Transfer Seminar: A Case Study of Transfer Students’ Experiences at a Private, Four-Year College in Brooklyn, New York, Using Tinto’s Model of Persistence

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Matthew R. Kubacki

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand transfer students’ experiences of their transition to a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. Of particular focus are the students’ experience of a Transfer Seminar required of transfer students in their first semester of enrollment at this institution, and how the experience of this Transfer Seminar affected the transition and the re-enrollment of these students in subsequent semesters. The research question this study sought to answer is as follows: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist?

Data collection included document review of course materials and face-to-face interviews. Participants for the interviews were 10 alumni from this institution who have transferred to this institution, successfully completed the Transfer Seminar, and since graduated from this institution. Data was analyzed using descriptive coding. The majority of participants perceived that the Transfer Seminar positively affected their decisions to re-enroll in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation at this institution. Namely, the Transfer Seminar provided the participants with a comfort level at the institution, a welcoming environment, the academic and social foundation of the institution, and support from the faculty and staff.

Keywords: transfer student, persistence, retention, transition
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this case study is to understand transfer students’ experiences of their transition to a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. Of particular focus are the students’ experience of a Transfer Seminar required of transfer students in their first semester of enrollment at this institution, and how the experience of this Transfer Seminar affected the transition and the re-enrollment of these students in subsequent semesters. Because students transfer into this institution from a wide variety of other institutions and have a wide variety of academic and personal backgrounds themselves, the transfer population at the focus of this study will be that general one, defined as those students who enroll at this institution after having enrolled at a different institution in the past.

The Transfer Seminar is defined as a for-credit academic and social support mechanism for the purpose of assisting transfer students to transition to and integrate within the learning environment of the institution. Knowledge generated from this study can inform practices regarding strategies for retention, student support, and student success, as well as encourage and enhance the collaboration between offices of academic affairs, student affairs, and enrollment management. This study may also provide insight into the transfer student experience, which would allow this and other institutions proactively to create or focus support mechanisms to increase the likelihood of retention and persistence to graduation for the transfer student population. Lessons learned from this study could provide a blueprint for how to develop intervention programs and support mechanisms for this student population.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to the common transfer student experience and the support mechanisms related to that experience to provide context and
background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study are discussed next, drawing connections to the potential beneficiaries of this research. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

**Context and Background**

The context of this research focuses on intervention strategies that stem from an institutional problem of practice. That problem is the decreasing and unpredictable retention rate of transfer students at a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), “while total undergraduate enrollment increased by 37 percent between 2000 and 2010, enrollment in 2013 was 3 percent lower than in 2010” (NCES). Undergraduate enrollment is only projected to increase 12 percent between 2013 and 2024 (NCES). While this is still growth, it is a slower rate of growth than was seen in the previous decade. Many four-year colleges and universities are reacting to this phenomenon by focusing more than ever on strategies for student retention (Tinto, 2006-2007; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Retaining students who transfer to a new institution in the middle of their undergraduate experience poses unique challenges, since they have already left one institution (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kurland & Siegel, 2013; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). The focus of this study is on the student experience of a semester-long Transfer Seminar as a particular intervention strategy to support transfer students’ transitions and persistence at the institution.

While there is a substantial amount of information to provide institutions with the basic facts about the progress of transfer students (Kozeracki, 2001), data on particular interventions that can affect transfer student success and retention are less readily available. Many students
characterize the transfer transition as a chaotic and confusing time (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Kurland & Siegel (2013) found a strong relationship between secure student attachment and the overall psychological health of this student population on the whole. For example, securely attached students reported low levels of depression and anxiety. More anxious students performed worse academically in college than they had in high school (Kurland & Siegel, 2013), which shows that institutions of higher learning need to be concerned with the processes by which they are supporting students’ secure transitions to the school itself, to limit or lessen this anxiety. Stewart and Martinello (2012) found that students transferring from community colleges to universities face a difficult transition, yet once they identify these differences, or when an institution addresses them preemptively through support mechanisms, the college transfer students’ performances improve markedly. Therefore, this study sought to understand the transfer student experience relative to the experience and completion of this Transfer Seminar, which has transfer student transition at its focus in order to increase the likelihood of retention and, ultimately, student persistence to graduation.

Regarding the particular institution where the Transfer Seminar was implemented, while general student retention at this institution stands stable at or around 80% from year one to year two, the transfer student population has a retention rate that has been more volatile, with that rate showing steady decreases in recent years. In the academic years 2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14, the one-year rate of retention for transfer students fluctuated from 69 percent to 81 percent to 70 percent. In part to address this issue, the Transfer Seminar was piloted in the spring semester of 2013 and became a required part of the curriculum in the fall of 2013. In the academic year 2014-15, the one-year retention rate for transfer students climbed to 75 percent.
While most courses at this institution are three credits, the Transfer Seminar is a one-credit course, and incoming transfer students are required to enroll in the course in their first semester of matriculation. The Transfer Seminar sought to introduce and transition transfer students to the institution by addressing many aspects of the ethos of the institution, including its goals and mission; a presentation of the institution’s support services and resources; academic and research skills; and opportunities for campus and community involvement. In addition to the coverage of academic and research skills, self-reflective writing assignments are given to encourage students’ own critical thinking on their experience of transfer. The topics of the Transfer Seminar are interwoven with reflective journals and discussion on each student’s personal transfer journey to this institution, a connection of research to his or her academic area of study or interest, and a capstone essay including a discussion of academic, professional, and personal goals. This Transfer Seminar course can be a lens through which to study how transfer students engage with the institution and how they experience the transition and integration into academic and student life.

