentage

N=137 note cards

Sub-themes	Impede n(%)	No Effect n(%)	Promote n(%)	Total n(%)
Academic				
Academic Advising	17(12.4%)	1(0.7%)	13(9.5%)	31(22.6%)
Application	10(7.3%)	2(1.5%)	2(1.5%)	14(10.2%)
Academic Adjustment	4(2.9%)	13(9.5%)	3(2.2%)	20(14.6%)
Faculty Interaction	2(1.5%)	0(0.0%)	3(2.2%)	5(3.6%)
Sub-total	33(24.1%)	16(11.7%)	21(15.3%)	70(51.1%)
Social				
Extracurricular Involvement	1(0.7%)	0(0.0%)	3(2.2%)	4(2.9%)
Making Friends	4(2.9%)	0(0.0%)	2(1.5%)	6(4.4%)
Social Atmosphere	1(0.7%)	0(0.0%)	6(4.4%)	7(5.1%)
Sub-total	6(4.4%)	0(0.0%)	11(8.0%)	17(12.4%)
Personal				
General Information	15(10.9%)	0(0.0%)	2(1.5%)	17(12.4%)
Housing	6(4.4%)	1(0.7%)	0(0.0%)	7(5.1%)
Finances	3(2.2%)	0(0.0%)	4(2.9%)	7(5.1%)
Personal Adjustment	6(4.4%)	4(2.9%)	9(6.6%)	19(13.9%)
Sub-total	30(21.9%)	5(3.6%)	15(10.9%)	50(36.5%)
Total	69(50.4%)	21(15.3%)	47(34.2%)	137(100.0%)

word count and not considered in the remaining analyses. They included: words and phrases with no meaning (e.g., "like", "you know", "I mean", "well", and "okay"); words or comments that could not be understood due to the quality of the tape; wordsspoken by the researcher; and, a limited number of words and comments that were unrelated to the study (e.g., "Where did you live?," referring to another town, and "Yeah, my mom went there too at one time," referring to another four-year institution). The transcribed text was analyzed by number of comments, and number of words for each category. Though other types of analyses were available, such as time spent on a topic, the transcriptions were analyzed according to number of comments and number of words so that comments made by participants who agreed with, or supported ideas of other respondents (e.g., "Yeah," and "I agree") were included in the comment count. Additionally, words were included in the count when more than one participant was talking and his or her comments could be deciphered, whereas these kinds of comments would be lost if the time spent on a topic was used for analysis.

Finally, each comment was assigned to a sub-theme within each category, and was further assigned along the continuum of impede/no effect/promote on the transition. Tables 3 and 4 provide details on the number and percentage of comments and words assigned to each of the categories (academic, social, and personal), each of the sub-themes within the categories, and the placement of each sub-theme along the continuum.

Table 3

Distribution of Comments Across Categories, Sub-themes and Continuum by Number and Percentage

(N = 740 Comments)

Sub-theme	Impede n(%)	No Effect n(%)	Promote n(%)	Total n(%)
Academic				
Academic Advising	58(7.8 %)	17(2.3 %)	20(2.7 %)	95(12.8 %)
Application	19(2.6 %)	15(2.0 %)	21(2.8 %)	55(7.4 %)
Academic Adjustment	29(3.9 %)	13(1.8 %)	8(1.1 %)	50(6.8 %)
Faculty Interaction	5(0.7 %)	2(0.3 %)	7(0.9 %)	14(1.9 %)
Sub-total	111(15.0%)	47(6.4 %)	56(7.6 %)	214(28.9 %)
Social				
Extracurricular Involvement	9(1.2 %)	0(0.0 %)	4(0.5 %)	13(1.8 %)
Making Friends	36(4.9 %)	23(3.1 %)	16(2.2 %)	75(10.1 %)
Social Atmosphere	9(1.2 %)	6(0.8 %)	5(0.7 %)	20(2.7 %)
Sub-total	54(7.3 %)	29(3.9 %)	25(3.4 %)	108(14.6 %)
Personal				
General Information	87(11.8%)	36(4.9 %)	27(3.6 %)	150(20.3 %)
Housing	30(4.1 %)	4(0.5 %)	10(1.4 %)	44(5.9 %)
Finances	19(2.6 %)	6(0.8 %)	1(0.1 %)	26(3.5 %)
Personal Adjustment	59(8.0 %)	29(3.9 %)	20(2.7 %)	108(14.6 %)
Miscellaneous	34(4.6 %)	41(5.5 %)	15(2.0 %)	90(12.2 %)
Sub-total	229(30.9%)	116(15.7%)	73(9.9 %)	418(56.5 %)
Total	394(53.2%)	192(26.0%)	154(20.9%)	740(100.0%)

Table 4

Distribution of Words Across Categories, Sub-themes and Continuum by Number and Percentage

N=20,133 words

Sub-theme	Impede n(%)	No Effect n(%)	Promte n(%)	Total n(%)
Academic				
Academic Advising	2,594(12.9%)	174(0.9%)	599(3.0%)	3,367(16.7%)
Application	746(3.7%)	196(1.0%)	273(1.4%)	1,215(6.0%)
Academic Adjustment	711(3.5%)	435(2.2%)	404(2.0%)	1,550(7.7%)
Faculty Interaction	251(1.2%)	5(0.0%)	338(1.7%)	594(3.0%)
Sub-total	4,302(21.4%)	810(4.0%)	1,614(8.0%)	6,726(33.4%)
Social				
Extracurricular Involvement	249(1.2%)	0(0.0%)	71(0.4%)	320(1.6%)
Making Friends	1,661(8.3%)	310(1.5%)	671(3.3%)	2,642(13.1%)
Social Atmosphere	242(1.2%)	274(1.4%)	149(0.7%)	665(3.3%)
Sub-total	2,152(10.7%)	584(2.9%)	891(4.4%)	3,627(18.0%)
Personal				
General Information	2,365(11.7%)	380(1.9%)	479(2.4%)	3,224(16.0%)
Housing	725(3.6%)	56(0.3%)	373(1.9%)	1,154(5.7%)
Finances	896(4.5%)	89(0.4%)	96(0.5%)	1,081(5.4%)
Personal Adjustment	2,076(10.3%)	535(2.7%)	682(3.4%)	3,293(16.4%)
Miscellaneous	526(2.6%)	273(1.4%)	229(1.1%)	1,028(5.1%)
Sub-total	6,588(32.7%)	1,333(6.6%)	1,859(9.2%)	9,780(48.6%)
Total	13,042(64.8%)	2,727(13.5%)	4,364(21.6%)	20,133(100.0%)

Academic integration. The highest percentage of note cards (51%, 70 out of 137 note cards), and second highest percentage of comments (29%, 214 out of 740 comments), and words (33%; 6,726 out of 20,133 words) were categorized as academic issues. The sub-themes that emerged in the academic category included: academic advising, the application process, adjusting to the academic environment; and, faculty interaction. The analysis of each academic sub-theme follows.

The sub-theme of academic advising included class registration, transferring credits, and advising in general. Twenty-three percent of the note cards (n=31), 13% of the comments (n=95), and 17% of the words (n=3367) were categorized as relating to academic advising.

Twelve percent of the note cards (n=17), 8% of the comments (n=58), and 13% of the words (n=2594), were academic advising issues that impeded academic integration. Examples included:

I found it hard to get classes because most of the classes I needed to take were the "core" classes and they were filled with freshmen or the class was not offered second semester. (note card)

After I discovered that there was such a thing as advisors, I searched the campus for mine. I went and talked to mine and he was really, really nice to me, and helpful. But I am a freshman, I'm right out of high school, and I didn't even know there was such a thing, and nobody told me anything until I was having a problem with a class, and they were like talk to your advisor, and I was like, what's that? (comment)

One percent of the note cards (n=1), 2% of the comments (n=17), and 1% of the words (n=174), were academic advising issues that had no effect on academic integration. Examples included:

All of my credits transferred O.K. (note card)

Some classes are offered in sections. (comment)

Ten percent of the note cards (n=13), 3% of the comments (n=20), and 3% of the words (n=599), were academic advising issues that promoted academic integration. Examples included:

(Staff name) was extremely helpful and helped me pick the classes I needed. (note card)

My counselor gave me a (name of community college) and (name of four-year institution) transfer guide, and [it listed] everything that transfers. (comment)

The sub-theme of the application process included any reference to the application process and admission decision. Ten percent of the note cards (n=14), 7% of the comments (n=55), and 6% of the words (n=1215) were categorized as relating to the application process.

Seven percent of the note cards (n=10), 3% of the comments (n=19), and 4% of the words (n=746) were issues related to the application process that impeded academic integration. Examples included:

I had some difficulties getting my transcripts to (name of institution). They sent me notice that they had not received my (name of previous four-year institution) transcript. (note card)

Be sure to get your application information in, it's really important to get materials in earlier, just to make sure...even though the stuff I sent in was getting late, it was still getting in before the deadline, and I still had a lot of trouble anyway. I really felt that was unfair. Even though I didn't get in real early, so what, it wasn't after the deadline either, so it should have gotten there. Maybe they should...put [out] some kind of piece of paper to say, it's best to get your material [in] this much time before the deadline to make sure everything is accomplished, because having to wait until the first day of classes is a bit harsh. (comment)

Two percent of the note cards (n=2), 2% of the comments (n=15), and 1% of the words (n=196), were issues related to the application process that had no effect on academic integration. Examples included:

During high school, I visited (name of institution) numerous times and after doing some research on things such as [the] student body, different majors, past students, etc., I decided to attend. The application process was not that difficult. With the exception of a few things that I mailed not arriving here, application went fairly easy. The worst part was waiting for my acceptance letter. (note card)

But see, a lot of schools seem to do that, like (name of other state four-year institution) won't take mid-semester transfer [students], for the most part, from what I understand. (comment)

Two percent of the note cards (n=2), 3% of the comments (n=21), and 1% of the words (n=273), were issues related to the application process that promoted the students academic integration. Examples included:

(Name of institution) was very helpful and considerate throughout the application process, i.e., I was notified over the phone upon inquiry and (name of institution) was the first school to respond to my application. (note card)

I got accepted, I applied to (name of other institution) and (name of other institution), and I got in here first, and I didn't hear from them, their acceptance letters until really late and, I guess that's one of the reasons why I'm here. (comment)

The sub-theme of academic adjustment included class difficulty, class size, and the classroom atmosphere. Fifteen percent of the note cards (n=20), 7% of the comments (n=50), and 8% of the words (n=1550), were categorized as relating to academic adjustment.

Three percent of the note cards (n=4), 4% of the comments (n=29), and 4% of the words (n=711) were issues related to academic adjustment that impeded academic integration. Examples included:

I am currently in the second semester of many courses - had to jump in when [the] prof[essor] assumes everyone knows what is going on. (note card)

Same thing with my math classes here, too. I find it a lot harder here, too. I got straight A's at the community college and now I am struggling with a B/C, which means I have to study twice as much. (comment)

Ten percent of the note cards (n=13), 2% of the comments (n=13), and 2% of the words (n=435) were issues related to academic adjustment that had no effect on academic integration. Examples included:

I had attended (name of community college) for a year and a half and it was time for me to move on to a 4-year school, academic wise. (note card)

Lecture halls don't bother me. (comment)

Two percent of the note cards (n=3), 1% of the comments (n=8), and 2% of the words (n=404) were issues related to academic adjustment that promoted academic integration. Examples included:

I had an easy time adjusting to my classes (size, workload, location). (note card)

I think the Computer Science department seems about ten times more credible than (name of other four-year institution)'s. They have a good Computer Science department here, which is pretty cool. (comment)

The sub-theme of faculty interaction included any reference to the faculty or teaching assistants. Four percent of the note cards (n=5), 2% of the comments (n=14), and 3% of the words (n=594), were categorized as relating to academic integration.

Two percent of the note cards (n=2), 1% of the comments (n=5), and 1% of the words (n=251) were issues related to faculty interaction that impeded academic interaction. Examples included:

(Name of institution)'s Architecture department is a high school. They force transfers to start as first year. Their teachers (at least the one I have) suck. They think they are a lot better than they are. (Because of this I am attempting to transfer out of (name of institution)). (note card)

The teachers seem to be so far out of it, classes are so big, and every time a class is over, the teacher just gets swarmed with students. (comment)

None of the note cards, 1% of the comments (n=2), and less than 1% of the words (n=5) were issues related to faculty interaction that had no effect on academic integration. For example:

I think there's two [Teaching Assistants]. (comment)

Two percent of the note cards (n=2), 1% of the comments (n=7), and 2% of the words were issues related to faculty interaction that promoted academic integration. Examples included:

I have really good professors that are readily available - something I didn't think that would happen. (note card)

One thing academic, I think that most of the professors are easily accessible, you can usually talk to them after class. (comment)

Social integration. The lowest percentage and number of note cards (12%, 17 out of 173 note cards), comments (15%, 108 out of 740 comments), and words (18%, 3,627 out of 20,133 words), were categorized as social issues. The sub-themes that emerged in the social category included extracurricular involvement, making friends, and, the social atmosphere. An analysis of the social sub-themes follows.

The sub-theme of extracurricular involvement included the opportunity for involvement on-campus. Three percent of the note cards (n=4), 2% of the comments (n=13), and 2% of the words (n=320) were related to extracurricular involvement.

One percent (n=1) of the note cards, 1% of the comments (n=9), and 1% of the words (n=249) were issues related to extracurricular involvement that impeded social integration. Examples included:

I would like to see a way to find out about things happening on campus. The only way I know is to read the paper. Maybe I don't know where to look. (note card)

The only thing interesting I found had the date 1995 on it. (comment)

None of the note cards, comments, or words were issues related to extracurricular involvement that had no effect on social integration.