**Rationale and Significance**

One significant complication for the issue of student retention in general is the increased mobility of current students relative to those in the past. Borden (2004) found that the majority of 18- to 24-year olds, not to mention older students, do not experience college education in a linear fashion of four consecutive years at the same institution. What is more common for institutions to experience is the concept of “student swirl,” which is characterized by the back-and-forth, multi-institutional attendance pattern among students (de los Santos & Wright, 1990). This student swirl poses problems for retention and institutional planning in general, and the more
recent increase in distance learning options for students in particular is only increasing the likelihood of swirl.

Focusing on the increasing population of transfer students could address a common area of attrition. Overall, native students are retained at higher rates than are transfer students (Ishitani, 2008), and because of this transfer students can be thought of as a population particularly at risk for attrition. Although there is a significant amount of research on transfer students, most of that research comes from the perspective of the two-year community college, from where most transfer students transition. That perspective causes the studies to focus primarily on what can be done to prepare students for transfer, getting them ready for future transition. This study’s focus is on the four-year institution, the institution to where most transfer students transition. Therefore, the perspective focuses on a central problem – what strategies can a welcoming institution provide to support and ease a transfer student’s transition, regardless of what has or has not been accomplished on this issue by the student’s previous institution.

With the goal of easing student transition comes the longer-term goal of retaining the transfer student and supporting him or her to graduation. The overall institutional goal is to make this present institution a student’s final transition on the transfer journey. This study’s focus on how transfer students experience their transition to this new institution and their experience during and after the completion of the Transfer Seminar can lead to an increased understanding of the issues involved in student transfer, relative to supporting student retention. The potential benefits of this study can be for the transfer students themselves by having an institution proactively identify areas of necessary support that can enhance student retention and persistence to graduation, for this particular institution by evaluating the efficacy of this support mechanism
of the Transfer Seminar within the institutional context, and for other four-year institutions that seek to enroll transfer students.

**Research Problems and Research Questions**

The research problem that guides this study is the need for an institution to become cognizant of the transfer student population’s needs in regard to retention. To do so, this study focuses on the student perception and experience of a Transfer Seminar required of incoming transfer students in their first semester of matriculation at this institution. The purpose of this study is to understand how transfer students perceive their transition to this institution and how they reflect on the experience of the Transfer Seminar and their subsequent decisions to re-enroll in subsequent semesters at this institution. Student perceptions were understood through the lens of Tinto’s (2006) findings on how an institution can enhance student persistence, which will be covered in more detail below. The research question this study sought to answer is as follows: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist?

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Transfer student** – student who enrolls at an institution after having completed any post-secondary work at another institution (Stewart & Martinello, 2012).

**Native student** – a student who began and continues at the same institution of original matriculation (Stewart & Martinello).

**Retention** – a measure of the rate at which institutions ensure a student’s continued enrollment (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012, p. 9).

**Persistence** – a student’s continual enrollment toward degree completion (Habley et al., 2012).
**Transition** – the process or period of a student’s entrance to a new institution (Tinto, 1988).

**Theoretical Framework**

This case study sought to understand how transfer students perceive their transition to this institution and how they reflect on the experience of the Transfer Seminar and decisions to re-enroll in subsequent semesters at this institution, using Tinto’s (2006) findings on how an institution can enhance student persistence. The context of this research focuses on intervention strategies that stem from an institutional problem of practice. That problem is the volatile retention rate of transfer students at a small, private, four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates.

Providing a theoretical starting point, Tinto’s (1975) Student Integration Model was the first to theorize the connection between academic and social integration of the student and the possible resultant effect on student retention at the institution of higher learning. This theory links closely with the phenomenon of transfer student integration to a new institution, particularly what programs or resources an institution can provide to support student integration and increase retention. Tinto’s model is a seminal theory that can provide the framework for study of this Transfer Seminar, an institutional program that addresses elements of both academic and social transition. As will be addressed below, this original theory has been revised over time to provide a framework of discussion on how an institution can enhance student persistence and an institution’s retention rate.

Since Tinto’s (1975) seminal study, much research has been done on student retention. Where once student attrition was understood to be a psychological issue related to the student’s lack of motivation or ability to persist (Tinto, 2006b), Spady (1970) began to view attrition as an
institutions’s responsibility. Spady’s study influenced Tinto (1975) to formalize a theory he called the Student Integration Model, connecting academic and social integration with institutional retention.

The Student Integration Model is based in part on Durkheim’s (1897) theory of suicide, which posited that suicide was an effect of an individual’s withdrawal after not socially integrating into society. Tinto (1975) built his theory on this social model, adding academics as an integral element, and linked the idea to student attrition, in that students who did not successfully integrate to an institution academically and socially stood a greater chance of withdrawal and attrition. The Student Integration Model considers formal and informal academic and social experiences that determine a student’s level of institutional integration (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). The student’s level of integration shapes a student’s commitment level (Tinto, 1975), which is what was found to determine the likelihood of student persistence and retention.

Contributing to academic and social integration in the Student Integration Model are individual student characteristics (expectations and motivations), family background, and prior educational experiences (Tinto, 1975). These attributes lead to a student’s level of commitment to achieving his or her goals, as well as a student’s commitment to the institution itself, all issues that apply readily to the integration of newly enrolled students transferring to an institution.