Two percent of the note cards (n=3), 1% of the comments (n=4), and less than 1% of the words (n=71) were issues related to extracurricular involvement that promoted social integration. Examples included:

More student organizations [at the four-year institution]. (note card)

Yeah, I rushed, and you get to do a lot, because there are, each sorority or fraternity has their own philanthropy to participate in, and have fun. There's just a lot of things to do, to get involved in. But, it can get kind of dangerous because you have to watch not to have too much fun. (comment)

The sub-theme of making friends included the process of making friends, and getting to know other students at the institution. Four percent of the note cards (n=6), 10% of the comments (n=75), and 13% of the words (n=2642) related to making friends.

Three percent of the note cards (n=4), 5% of the comments (n=36), and 8% of the words (n=1661) were issues related to making friends that impeded social integration. Examples included:

The hardest part of transferring is making friends. Everyone already has "groups." I always felt like an oddball. (note card)

I thought it was harder to find friends here because at home I had a lot of good, close friends, but since I came here, it's like everybody knows [people]. I guess, 99% of the people have been here since fall, and they got to meet people right away, and so they've been together for the past four or five months. And when I came, and it was difficult because they already had their group, so you kind of have to make your way into the group. And that was hard. (comment)

None of the note cards, 3% of the comments (n=23), and 2% of the words (n=310), were issues related to making friends that had no effect on social integration. The example included:

Well, you have to live here, you have to, you want to interact, it's human nature to want to have people to talk to. (making friends)

Two percent of the note cards (n=2), 2% of the comments (n=16), and 3% of the words (n=671), were issues related to making friends that promoted social integration. Examples included:

I've met a lot of new friends and I like the atmosphere on and off campus. (note card)

That was really helpful. I felt so alone, especially the first night, or the first couple days. At least I have this roommate, she's stuck here too. (comment)

The sub-theme of the social atmosphere included activities such as social gatherings and activities off-campus, and the social atmosphere of the institution in general. Five percent of the note cards (n=7), 3% of the comments (n=20), and 3% of the words (n=665), related to the social atmosphere.

One percent of the note cards (n=1), 1% of the comments (n=9), and 1% of the words (n=242) were issues related to the social atmosphere that impeded social adjustment. Examples included:

It would be nice if there was a form of culture in the immediate area, besides beer, etc. (note card)

Weekends start here on Wednesday. They end on Sunday. My roommate is so true to that. And I just feel like, I'm so not cool because I don't go out on Wednesday and Thursday, but I don't even, I think I've been here, I've stayed

here one weekend, because friends from (name of city). I go there, my boyfriend is there, and then I go home. I wanted to be close to my home anyway because my dog is there... (comment)

None of the note cards, 1% of the comments (n=6), and 1% of the words (n=274) were issues related to the social atmosphere that had no effect on social adjustment. For example:

I think (name of institution) is not as much of a party school as I've ever been to, because I've been to (names of three other four-year institutions), and (name of other four-year institution) is like four times. (comment)

Four percent of the note cards (n=6), 1% of the comments (n=5), and 1% of the words (n=149), were issues related to the social atmosphere that promoted social adjustment. Examples included:

Contrary to popular belief, a healthy social scene is imperative to a well rounded education. (Name of previous four-year institution) lacked the parties which helped contribute to an overall sense of understanding in the college community. (Name of institution)'s social foundation is better structured. (note card)

I've met a lot of people, but I met most of them in bars, a lot of people out... (comment)

Personal integration. Personal integration issues accounted for the second highest percentage of note cards (37%, 50 out of 137 note cards), and the highest percentage of comments (57%, 418 out of 740 comments), and words (49%, 9,780 out of 20,133 words). Sub-themes in the personal integration category included general information, housing, finances, personal adjustment, and miscellaneous issues.

The sub-theme of general information included receiving information about tuition, student services, orientation, transportation, interaction with student service staff, and other details specific to getting around the institution under investigation. Twelve percent of the note cards (n=17), 20% of the comments (n=150), and 16% of the words (n=3224) related to receiving general information.

Eleven percent of the note cards (n=15), 12% of the comments (n=87), and 12% of the words (n=2365), were issues related to receiving general information that impeded personal integration. Examples included:

I felt after I was accepted and notified the school I was coming that I should've received an information package. I had to initiate most everything. (note card)

And I didn't have an RA, coming on campus, so there was no one, so if I didn't know the people that I know, I would have no idea what to do and where to go for certain things. (comment)

None of the note cards, 5% of the comments (n=36), and 2% of the words (n=380), were issues related to receiving general information that had no effect on personal integration. An example included:

The only place I think lines are long, dining halls maybe, the computer lab, and the library. (comment)

Eleven percent of the note cards (n=15), 12% of the comments (n=87), and 12% of the words (n=2365), were issues related to receiving general information that promoted personal integration. Examples included:

When I did have questions, most people were helpful and courteous. (note card)

Yeah, the bus system is great. (comment)

The sub-theme of housing included the process of finding on- or off-campus housing and roommates. Five percent of the note cards (n=7), 6% of the comments (n=44), and 6% of the words (n=1165) related to housing issues. An analysis along the continuum follows.

Four percent of the note cards (n=6), 4% of the comments (n=30), and 3% of the words (n=725), were issues related to housing that impeded personal integration. Examples included:

My name was lost out of the housing lottery. Therefore, unless I find an apartment this week, I'll be camping out on the drill field next Fall. (note card)

The first day of classes I had to commute from...it's impossible if you don't live here to find a place off-campus, especially during the spring, starting spring semester. (comment)

One percent of the note cards (n=1), 1% of the comments (n=4), and less than 1% of the words (n=56), were issues related to housing that had no effect on personal integration. Examples included:

On the same token as the spring transfer "card," I was a little worried about finding someone to live with next year (I live in a dorm), but I did, seven others as a matter of fact. (note card)

It's fine. I couldn't live on campus. (comment)

None of the note cards, 1% of the comments (n=10), and 2% of the words (n=373), were issues related to housing that promoted personal integration. An example included:

25,000 students they say, and there must be 5 billion apartments you can go to. (comment)

The sub-theme of finances included applying for financial aid, the opportunity for on- and off-campus employment, and the cost of the institution. Five percent of the note cards (n=7), 4% of the comments (n=26), and 5% of the words (n=1081) related to housing issues.

Two percent of the note cards (n=3), 3% of the comments (n=19), and 5% of the words (n=896), were issues related to finances that impeded personal integration.

Examples included:

For some unknown reason my financial aid is messed up. I cannot gain access to my money. (note card)

[There are only] a couple of stores, and the jobs are prized [limited]. (comment)

None of the note cards, 1% of the comments (n=6), and less than 1% of the words (n=89), were issues related to finances that had no effect on personal integration. For example:

From what I understand, you have to be on financial aid [to get an on campus job]. (comment)

Three percent of the note cards (n=4), less than 1% of the comments (n=1), and 1% of the words (n=96), were issues related to finances that promoted personal integration. Examples included:

Number one decision to wait before transferring was to save money. By going to a community college first, I was able to get the base classes taught in smaller surroundings, as well as saving money. (note card)

I worked last semester when I was in school, so I saved up a lot of money. My parents are paying for my education, but I saved up a lot of money and put it in the bank, so I use it for books, or personal supplies, or anything. I thought there's 25,000 people here, so I thought there would be so much competition, and it would just be too hard to find a job, but I see notices everywhere of people looking for workers. I'd rather just work in the summer and save up enough money. (comment)

The sub-theme of personal adjustment included the process of moving in and getting ready to begin classes, the effect the inclement weather had on this process, and adjusting to a new roommate and various people on campus. Fourteen percent of the note cards (n=19), 15% of the comments (n=108), and 16 of the words (n=3293) related to personal adjustment issues.