Tinto’s continued research on student retention saw his original theory evolve. The first major change was in creating stages that could relate to student withdrawal and attrition. Tinto (1988) described the process of integration to a new environment as having three specific stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. “Separation” is the stage in which a student moves away from a previous environment or way of thinking, whether it is that of high school, a former institution of higher learning, work, family, or peers, and becomes a student at a new institution
of higher learning (Swail, et al., 2003). In the “transition” stage, the student recognizes and attends to stresses related to the “separation” stage, while also recognizing that he or she has not fully integrated into the new environment or institution (Swail, et al.). The final, “incorporation” stage is characterized by a student’s acceptance as a member of a new environment and community, which signifies integration (Swail, et al.). Tinto (1988) found that student attrition likely occurs with a disconnect in one of the two first stages of integration. Because of this, the stages of separation and transition have become the foci of much retention research, and practitioners have emphasized the same importance in addressing these stages in institutional programming.

Later, Tinto (1993) identified five primary factors that influence student persistence: student goals, commitments, institutional experiences, integration, and high school outcome (academic preparedness) (Porchea, Allen, Robbins & Phelps, 2010). Academic preparedness has become one of the strongest indicators of student persistence (Porchea et al.).

Forming the particular framework of the present study, Tinto (2006) then expanded the Student Integration Model in regard to persistence for a student integrating into the life of the institution. The first element in facilitating academic integration is a faculty member’s high academic expectations, characterized by clear and consistent guidelines that compel students to study the given material. The second element for academic integration is support from the faculty, staff, and the curriculum. Third, timely, accurate, and sensitive feedback on academic work to students provides students with opportunities to understand their academic strengths and weaknesses. According to Tinto, students who understand their strengths and weaknesses experience increased institutional integration. The fourth and final element T into found was student involvement in learning. Students who are more actively involved in learning do tend to
become more socially integrated as well. Because these four elements address primarily academic concerns, Tinto’s (2006) revised theory is what comprises the framework through which to study the for-credit Transfer Seminar course.

**Critics**

Since its original publication in 1975, the Student Integration Model has been influential for other educational theorists in building their own theories for student retention. Bean (1982) furthered retention research by focusing on student intentions in developing the Path Model. Student motivation was the emphasis of Stage’s (1989) retention theory. Brower (1992) built on Tinto’s (1975) and Bean’s (1982) focus on the institution’s agency in affecting greater student retention by establishing the “life task” model and adding the element of how students shape their own experiences in higher education. And Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) moved to more formally connect Tinto’s (1975) Student Integration Model with Bean’s (1982) Path Model in a model linking an institution’s programming and student intention.

More recently, Kerby (2015) builds on the work of Tinto (1975) and Spady (1970) in first acknowledging that the higher education institution integrates the academic and social development of the student, and second in expanding the concept of student integration with the institution using classical sociological theory. Kerby’s critique of Tinto and Spady derives from the fact that more context is needed in understanding how external factors of the national and educational climate, internal factors such as that of the institution, and adaptive factors such as student resiliency all affect a student’s decision to persist in or dropout from an institution of higher education. Rather than encompassing Kerby’s (2015) more expanded focus on greater sociological factors, the present study sought to focus particularly on Tinto’s (2006) findings on how an institution itself can enhance student persistence through its own interventions.
Rationale of the Use of Tinto (2006)

Tinto’s (2006) revision of his retention model focuses primarily on a student’s academic integration into a new institution, which connects well to the study of the Transfer Seminar as an academic course used for transition, retention, and persistence purposes.

Tinto (2006-2007) called for a model of institutional action that could provide a guideline for effective policies and programs an institution can use to support student retention. This Transfer Seminar could provide an example of such a particular institutional action, one through which to study the particular student population of transfer students, to determine the efficacy of the program regarding student retention. As such, it could provide such a model that Tinto called for, for this particular student population. To determine the Transfer Seminar’s efficacy, Tinto’s (2006) findings on enhancing student persistence form the theoretical framework of this study.

In order to achieve insight into the factors contributing to student integration, this study sought to understand students’ own perceptions on their transfer experience, their experience of transition to the new institution, and their evaluation of the Transfer Seminar and its possible effect on their own persistence and retention.

Because of the case study approach, students’ own perceptions were understood through a variety of data gathering methods, document review of course materials from the Transfer Seminar course and face-to-face interviewing of students who have successfully completed the Transfer Seminar and have since graduated from this institution. Through these forms of data collection, data was gathered and related back to Tinto’s (2006) findings. In particular, the data collected was analyzed in terms of the four major topics: a faculty member’s high expectations for student learning; the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum; frequent and timely feedback on student academic performance; and student involvement in the campus community.
How effectively students perceive that the Transfer Seminar addresses these four topics comprised the framework through which the data collected was analyzed.

The case study approach of this study investigated students’ own perceptions on the Transfer Seminar they took in their first semester of transfer, and sought to understand their views of how this transfer seminar affected their decisions to persist at the institution, all in terms of Tinto’s (2006) findings. Because of this, perhaps this research could affect how institutions provide interventions of support and resources for the transfer student population to increase their own rates of retention.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Because the general topic of this study is on an institutional strategy and intervention focused on retention, this literature review is organized based on Tinto’s (2006) findings on enhancing student persistence from the institutional point of view, in order to increase rates of student retention. In particular, the purpose of this case study is to understand the relationship between the completion of a Transfer Seminar and the integration and retention of transfer students at a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York. The context of the study stems from an institutional problem of practice, the decreasing and unpredictable rate of retention of transfer students from the academic years 2011-12 to 2013-14 at this institution, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. In spring 2013, the Transfer Seminar was piloted, becoming a required course in the curriculum for entering transfer students during their first semester of matriculation.