Four percent of the note cards (n=6), 8% of the comments (n=59), and 10% of the words (n=2,076), were issues related to personal adjustment that impeded personal integration. Examples included:

Bad experience my first few days here. I got here Sunday, before the first day of class. I wasn't registered. It was my first time in (name of town). I was lost. (note card)

That was something that bothered me about this semester, is they didn't, it seemed to me that they didn't take into consideration that most of (name of state) was covered in snow and it would have been hard, I couldn't bring my car up here until after three weeks, heck, I couldn't get it out of the driveway. I think they should have taken that into consideration. (comment)

Three percent of the note cards (n=4), 4% of the comments (n=29), and 3% of the words (n=535), were issues related to personal adjustment that had no effect on personal integration. Examples included:

I like to see different places. (note card)

It takes a little while, I think you get it [a routine], eventually. (comment)

Seven percent of the note cards (n=9), 3% of the comments (n=20), and 3% of the words (n=682), were issues related to personal adjustment that promoted personal integration. Examples included:

The most helpful thing probably has been having a friend that has been here for two years and he has been able to answer questions for me as they come up. (note card)

I didn't have most of those problems, just because my friends showed me pretty much what to do, and I'd always ask questions, stupid or not, I'd always just ask them everything. (comment)

The sub-theme of miscellaneous issues included receiving "good-stuff" boxes, details about dining plans, room conditions and amenities, and the campus security program. These were things that one group (Group 3) discussed in detail. They did not apply to any sub-theme, but were an adjustment nevertheless. Twelve percent of the comments (n=90), and 5% of the words (n=1028) related to miscellaneous issues.

Five percent the comments (n=34), and 3% of the words (n=526), were miscellaneous issues that impeded personal integration. An example included:

Yeah, but they only, at least for me it hasn't been really convenient at all. It takes me an hour to take safe ride, when it would take me five minutes to walk. (comment)

Six percent the comments (n=41), and 1% of the words (n=273), were miscellaneous issues that had no effect on personal integration. An example included:

I hang out up there, and I feel sorry for anyone who lives in (name of residence hall). (comment)

Two percent the comments (n=15), and 1% of the words (n=229), were miscellaneous issues that promoted personal integration. An example included:

I love, I love having a sink in my room. (comment)

Summary of Student Experiences

Student experiences were evaluated in two ways. First, note cards were grouped into three categories (academic, social, and personal). The note cards were then grouped into sub-themes, and assigned along the impede/no effect/promote continuum. Second, transcripts from four focus group discussions were coded according the same three categories, sub-themes, and continuum. The next step of the analysis was to examine the results of the interviews with the campus administrators in order to explore the institutional practices that affect spring semester transfer students.

Institutional Practices

Description of the Sample

To explore the institutional practices of the institution under study, 30-minute interviews were conducted with administrators and staff of various offices on campus who frequently interacted with transfer students. The offices included: Admissions, the Registrar, Financial Aid, Student Accounts, Residential and Dining Programs, Orientation, and Academic Advising. The population of spring semester transfer

students from community colleges was examined, and it was determined the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Business enrolled the largest number of spring semester community college transfer students. The Directors of the offices or colleges were contacted during the 10th week of the spring semester to request an interview. During the interview, questions were asked about the policies and procedures of the office regarding spring semester transfer students (see Appendix C), and responses were used to create a time line of when activities related to transfer students occurred. Additionally, the name of a staff member who had frequent interaction with transfer students was requested, and an interview was conducted with that person to get supplementary information on the day-to-day practices of the office. The following sections summarize the findings related to the time line of the transfer process and the policies and procedures guiding it.

Admissions

The Admission Office of the institution under investigation is part of the Division of Enrollment Services, and has a separate office designated for transfer students. The Executive Associate Director of Transfer Affairs and the Office Services Secretary Senior were interviewed.

Policies and procedures. The first decision the Admission office must make is how many transfer students should be admitted. This number is based on fall enrollment, and is determined by the Director of Admissions and the Enrollment Management Team. Admission decisions for spring are made on a "space available

basis," although most years there is sufficient space to accommodate some spring semester transfer students. Admission criteria are dependent on, and applications are ranked according to, space availability in the applicant's academic major.

When reviewing a transfer application, the first measure examined is courses completed at the previous institution. Students who have made a good start towards fulfilling the University's general education requirements are preferred. The next step entails a grade evaluation. If the student has completed only one semester of college work, only the high school grades are examined.

Most of the contact with the transfer students revolves around the issue of what courses will transfer, and these inquiries are generally referred to the academic colleges, since the colleges determine what credits will be accepted. Other inquiries include changing majors, what the town is like, housing, and opportunities for employment. There are counselors in the office who work specifically with transfer students. Though a larger number of prospective freshmen students visit the campus annually, transfer students receive more individual attention because their needs are more specific. The offers of admission are a lot more individualized as well, and they entail more paperwork, sometimes including a contract to complete certain courses before enrolling.

Time line. The deadline to apply for spring semester is October 1, and notification is sent out by November 15, if the application was received on time. However, a modified rolling admissions plan is in use, where once the decision to

offer admission is made, an acceptance letter is sent out immediately. The staff are selective. They choose and offer admission to the number of transfer students needed to fill the available spaces. If space is still available, applications will be accepted after October 1, and under compelling circumstances a student could be admitted up until the first week of classes. After students accept the offer of admission, their transcripts are sent to their prospective college for review. Once the student enrolls, application materials are transferred to the Registrar's office, and there is no further official contact between the Admissions office and the transfer student.

Registrar

The Office the University Registrar is also a component of the Enrollment Services Division at the institution under investigation. The Registrar and an Enrollment Services, Audit and Accounting staff member were interviewed.

Policies and procedures. The primary contact between transfer students and the Registrar's office relates to providing the schedule of classes. Advising is not conducted by the Registrar's staff, and most questions about registration and transfer evaluations are directed to the college in which the student will enroll. All materials for academic work completed prior to admission to the university are sent to the college, and, once evaluated, returned to the Registrar's office to enter into the university's computer system.

At present, each individual college is responsible for transcript evaluations and determination of transferable credits. The Registrar's office merely serves as a

clearing house. However, the centralization of the university's general requirements in the Registrar's office is an issue currently under discussion.

Time line. Schedules of classes are sent to spring transfer students after the offer of admission is accepted. Course registration for the university occurs in October, when most transfer students are still in the application process. Spring semester transfer students are referred to their colleges to register for classes, generally through the drop/add system.

Financial Aid

The Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid also falls within the Division of Enrollment Services at the institution under investigation. The Director of Financial Aid and an Enrollment Services Assistant, Scholarships and Financial Aid were interviewed.