This topic of transfer student retention and the efficacy of institutional intervention related to it has growing significance. Transfer students comprise a growing population, as it is widely acknowledged that many postsecondary students no longer take what has been commonly called a traditional path to college and graduation (Borden, 2004). In addition, transfer student transition to a new institution is oftentimes characterized by stress, chaos, and confusion, with academic, psychological, and environmental challenges (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). While much research has been done covering transfer students in general and the issues surrounding their transitions (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kurland & Siegel, 2013; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013), much less has been focused on studying the efficacy of particular intervention strategies an institution can implement to address common transfer student issues related to retention.
To address the above topics and their significances, the four main sections to this literature review relate specifically to four categories found by Tinto (2006) to enhance student persistence at an institution. These four are as follows: high expectations for student learning; the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum; frequent and timely feedback on student academic performance; and student involvement in the campus community (Tinto, 2006). Each of these sections will be covered in turn, and the research will be analyzed and explained in terms of the relations to transfer student population.

**High Expectations of Student Learning**

The first main topic of this literature review is the overview of how high expectations for student learning relates to the entrance of a transfer student to a four-year institution. According to Tinto (2006), students learn best when held to high expectations for their learning and provide clear and effective guidelines for what is expected for student success. An institution’s high expectations can be viewed through the subsections of grade point average and student success, and the expectation differences between a two-year and a four-year institution.

**Grade Point Average and Student Success**

It is essential that the academic expectations of the institution be conveyed in a clear manner (Kippenhan, 2004). Related to the student success of transfers, Stewart and Martinello (2012) examined first-year grades and course withdrawals to find differences between the performances of native and transfer students, finding that students transferring from community colleges to universities face a difficult transition, yet once they identify these differences – or when an institution addresses them preemptively through support mechanisms – the college transfers students’ performances improve markedly. Laanan (2001) commented on conflicting data surrounding transfer students, as studies range from noting transfer shock – characterized by
an initial drop in Grade Point Average (GPA) – to transfer ecstasy – characterized by an increase of GPA after transfer. Laanan’s (2001) findings point to the fact that over time transfer students can transition and find success in their new institution, including a resultant increase in GPA.

In their study of Canadian transfer students, Stewart and Martinello (2012) found that final course grades for college transfer students were, on average, one percentage point higher than those of non-transfers, while those transferring from one university to another scored final grades that were two percentage points higher than non-transfer students. Students who experience difficulty in their early stages of transfer but persevere are able to recover and even flourish, demonstrating better academic performance in their second term than their non-transfer peers (Stewart & Martinello, 2012). These results point to the effects of an institution’s high expectations for student learning, as well as for the institution to put a priority on implementing strategies to make transferring an easy process through which a new student can move. Clearly stated high expectations can be stressed to help students navigate the rocky road, leading to less student frustration, a shorter period of transitional feeling, and quicker indications of student success.

Expectation Differences Between a Two-Year and a Four-Year Institution

While there is a substantial amount of information to provide institutions with the basic facts about the progress of transfer students, what is less readily available are data that examine the factors that affect student success and that explore the effectiveness of two-year community colleges in preparing students to transfer (Kozeracki, 2001). Kates (2010) found that institutions need to focus greater attention on pedagogy and practice to address academic differences between a two-year community college and a four-year college or university. While transfer students by definition have college experience, they may need intervention regarding time
management, study skills, library resources, and learning literacy, such as how to read a syllabus. A four-year institution taking time to provide these seemingly remedial tasks and clarify their expectations for success can help smooth the transfer transition and help as many students as possible succeed (Kates, 2010).

Laanan (2001) referred to the transfer transition period as rife with psychological, academic, and environmental challenges, while also stating its paramount importance to maintaining access to higher education. These challenges are due to the environmental differences between the two-year and the four-year institution. Consequently, students must be made aware of these differences, by either the two-year or the four-year institution, and preferably by both.

**Conclusion**

Transfer students, through having already gone through at least one transition to college, may have more of a primary focus on academic work than do their native counterparts. This could cause transfer students to disregard the social function of college life. The implications here are in the fact that more holistically integrated students – academically as well as socially – were found to be retained at a higher rate (Haynes, 2006). Yet, while the social aspect of institutional integration is an important one, the particular needs of the transfer student show that an institution’s high expectations for student learning will allow students to rise to the expectations set, allowing for a greater likelihood of student success over time and a resultant increase in the likelihood of retention by that institution.

**Support of Faculty, Staff, and the Curriculum**

The second main topic of this literature review is the necessity of the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum to enhance student persistence. Tinto (2006) stressed that the period of
transition to an institution of higher learning requires that students make a series of academic and social adjustments. Academic, social, and oftentimes financial support are needed to increase the likelihood of successful adjustments, transition to a new institution, and ultimate persistence at that institution (Tinto, 2006).

Multidirectional student movement calls for an institution to provide a range of transfer services and support from faculty, staff, and the curriculum as a whole. While Zamani (2001) focused on how community colleges can facilitate the preparation of their students who plan to transfer, four-year institutions need to be more welcoming and provide services on their end as well. Her study shows that the transfer process can immobilize many students who find the transfer transition particularly jarring, as policies related to transfer movement between community colleges and four-year institutions are inconsistent or nonexistent. These facts underline the importance of having strong support systems in place to assist transfer students in transitioning to a new institution. The support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum in general will form the structure of this section of the literature review. The support of faculty will be addressed as one subtopic, the support of staff will be subdivided into the sections on the general integration of support staff offices and support through orientation, and the support of the curriculum will be subdivided into sections on overall the curriculum structure and in particular the relation to first-year seminars.