Policies and Procedures. Criteria for financial aid awards for spring semester transfer students are no different than for other students. However, when transfer students enroll, they are considered freshmen until their credits are evaluated and entered into the university's computer system, and they do not receive as much aid as students with more advanced standing (e.g., sophomores, juniors). The Financial Aid office must wait until the individual colleges evaluate transcripts and forward them to the Registrar's Office to assign an appropriate amount of aid. No aid is reserved specifically for spring students, although some scholarship money is now being directed to transfer students.

The Financial Aid office also requires a financial aid transcript (different from an academic transcript) from all previous institutions attended. In the near future, it is hoped that this information will be entered into a federal electronic database, which will eliminate the need for transfer students to submit this additional paperwork.

Time line. A student can apply for loans and Pell grants at any time. However, to be considered for so-called "free money," primarily grants, the student's financial aid application must be received by February 15 of the previous academic year. Spring semester transfer students can apply for this money, but they must have listed the transfer institution on the application they submitted to their community college the previous February. Financial aid is not transferrable from school to school, so spring transfer students have to apply for fall semester aid from the community college, and spring semester aid from the four-year institution. Generally, students will receive notification about their aid packages one month after they are admitted to the university.

Student Accounts

The only individual available for an interview in Student Accounts, also a part of the Division of Enrollment Services, was a Fiscal Technician.

Policies and procedures. Spring semester transfer students are billed in the same way as other students. There is no distinction among student accounts. The only interaction staff might have with the transfer students relates to waiving late fees, if appropriate, or if the student has received some type of support or aid.

Time line. Tuition bills for the spring semester are printed on approximately December 2nd. If the students have accepted admission and registered for classes by then, they will receive a bill. If not, students must contact the Student Accounts office to receive a bill. Tuition bills are generated again on January 20th, and if the transfer students have registered for classes by that time, they will receive a bill. Students are required to pay tuition by the deadline to add classes, but generally receive about a one-week grace period if payment cannot be made by that deadline. Enrollment history is taken into account, and new students are not usually assessed a late fee.

Residential and Dining Programs

The Office of Residential and Dining Programs (RDP) is part of the Division of Student Affairs at the university under investigation. The Director of Residential and Dining Programs and the Assignments/Contracting Coordinator were interviewed.

Policies and procedures. Because students graduate, leave for co-op, or transfer at the end of the fall semester, there are almost always rooms available in the spring semester for students wishing on-campus housing.

Transfer students receive their keys at the housing office, and do not have to check in with their resident advisors, who normally handle this responsibility. However, the housing office is equipped to handle general questions from the transfer students. The resident advisors do not receive any training to work with transfer students, because there are so few spring transfer students, and they are assigned to residence halls all over campus (8,100 bed spaces).

Time line. There are no strict deadlines to apply for housing because there are always vacancies in the spring. A student can be accommodated at virtually any time. Spring transfer students are sent housing contracts with their letters of admission. If the office receives the signed contract, assignments are made at the end of the first week, or more likely at the start of the second week of January. Letters are sent out at that time instructing students about the check-in process, and sign-up procedures for housing in subsequent years. The deadline for housing applications for the following year occurs at the end of the first week of spring semester classes, to allow new and transfer students to participate. The residence halls open on the Saturday before spring semester classes begin.

Orientation

The orientation program is located in the Dean of Students Office, a component of the Division of Student Affairs at the institution under investigation. The Assistant Dean for Orientation and a secretary were interviewed.

Policies and procedures. A significant orientation program was held for the spring semester transfer students for the first time in January, 1996. Academics were stressed, and various sessions informed transfer students about offices and services available on campus. Colleges also participated to answer any academically-oriented questions. The session was open to new and transfer students, but will be geared solely to transfer students in future years. The primary interaction between the Dean

of Students staff and spring semester transfer students is the orientation session, although additional support services are planned for the future.

Time line. The orientation program was held on the Sunday before classes began in the spring semester. Beginning November 1, letters announcing the orientation session were sent to the transfer students as soon as they accepted their offers of admission. In mid-December, announcements are mailed to all transfer students who have accepted their offers of admission. The announcements provide the times and details related to the January orientation session. Mailings to admitted transfer students continue through January.

Academic Advising - College of Arts and Sciences

The College of Arts and Sciences enrolled the greatest number of spring semester community college transfer students in the study. The Associate Dean and Enrollment Services Specialist of the college were interviewed.

Policies and procedures. Spring semester transfer students are managed by the same general university policies and procedures in all colleges, however each college is responsible for its own transcript evaluation and academic advising. The university has a transfer agreement with the state community college system, so transfer students tend to lose few credits. The university has also published a transfer guide, which has helped make course selection and transfer easier. The students in the College of Arts and Sciences are referred to their faculty advisors in their academic departments for course registration.

Time line. Once students apply for admission, even before they are accepted, an incomplete transfer credit evaluation is conducted and sent to the transfer student applicant with the offer of admission. Once the offer of admission is accepted, an official transcript evaluation is completed and the credits are entered on the system by the Registrar's office. However, the majority of transfer students are enrolled in community college classes during the fall semester, so final transcript evaluations are not complete until January, when the final community college transcripts are received.

Academic Advising - College of Business

The College of Business enrolled the second highest number of community college transfer students for the spring semester. The Associate Dean and Director of the Advising Center were interviewed.

Policies and Procedures. The College of Business follows the same university policies and procedures as the College of Arts and Sciences, with a few exceptions. Instead of referring students to their departments for academic advising, transfer students utilize the college's Advising Center until they reach junior or senior academic status. The number of credits the students generally transfer depends on what the students have taken at the community college, but the goal is to enroll them with 16 credit hours per semester.

Time line. The transfer students' transcripts are not evaluated by the staff in the College of Business until after students accept offers of admission, unless otherwise requested by the prospective student. After students accept the admission

offer, they are sent requests to call the Advising Center or make an appointment to review the transcript evaluation and conduct course selection for the spring. If the student is contacted after Thanksgiving, when continuing students have already registered for classes, the advisor registers the student over the phone. The timing is up to the transfer students, and how quickly they accept offers of admission and request final transcripts from previous institutions.

Summary of Institutional Practices

Upon completion of all interviews with administrators, the researcher constructed a time line representing when various bureaucratic components of the admission and matriculation process for spring semester transfer students too place. That time line is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Time Line Data

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description of Activity</u>
February 15	Financial aid application deadline for "free money"
October 1	Application deadline to receive November 15 admission decision
October	Course registration for students currently enrolled
November 1	Orientation letters mailed announcing spring session
November 15	Admission decisions mailed if application received by October 1
December 2	Student bills printed
Mid-December	Orientation announcements mailed with session details Preliminary financial aid packages awarded (on-going)
January 3-10	Housing assignment letters sent
January 13	Residence halls open
January 14	Orientation session
January 15	First day of classes
January 19	Housing application deadline for following academic year
January 20	Second student bills printed
Late January/ Early February	Updated financial aid awarded (on-going)

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Implications

To avoid the increased tuition imposed at four-year institutions facing decreased state and federal funding, many students are enrolling in community colleges to complete the first two years of their education in a cost-efficient manner. At the same time, four-year institutions have begun to utilize community college transfer students as a means of stabilizing their enrollments. While there has been considerable research conducted on the transfer experience, it has been limited to student experiences of fall semester transfer students. Specifically, research is lacking on the institutional practices that affect the transfer experience, and on the students who matriculate in the spring semester.

The purpose of this study was to examine the student experiences and institutional practices affecting spring semester community college transfer students at one four-year institution. The effect of the institutional practices on the spring semester transfer students' experiences was explored as well. Focus groups were conducted to determine the students' experiences, and interviews were conducted to determine the institutional practices.

The student experiences and institutional practices demonstrated that there were important timing considerations when transferring from a community college to the four-year institution in the spring semester. Both the student and the institution contributed to the process and had an impact on the success of the transfer. Consistent

with the analytical results, the following summary will be divided into academic, social, and personal categories.

Academic Integration

Student experiences. Academically, the students reported that most of the impediments to a successful transfer related to academic advising and academic adjustment. They experienced difficulties in the following areas: transferring credits, registering for classes; receiving sufficient advising; and, adjusting to the class difficulty, class size, and classroom atmosphere of the four-year institution. Research has demonstrated that poor advising, including insufficient information about the transfer process through limited written materials, and inadequate advice from other people, including counselors, impeded the transition of community college transfer students to four-year institutions (Vaala, 1989). Additionally, larger class sizes, heavier workload requirements, and lack of interaction with professors at four-year institutions were major difficulties for community college students after transferring (Vaala, 1989).

Less frequently, students reported experiences that promoted academic integration, especially within the sub-theme of academic advising. Some students did not have a difficult time with transferring credits, registering for class, and academic advising. Those students reported that their credits transferred readily, they had no problem registering for classes, and the advisors were friendly and helpful.

Institutional practices. Several institutional practices hindered spring semester transfer students' academic integration, especially practices related to academic advising. Spring semester transfer students are at a disadvantage because of the application deadline of the four-year institution. Since many students were taking classes at another institution in the fall, forwarding final transcripts from the transfer institution usually could not occur until January. As one transfer counselor pointed out, spring transfer students only had one month between semesters before transferring, whereas fall transfers had the entire summer between transferring to take care of paperwork.

Spring semester transfer students also did not have the opportunity to take additional classes over the summer to fulfill additional requirements. These courses would be beneficial to the transfer student because the admission policy was to give preference to students who have made a good start towards fulfilling the university's general education requirements.

Institutional policies regarding registration were also identified. In addition to uncertainty about what credits would transfer, delays in receiving the final transcript from the transfer institution affected academic advising and class registration for spring semester transfer students. They did not know what courses were going to transfer until the final transcript was analyzed. Also, since the spring registration process for current students occurs in October, when most prospective transfer students are still in the application process, the transfer students do not find the same

course availability. By the time spring transfer students are able to register, there are often limited seats available in required courses.

Additionally, each college in the institution under study operated fairly autonomously, which resulted in spring transfer students being processed under different sets of guidelines and timetables. The students initiated the admission process when they contacted the Admission Office, accepted the offer of admission, and submitted transcripts from the transfer institution. Then, the Admission Office forwarded transfer students' names to their colleges. Thus, the timeliness with which students applied, the efficiency with which the Admission Office processed their application, and the timeliness with which transfer students accepted offers of admission dictated the initial phase of the transfer process. Thereafter, students were in the hands of each individual college. The colleges themselves were responsible for the rest of the process. Each college, and sometimes departments within the college, determined how quickly the transcripts are evaluated, what classes would transfer, and what assistance the students received in terms of advising. University policies related to academic advising and transfer credit become important because research has established that students who lose a significant amount of credits when transferring are less likely to graduate (Pincus & DeCamp, 1989).

An institutional practice promoting academic integration was the personalized advising transfer students received in the Admission Office. Since transfer students' needs are so individualized, they receive more one-on-one counseling from designated

transfer counselors than prospective freshmen receive. The individual attention may help explain the relatively low concern expressed by the transfer students regarding the application and admission process, and may have contributed to the positive academic advising experiences reported in the focus groups.

Social Integration

Student experiences. The social category was the only category in which one of the analyses reported a greater percentage of experiences promoting rather than impeding integration. The note card analysis demonstrated many socially integrative experiences in the sub-themes of extracurricular involvement and the social atmosphere. Though described as promoting social integration in the present study, transfer students in previous research reported that the expanded social life at the transfer institution was difficult to adjust to, since the social experience at the community college was more narrow and offered fewer opportunities for involvement (Conklin, 1993).

Though students reported many experiences that promoted social integration, the sub-theme of making friends was significant nevertheless. In the focus group discussion, the process of making friends received the majority of comments and words (impede, no effect, and promote) than any other social sub-theme. The largest percentage of comments were categorized as impeding social integration. Thus, enrolling mid-year with a smaller cohort, at a time when most friendships had already been established, hindered the process of making friends, even though students

reported a much more active social atmosphere in general at the four-year institution. This seems to be consistent with previous research that found that transfer students reported more friendships at the community college than at the four-year colleges they subsequently attended (Vaala, 1989), and were concerned about making friends after transferring to a four-year institution (Bauer & Bauer, 1994). Further, respondents in the present study made several comments indicating that, although academic and personal issues caused obstacles to a successful transition, those issues were resolved early, and the process of making friends and adjusting to the social atmosphere continued to plague them.

Institutional practices. Socially, there were not many policies that directly affected the transition of spring semester transfer students, although admitting a small cohort mid-year may hinder the progress of making friends. Most importantly, the institution should be aware that social issues continued to challenge students up to the seventh week of the semester, at a minimum, since this was when the focus groups used to collect data for this study were conducted.

Personal Integration

Student experiences. Previous research has found that transfer students were particularly interested in finding out about living arrangements and financial aid during orientation programs to four-year institutions (Sandeen & Goodale, 1976). Though housing and financial issues were important to the transfer students in the present study, students reported the university's failure to provide timely information

and adjusting to a new environment were the most significant personal issues posing barriers to personal integration. The lower than expected concern regarding housing could be attributed to the fact that on-campus housing is always available for spring transfer students requesting it at the institution under investigation. However, it was receiving insufficient information about concerns such as tuition, student services, orientation, transportation, and other general issues specific to the institution that impeded the spring transfer students' integration. Other impediments that students reported that frequently affected a successful transition included the process of relocating, getting ready to begin classes, inclement weather, and adjusting to a new roommate and people on campus.

The note cards, however, reported a significant amount of personal adjustment experiences that promoted integration. These comments were often related to having a friend or roommate on campus who served as a support in their adjustment to the four-year institution.