**The Support of Faculty**

Academically, the transition period for transfers is also characterized by a more difficult time finding faculty and obtaining academic advising at the university than they were used to from their community college experience (Berger & Malaney, 2003). The study suggests that this could be due to the fact that the four-year school has a larger student enrollment or that these
processes are just new and students have to learn again how to navigate. Intrusive advising is the strategy for faculty advisors and advisement centers to anticipate student needs and concerns, to be proactive rather than reactive. Intrusive advising practices have been found to work well for insecurely attached students (2003) and could provide a useful and practical solution that would bridge the understanding of Kurland and Siegel’s (2013) focus on psychological factors related to transfer student transition and Berger and Malaney’s relation to academics.

Berger and Malaney (2013) also find that transfer students’ satisfaction with faculty and academic support, while still generally high, was lower than their general student satisfaction of any other facet of the college. This is extremely concerning, as faculty and academic advising can be seen as the hub of the student services wheel, providing the linkages with other support services, such as career development, counseling centers, offices of financial aid, and tutoring services (King, 1993). As such, academic advising has a direct impact on transfer student transition in a variety of ways. The support of faculty advisors and advising departments also plays a key role in helping students become integrated within the academic and social systems on campus (King, 1993).

The Support of Staff

General integration of support staff offices. In regard to the need for a holistic institutional approach to supporting the entering transfer student, Davies and Kratky (2000) provided the student perspective in their study, the findings of which showed that the issues surrounding the transfer process are widespread and need to be addressed by a variety of staff, offices, and departments throughout the institution. Davies and Kratky find that students express frustrations with the actual process of applying, gaining admission, transferring their credits, and registering for the courses in the new institution. Because of this, the institution must be
proactive in making these processes as clear and easy as possible. Doing so takes the support and integration of staff from the offices of enrollment management and admissions, academic departments, and academic advising, to name a few. Zamani (2001) also found that a student’s financial background and academic readiness for college-level work are strong indicators of student success, and students who have less support in these areas face greater barriers. This highlights the need for financial aid office staff and academic tutoring or remediation to be important and integrated aspects of such support early in the transfer student transition.

Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013) also observed the anxiety involved in the transfer process. They found that as soon as possible students need to acquire the knowledge necessary for navigating through the university. This knowledge is critical for students to succeed, as students who did receive support of counseling and wellness centers showed an increase in student success (Laanan, 2001). Overall, transfer students are seen to face stress, frustration, and even anxiety, leading to academic and social struggles. All of these issues contribute to transfer students’ at-risk status, making them a population an institution should endeavor to understand. Anticipating and supporting these major issues, and stemming their tide, can foster increased student satisfaction and retention. Beforehand, however, the issue of the transition period for transfer students entering a new institution must be addressed, along with the attendant support systems an institution can put in place. This period of transition is home to its own particular issues on a student’s journey, issues that can greatly affect and even determine a transfer student’s success and likelihood of retention (Kurland & Siegel, 2013).

Zamani (2001) found a strong correlation between transfer student success and particular support mechanisms an institution can put in place to address transfer challenges, such as dedicated on-site transfer centers, establishing cooperative admissions agreements, extending
outreach activities, clarifying articulation agreements between institutions, hosting transfer informational sessions, conducting four-year college campus tours, and creating innovative approaches to academic skills acquisition and tutoring programs. Any or all of these strategies could provide an institution with strategies for increasing student enrollment and retaining its present numbers.

With a multitude of institutions to choose from, colleges would be well advised to practice the view of students as consumers addressed in both Schertzer and Schertzer (2004) and Mullin (2012). This institutional communication and the integrated support needed to convey it, Davies and Kratky (2000) noted, should address usual transfer student concerns as varied as assistance with the application process, information about transfer events and tours, and scholarship, financial aid, and advising and tutoring services.

**Support through orientation.** Several studies name orientation and first-year seminars as key intervention strategies to foster smooth student transition (Davies & Kratky, 2001; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Townsend, 2014; Kippenhan, 2004; Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2009). However, the research differs in the manner, length, and focus of such orientation programming. In addition to orientation, there are other means of intervening in transfer students’ college experiences in order to assist and smooth transition and adjustment. These strategies range from the structuring of academic programs (Hovdhaugen, 2011) and advisement (Kippenhan, 2004). More research can be done on the specific effects of particular intervention methods and programs, yet these studies do raise issues that point to where that future research can go.

Davies and Kratky (2001) described a combination advising and orientation program that transfer students participated in voluntarily. Those who did participate in this program found it
helpful for information availability in particular, a quality of orientation programs found to be of critical importance for the early stages of transfer transition (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Yet, in their own study, Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013) found that students have mixed reactions about the benefits of the orientation program they experienced. One participant did not find it helpful, as the orientation did not address core issues, such as how to choose professors, the location of academic departments, and the organization of the faculty. Another student, while not finding the whole of the orientation necessarily helpful, did enjoy her experience as it made her feel more comfortable at the school. A few others reported very positive experiences, particularly on course registration and a general feeling of welcome (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013).

One of the major findings of Mayhew, Vanderlinden, and Kim (2010) was the strong relationship between having a dedicated office for orientation programs and orientation’s impact on student learning for first-year and transfer students. As well, transfers were found to be more likely than their first-year counterparts to credit orientation programming with helping them develop effective study and time management skills, adjust to academic demands, and understand professors’ expectations. The final factor that played a significant role in explaining orientation’s impact on student learning involved how orientation helped students learn how to access critical campus resources (Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2009). The strongest predictor of an orientation’s impact on academic and social learning was the students’ perceptions of ease in their transitions from high school to college (2004).