Institutional practices. Previous research has identified one barrier to the transfer students' adjustment to four-year institutions as "transfer shock," which includes the new policies, procedures, and regulations that transfer students encounter at the receiving institution (Graham, 1987; Graham & Dallam, 1986). The practices of the institution under investigation most affecting the spring semester transfer students' personal integration were the admissions process and deadlines. The students did not receive notification about orientation or other events that were occurring on

campus unless their names were in the student database. Names were not entered in the database until students accepted an offer of admission. Offers of admission were determined by how early the student initiated the application process, how efficiently the Admissions Office forwarded the students' names to the various offices and colleges on campus, and the process of distributing information in each office or college. Thus, the efficiency in which the Admissions Office processed the students' applications, how early the students applied, and how quickly they accepted the offer of admission determined much of what followed in terms of information. Since students could be admitted to the university after the October 1 deadline, up through the first week of classes, many spring transfers may have missed informative mailings, tuition bills, and other notices sent out by various offices and departments across campus.

Institutional practices regarding when the residence halls open and when classes begin may also impede transfer students' experiences. Since the residence halls do not open until the Saturday before classes begin, and some spring transfer students may have just received their housing assignments a day or two earlier, spring transfer students living on campus may not have ample time to adjust to the new atmosphere. There are many details a new student must take care of within the first few days of arrival at the institution. The number of spring students admitted to the institution also served to affect the transition. If only a small number of students enroll in the spring semester, many offices do not provide the same services, especially during opening

weekend (loft and refrigerator sales for example), as they do for the large number of students who matriculate fall semester.

Holding the spring orientation meeting the day before classes start may also impede the transfer students' personal integration. If the students enrolled late, they may not have received notification about the session. Other students may have wanted to attend, but were busy moving in and taking care of other personal matters.

Obtaining on-campus housing for the spring semester is not problem at the institution under study. If desired, all spring semester transfer students have traditionally received on-campus housing. However, housing is not guaranteed for the following year, and can be difficult to obtain. Though the application deadline does not occur until the end of the first week of the spring semester to allow spring transfer students the opportunity to apply, it only gives them a week to decide if they want to remain on campus the following year. This can be a hard decision. Because they just enrolled, many spring transfer students are uncertain about finding roommates for the following year.

Though not a frequent concern articulated by the students in this study, transfer students cannot receive the appropriate amount of financial aid for their class level until the final transcript is evaluated and the credits processed and entered into the student database. The delays in processing financial aid may have caused additional stress to the students' transition, especially since financial concerns were commonly cited by other transfer students as critical to their transfer experience

(Vaala, 1991). Though some four-year schools have increased financial aid packages, and, as the institution under investigation has, created scholarships designed to meet the needs of community college transfer students (Masat, 1980), financial aid continued to be an issue of concern to transfer students.

Implications for Future Practice

Tinto demonstrated that college students are more likely to persist when they are academically and socially integrated (Tinto, 1975). Ensuring that transfer students are academically, socially, and personally integrated would serve the institution by stabilizing enrollments, and serve transfer students by attaining a degree. Being aware of the special needs of spring semester transfer students in academic, social, and personal areas is the first step. Though some institutional practices are not subject to change, modifying some practices to encourage integration would be beneficial to all.

Four-year institutions can encourage academic integration by speeding up the transfer evaluations. This could be done through the centralization of evaluations, an issue under investigation at the institution under study. Institutions can also require preliminary evaluations at the time of application, as the College of Arts and Sciences does. Providing spring transfer students with detailed and uniform information about registration would also be helpful, as would reserving some seats in required courses for transfer students. Designating one counselor in each college as a transfer counselor, as the College of Business does, might also reduce the confusion spring transfers experience in academic matters.

Socially, four-year institutions could provide more opportunities for interaction for spring semester transfer students. Holding a student activities fair in January would encourage involvement, not only from spring transfer students. A student group just for transfer students, in the reorganization phase at the institution under study, could teach transfer students about the social atmosphere and let them know they are not alone.

To promote the personal integration of spring semester transfer students, four-year institutions could provide more general information to prospective transfer students at the time of application. Opening all offices the weekend before classes begin, a new policy at the institution under study, and providing as many student services as possible, should ease the transition of spring transfer students.

Additionally, orientation programs could address spring transfer students' needs in all three categories. Such programs could address academic needs by providing academic advising and class registration, could address social needs by providing opportunities for making friends and becoming involved both on- and off-campus, and could address personal needs by providing a thorough review of available services. The respondents in the study would have benefitted from such an orientation program.

Implications for Future Research

This study revealed several additional avenues for research. Many of the administrative interviews revealed rapidly changing state and institutional policies

regarding community college transfer students. A thorough investigation of those policies, and their effect on the transfer process would add to the current body of literature.

Finally, a comparison of fall and spring semester transfer students would be beneficial to the existing research concerning transfer students. Since this study was exploratory in nature, it did not allow for a thorough comparison, but would be worthwhile for future research.

Limitations

As with all research, the present study was not without some limitations. First, this study was limited because only one four-year institution was studied. The experiences are not generalizable to other populations of spring semester transfer students.

Second, the study was limited to students transferring from community colleges. The sample was selected using information reported by the student as the last institution attended. While some students may have attended community colleges for a year or more prior to transferring, other students may have taken only one class at a community college during the summer before transferring. Still other students may have attended a community college, but may not have listed that community college on the application, and hence, were not considered in selecting the sample.

Additionally, most of the students in the investigation transferred from in-state colleges. Students from other states may have significantly different transfer

experiences. There is a strong relationship between the state community college system and the four-year institution under study, which may not parallel the experiences of students transferring from out of state institutions. The strong relationship between the state community college system and the four-year institution may not be typical to other state systems.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study inform four-year institutions about many barriers spring-semester community college transfer students face in their integration into the four-year campus. Issues such as application deadlines, different practices among autonomous academic colleges, distribution of general information, and the communication between the community college and the four-year institution are all institutionally driven issues affecting the transfer process.

Other issues, such as making friends and having support at the four-year institution, are not as directly affected by the academic administrative units, but are significant issues nevertheless, and ones which student affairs administrators may wish to address. Providing support and opportunities for interaction may help the transition of spring transfer students, thereby retaining these students, which, in turn, helps the institution stabilize its enrollment.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Invitation

Dear (Transfer Student):

Do you want to earn money for simply talking about your experiences? You are invited to participate in a study evaluating the experiences of transfer students at [name of institution]. As a component of my master's thesis, this study is designed to identify the specific experiences of spring transfer students. You will receive \$10 for participating in the study. Several group meetings will be held February 26-27 to talk about your experiences trying to transfer to, and since arriving at [name of institution]. If you are able to join us to discuss your experiences with fellow transfers, please review the schedule and call 231-9207 or 552-3376 to confirm a time. Thanks for your help!

Sincerely,

Lori E. Walker
Graduate Student
College Student Affairs

Monday,	February 26	3:30 - 5:00pm
Monday,	February 26	8:00 - 9:30pm
Tuesday,	February 27	3:30 - 5:30pm
Tuesday,	February 27	8:00 - 9:30pm

All meetings will take place in __.

***** If the above times are not convenient and you would like to participate, please call me at the above numbers as well.**

The results of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will be distinguished from any information you provide and only a subject number will identify you in any written reports of the research. The sessions will be audio recorded and the tapes will be destroyed after two years. You will receive an Informed Consent Form to review and sign before the session.

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

- I. Introduction of the facilitator and participants (5-10 minutes)
- II. Note card Exercise (20 minutes)
- III. Discussion (60 minutes)
- VI. Thank you and farewell

Overview of focus group

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the focus group today. I am a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program in the College of Education. I am doing research on spring semester transfer students as a component of my master's thesis. The purpose of conducting the focus group is to examine spring-semester community college transfer students' experiences and the institutional policies affecting them. This session will be tape-recorded and transcribed to assist in my evaluation, but names and any identifying characteristics will be excluded in the analysis and reported results.

I am going to pass out some blank note cards. Please write down one concern or experience you have as a transfer student per note card on as many note cards as you like. Then we will sort them into categories as a group and discuss them. Please feel free to be open in the discussion, giving specific examples through stories or whatever else you feel comfortable sharing with the group.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Admissions

1. What is the process for spring transfers? (When do you begin accepting applications, what is the deadline, when do you begin and end notification of admission?)
2. How do you determine admission criteria? (academically, socially, personally)
3. How do the GPA, attrition rates, etc., compare for spring transfers?
4. What kind of interaction do you have with the spring transfers after admission?

Registrar

1. What is the registration process for spring transfers?
2. How do you determine transfer credit?
3. What deadlines do you have to evaluate spring transfer transcripts?
4. What interaction do you have with spring transfers?

Financial Aid

1. What is the process for spring transfers? (When do you begin accepting applications, what is the deadline, when do you notify students of their awards?)
2. What criteria are used to award aid to spring transfers?
3. What type of interaction do you have with spring transfers?
4. Are any funds reserved for spring transfers?

Student Accounts

1. When do bills go out to spring transfers?
2. What deadlines do you impose for spring transfers?
3. What type of interaction do you have with spring transfers?

Residential and Dining Programs

1. What is the procedure for application for housing and meal contracts for spring transfers?
2. Are there deadlines to apply for housing/meal contracts for spring transfers?
3. Are RAs trained, or advised, to deal with spring transfers?
4. What interaction do you have with spring transfers?

Orientation

1. What is the orientation process for spring transfers?
2. Are any resources provided to help spring transfers adjust?
3. What interaction do you have with spring transfers?

Academic Advising

1. What is the process for evaluating credits for spring transfers? (deadlines, notification, etc.)
2. How many credits are generally accepted for spring transfers?
3. What interaction do you have with spring transfers?

Appendix D: List of Majors of Focus Group Participants



List of Majors of Focus Group Participants

Major within College	Number of Students
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences	
Agriculture and Applied Economics	1
College of Architecture and Urban Studies	
Architecture	2
College of Arts and Sciences	
Psychology	3
Computer Science	2
Biology	2
Spanish	1
Geography	1
International Studies	1
Communication Studies	1
Statistics	1
Business	
Business	1
Management	1
Marketing	1
Finance	1
Management Science	1
Education	
Technology Education	1
Forestry and Wildlife Resources	
Forestry and Wildlife	3
Human Resources	
Human Nutrition and Foods	1

Appendix E: List of Colleges Attended by Focus Group Participants

List of Colleges Attended by Focus Group Participants

<u>College Attended</u>	<u>Number of Students Who Attended</u>
Northern Virginia Community College	13
Tidewater Community College	5
George Mason University	2
New River Community College	2
Old Dominion University	2
Berklee College of Music	1
Catholic University	1
City College of Chicago, Europe	1
Community College of Philadelphia	1
Danville Community College	1
Lord Fairfax Community College	1
Louisiana State University	1
Lynchburg College	1
Montgomery County Community College	1
Patrick Henry Community College	1
Santa Monica City College	1
University of Maryland	1
University of Maryland, Europe	1
University of Rhode Island	1

<u>College Attended</u>	<u>Number of Students Who Attended</u>
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University of Virginia	1
Virginia Commonwealth University	1
Wytheville Community College	1

LORI E. WALKER

EDUCATION

Master of Arts in Education, Student Personnel Services
May 1996, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts, English and Spanish; Minor: Psychology, Cum Laude
May 1991, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia

EXPERIENCE

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Community Assistant

Residential and Dining Programs, Division of Student Affairs
Virginia Tech, August 1995 - present

- Recruit, train, and supervise students for 49 residence hall night monitor positions and six fitness room monitor positions for a community of more than 2,000 residents
- Facilitate Resident Advisor and Hall Council training sessions on programming and funding issues
- Advise Hall Councils regarding leadership and university policy
- Administer four Resident Advisor and Hall Council budgets totaling \$5,100

Assistant to Financial Aid Counselor

Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid, Division of Enrollment Services
Virginia Tech, December 1994 - July 1995

- Reviewed financial aid applications and awarded aid packages
- Examined scholarship contracts and determined grant awards
- Edited and redesigned financial aid forms and publications

Research Assistant

Student Personnel Services Program, College of Education
Virginia Tech, August 1994 - December 1994

- Designed and implemented project to recruit diverse students to program
- Conducted campus visits to four historically black colleges and universities to promote program and interview candidates
- Entered and analyzed data for Department Chair's research project

PRACTICA**Counseling and Career Education Centers**

Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale, Virginia, Summer 1995

- Advised students on course selection in scheduled sessions and as walk-ins
- Evaluated the success of campus efforts in Freshman Advising Sessions
- Created handouts on interview skills and job search issues
- Assisted students using computer programs and resources

Dean of Students Office

Division of Student Affairs, Virginia Tech, Spring 1995

- Advised an orientation and support group for transfer students
- Created officer training and resource manual
- Conducted survey of fall and spring transfer students regarding their experiences in the transfer process

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**Co-facilitator, Introduction to Residence Education**

Residential and Dining Programs, Virginia Tech, Spring 1996

- Present class sessions on student development theory, community development, diversity, educational programming, peer helping, confrontation skills, time and stress management, and study skills for training class
- Evaluate trainees' performance and provide feedback weekly

Member, Resident Advisor Recruitment and Selection Committee
Residential and Dining Programs, Virginia Tech, Fall 1995

- Planned and assisted in the recruitment and selection of 1996-1997 resident advisor staff
- Evaluated application materials and interviewed resident advisor candidates

Chair, Lecture Series Committee
Graduate Student Assembly, Virginia Tech, Fall 1995 - present

- Solicit and review graduate students' applications for funding of speakers
- Approve funding for graduate student-sponsored lectures

Facilitator, Mock Interview Program
Career Services, Virginia Tech, 1995

- Interviewed student in simulated interview situation
- Provided feedback regarding students' performance and provided suggestions for improvement

Treasurer, Association for Student Development
Virginia Tech, 1995

- Administered account for professional activities for graduate student organization

Member, Phi Kappa Phi, Spring 1995 - present

Member, American College Personnel Association, Fall 1995 - present

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Client Services Billing Specialist
National Health Laboratories, Herndon, Virginia, January 1992 - August 1994

- Set up and administered sensitive client accounts for Billing Department
- Resolved client concerns regarding billing and customer service
- Developed policies and procedures for handling contact with sensitive accounts

Lori E Walker