Varying populations of student also report different results on their experiences in orientation. Colleges will likely need to examine student expectations of orientation, while also taking into account how certain elements of their orientation programming could be enhanced to better meet both the academic and social needs of students. One particular element of new
student orientation was a student peer mentoring system (Warren-Sohlberg, Jason, Orosan-Weine, & Lantz, 1998; Townsend, 2014). Current students could more clearly speak to transfer student concerns from the student perspective, particularly if these mentors were themselves transfer students. Warren-Sohlberg, et al. (1998) stressed that transfer students, regardless of age, frequently experience a loss of social status and need to adjust to new peer groups. Student mentoring can provide information, social support, and opportunities to reflect on emotions and experiences. Advising offices, as well, can make sure from an institutional perspective their students’ needs are being met. Appropriate student advising at both the sending and the receiving institutions is critical to potential transfer students (Kippenhan, 2004).

The Support of the Curriculum

**The overall curriculum structure.** Tinto (2006) stressed the need for an institution to assess its curriculum in a structural and holistic way in order to enhance persistence and increase its rate of student retention. Tinto found that isolated steps do not show efficacy, as “simply adding on programs to the existing structure does not result in significant gains in persistence” (p. 7). Therefore, the structure itself must change to provide such needed support for these ends.

Internationally, Hovdhaugen (2011) concentrated on higher education reform in Norway, pointing to an interesting way to think about student retention and integration into a new institution. She posits that changes in program structure of an institution’s academic programs made the programs more attractive to students, presenting them with interesting combinations of courses that form appealing degrees. In addition, higher education institutions have made explicit potential employability in the various programs, making students’ options after completing a certain study program more visible.
The overall consequence of these structural changes was that more students persisted, due to a reduction in transfer rates. Rather than put the onus on orientation programs and student support offices for carrying all the weight of transfer student transition, Hovdhaugen (2011) put the responsibility on the institution as a whole, stressing the need to crafting programs of study that will more likely transition and retain students.

Related to student frustrations on the process of transfer found above in Davies and Kratky (2000) and Zamani (2001), students have been found to be concerned with the portability of their credits (Mullin, 2012). Institutions can prioritize clarity and timeliness in their approach to their transfer credit acceptance policies and how those policies are formed based on the flexibility of the curriculum itself. Such clarity and flexibility can anticipate the source of this common cause of transfer student frustration, and institutions can do well to anticipate such issues.

Additionally, students search intensively and actively for the right institution and demand satisfaction from their institution of choice (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004). Active marketing of the curriculum, values, atmosphere, and culture of an institution can better attract students whose values and expectations are in line with an institution’s characteristics (Tinto & Wallace, 1986). Matching the student with the institution can be viewed from a marketing perspective, and its importance should not be downplayed. One reason is that attracting students with academic and personal goals and values congruent to the institution’s lead to a match in understanding, identifying, meeting student needs and expectations (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004). Doing so will likely lead to greater student satisfaction. Student satisfaction, in turn, has a positive impact on student motivation, student retention, recruiting efforts, and even fundraising. Higher education has been resistant to viewing their students as “customers,” yet Schertzer and Schertzer (2004)
brought up strong reasons for doing so, as the customer-centered approach to servicing students can increase their satisfaction, leading to higher institutional commitment and ultimately higher retention.

**Relation to first-year seminars.** First-year seminar courses tailored to incoming entering students have long been proven to be an essential element in the successful academic performance and degree attainment (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001), and it is logical to think that tailoring such programs to the needs of transfer students could lead to the same types of successes. However, it is important that transfer students not be thought of as one and the same with first-year entering students. Kippenhan (2004) recommended that colleges provide orientation programs for transfer students that focus on their needs and are separate, but equal to, those offered for incoming freshmen. As Townsend (2014) found above, grouping transfers with freshmen could lead to confusion, detachment, and resentment.

**Conclusion**

While transfer students are a population at risk for attrition, an institution can support this population through its faculty, its staff, and its curriculum. Faculty support can be efficacious through advisement, while staff support needs to be integrated in various ways to serve the widespread needs of transfer students in their transitions, both through multi-pronged and even centralized transfer student support services and through particular and orientation services targeted to transfer students separately from entering first-year students. Finally, the support of the curriculum can come from a curriculum structure that is flexible in offering programs to attract transfers, open to the acceptance of transfer credits, and particularly providing a learning community that while alike to first-year seminar must also be targeted to the separate but equal needs of this transfer student population.
Frequent and Timely Feedback on Student Performance

While linked with the importance of the institution’s high expectations for student learning and the related support of students from faculty members, faculty feedback on student performance provides another key factor in student persistence (Tinto, 2006). Related to the specific location and context of the present study, the student-centered learning environment of the American liberal arts college in particular was found to have a positive indirect effect on the cognitive development of students. Students in these institutions were found in general to be exposed to more clearly organized classroom instruction and timely and frequent feedback on academic performance than in a larger research university, which led to a greater likelihood of deep learning (Pascarella, Wang, Trolian, & Blaich, 2013).

Valdez, Shea, Knutsen and Hoody (2014) reported on the efficacy of faculty formative feedback, finding that students perceived faculty feedback as beneficial, even in courses with student-directed activity and peer feedback mechanisms. The students in the study recommended that faculty feedback on student performance be used in all future courses.

Related to the quality of faculty feedback to students, Stern and Solomon (2006) found connections between faculty members’ substantive, macro-level feedback and subsequent student performance. The study analyzed faculty members’ rhetorical comments on 598 student papers from hundreds of courses housed in 30 academic departments. While finding such quality feedback from faculty was “surprisingly absent” (p. 37), Stern and Solomon conclude that providing substantive feedback to students at every opportunity is the best way to facilitate learning.

To put a fine point on this subject, Wiggins (2012) stressed that learning cannot occur without faculty feedback. He found that it was the student action to perform learning, coupled
with the attendant feedback and opportunities to apply it, that actually caused the learning itself, lending itself to one of the key factors in student persistence at an institution.

**Student Involvement in the Campus Community**

Moore, Lovell, McGann and Wyrick (1998) found a clear relation between student involvement in the campus community and student development and learning. Additionally, Tinto (1993) linked student involvement in the institution to his or her persistence at that institution. Yet, Tinto (2006) found that isolated learning, rather than integrated student involvement, is what characterizes the experience of most students, pointing to the need for institutions to build more learning communities that involve all students, fostering their engagement, their attachment to the institution, and subsequently their persistence.

Kurland and Siegel (2013) found that there is a strong relationship between secure student attachment to the institution and his or her overall psychological health, and that securely attached students reported low levels of depression and anxiety. Many students characterize the transfer transition as a chaotic and confusing time (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013), and schools would do well to address this transitional period related to a student experiencing a psychological trauma. More anxious students performed worse academically in college than they had in high school (Kurland & Siegel, 2013), which shows that institutions of higher learning need to be concerned with the processes by which they are supporting students’ secure attachments to the school itself.

Lester, Leonard, and Mathias (2013) also noted the demographics of transfer students: they are oftentimes older, hold full- or part-time jobs, and have significant family obligations. These students could devalue the social aspects of college, putting their priority in the classroom, leading to less of a feeling of social engagement with and involvement within the school.
Commonly, transfer students may find social engagement in the context of family and community, rather than in college life (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). Therefore, four-year institutions need to know that a transfer student expects the school to provide an academic function, over and above a social one, so that these particular student needs can be met. Too, transfer students are clear in not being first-year students, though they are beginning a transition to a new place as well. Transfers did not want to be treated like first-years, and found that many times the institution forgets to cater programs and opportunities for student involvement to their particular perspective (Townsend, 2014).

The Physical Space of Campus

In order to further the discussion of participants’ perceptions of their involvement on the campus community, Fetterman’s (2010) explanation of ethnographic research was utilized in the semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Such a survey question, according to Fetterman, is used to prompt a participant to explain his or her own experiences of the physical space, through human-scale interaction with it. Accordingly, the participant is able to provide an overview of the physical setting, his or her activities performed in that setting, and perceptions about those experiences in the space itself.

Summary

Because of the growing population of students who move from one institution to another (Borden, 2004), there is a growing need for postsecondary institutions to understand transfer students’ particular characteristics, expectations, and issues. This literature review has addressed its four main sections related specifically to the four categories found by Tinto (2006) to enhance student persistence at an institution: high expectations for student learning; the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum; frequent and timely feedback on student academic
performance; and student involvement in the campus community. The literature reviewed stressed that transfer students need clarification on what may be the higher academic expectations of the four-year institution, particularly when the student has transferred from a two-year institution. Creating and clarifying high academic expectations can lead to greater student success and, ultimately, persistence. As well, support for transfer students can also be achieved from faculty members and academic advisement; the integration of an institution’s support staff, offices, and orientation team; and a curriculum that is welcoming to transfers, both in its structure and in its targeted use of a derivation of the first-year seminar targeted to transfer students in particular. Faculty feedback is another way institutions can achieve increased rates of retention, as this element addresses a way to facilitate student development and learning. Receiving frequent and timely faculty feedback on their academic performance can dovetail with helping transfer students in understanding and meeting the high expectations of a new institution. Finally, student involvement is an important element in enhancing student persistence. And, while transfer students in general can be more focused on the academic aspect of the classroom than the social aspects of student involvement in the campus community, this student population can be enticed to become involved in the campus community when an institution targets such opportunities to transfer students in particular.

Based on the available literature, the Transfer Seminar that is the focus of this study can be viewed in terms of how well it addresses the four elements Tinto (2006) found to enhance student persistence: high expectations for student learning; the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum; frequent and timely feedback on student academic performance; and student involvement in the campus community. These elements must be tailored to the particular needs of this student population, yet when they are focused on the needs of transfer students, these
students can find greater student success, greater satisfaction with the institution’s processes and support services, a better likelihood of deep student learning, and an entrée into student involvement leading to a greater student attachment and commitment to the institution. Studying the Transfer Seminar based on Tinto’s (2006) findings can lead to an understanding of how an institution can create an intervention that supports student retention.
Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this case study is to understand transfer students’ experiences of their transition to a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. Of particular focus are the students’ experience of a Transfer Seminar required of transfer students in their first semester of enrollment at this institution, and how the experience of this Transfer Seminar affected the transition and the re-enrollment of these students in subsequent semesters.

The research question this study sought to answer is as follows: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist?

Qualitative Research Approach

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research occurs in a natural setting, with a researcher who is an instrument of data gathering. The data gathered is then analyzed inductively, and the meaning derived is focused on the participants involved (Creswell, 1998).

Because of its nature as holistic, qualitative research allows for face-to-face interviews and other data gathering methods, such as document review. In particular for this study, primary data was gathered from transfer students about their own experiences in transferring to this institution, their experiences during and after the Transfer Seminar, and their decision-making experiences in choosing to remain enrolled. This type of research could also allow for a contextual review of this Transfer Seminar course, in order to answer how efficacious it has been in providing transfer students with needed support during and after their initial transitions to the institution.
The research paradigm was constructivist-interpretivist. What distinguishes constructivism-interpretivism from positivism is the interaction between the subject and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005), finding the locus of study in that interaction. This paradigm would allow for students’ reflections on the experience of transition and of the Transfer Seminar, while also focusing on their process of meaning-making.

The case study approach was used for this research study. The main reason for this approach was because the proposed subject of transfer transition and the efficacy of a particular intervention of a Transfer Seminar to ease transition and increase retention at this institution addresses the context for the implementation of this intervention in regard to the students and the organization. Case study, as Creswell (1998) stated, allowed for an investigation of a wide variety of information about the case, in order to provide an in-depth picture of it (p. 39). The case, in this instance, was the experiences of those alumni who transferred into this institution, had successfully completed a Transfer Seminar course, and had since graduated from this institution. In particular, Stake’s (1995) constructivist-interpretivist methodology was used, which included interviews and document review.

This constructivist-interpretivist approach shaped the questions asked in the research in providing the focus on the student experience and perception of transfer into this institution, how the student experienced the Transfer Seminar, and what informed and impacted the student’s decision to re-enroll in subsequent semesters. Data was collected from face-to-face interviews with those alumni who had successfully completed this Transfer Seminar and who had since graduated from this same institution. These interviews addressed the alumni’s reflections on what was experienced in the transfer transition process and the Transfer Seminar that was then utilized in the decision-making process to re-enroll in subsequent semesters at this same
institution through the achievement of graduation. Document review was also included, in analyzing the course proposal (see Appendix A), course description (see Appendix B), and a sample course syllabus as it has been implemented (see Appendix C). This constructivist-interpretivist approach kept the focus on the holistic view of how transfer students have experienced the transition to this institution and how they have experienced this Transfer Seminar.

**Participants**

The participants for this case study were 10 alumni from this institution who have transferred to this institution, successfully completed the Transfer Seminar, and since graduated from this institution. Because of the nature of this institution and the make up of the alumni in general, this number included a variety of students in regard to school(s) previously attended, previous amount of credits earned, previous GPA, and educational goals.

The study occurred in two phases, the second of which required human participants. Phase One consisted of an analysis of the Transfer Seminar course proposal (see Appendix A), course description (see Appendix B), and a representative syllabus (see Appendix C). This was undertaken to provide an overview of the rationale for the course construction and how it has been implemented.

Phase Two consisted of face-to-face interviews with 10 alumni from those who have successfully completed this Transfer Seminar and have since graduated from this institution. These alumni were contacted using institutional data, provided through the institution’s Office of Institutional Research and the Office of Alumni Affairs.

The sample size of 10 alumni, all from varying perspectives, was a rationale stemming from Stake’s (1995) explanation that balance and variety is important in sample size, being that
an opportunity to learn from the experiences of these alumni is the focus. The sample sizes and variation of alumni data could provide differing angles and perspectives on the creation, implementation, and efficacy of the Transfer Seminar on the student experience of transfer transition and the experience of the Transfer Seminar on that transition and the decision to re-enroll in subsequent semesters, all the way to ultimate graduation.

**Procedures**

Stake’s (2005) constructivist-interpretivist methodology was utilized, which included two phases of data gathering in the form of document review and face-to-face interviews.

Phase One consisted of document review. Documents gathered for review were the initial course proposal for the Transfer Seminar (see Appendix A), the course description (see Appendix B), and a representative course syllabus (see Appendix C).

Phase Two consisted of 10 face-to-face interviews with participants who have successfully completed this Transfer Seminar and have since graduated from this institution. Institutional data was used to determine which students of the approximately 225 who have experienced this Transfer Seminar have since graduated from this institution. According to Stake (1995), “the interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). From this institutional data, 10 participants were randomly chosen for the face-to-face interviews. Randomizing occurred using Excel software by performing the randomizing function [fx=RAND()] on the institutional data set, choosing the first 10 names for initial contact and invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix D).

As individual potential participants from those initial contacted 10 either declined to be interviewed or did not respond to that or a follow up request, potential participants listed next on
the randomized list were contacted in turn, until 10 participants had agreed. Participants then completed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E).

Interviews were recorded face-to-face with an iPhone recording application. The interviews were semi-structured, and consisted of approximately five questions (Creswell, 1998, p. 124) regarding the alumni’s reasons for transfer, perception of the transfer transition, and the student perception of how the Transfer Seminar affected the transfer transition experience and subsequent choices of re-enrolling at the institution or not (see Appendix F). The interview protocol was consistent in its main questions, yet the semi-structured element allowed for individualized follow-up questions by the researcher. The semi-structured element is consistent with Stake (1995), as each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences.

Data Analysis

Data analysis related to the use of the case study approach, in the analysis of a variety of data gathering systems. Stake’s (2005) constructivist-interpretivist methodology was used, which included document review and face-to-face interviews. Documents used were the initial course proposal, description, and syllabi. Interviews were with transfer students who had successfully completed the Transfer Seminar in the past and had since graduated from this same institution. As Baxter and Jack (2010) explained, case study converges the various data in order to understand the overall case, and this could be achieved in a credible manner with the synthesis of a variety of data gathering systems.

Even though this is a variety of data gathering systems, all of them have elements of text, which I used Descriptive Coding to analyze. Descriptive Coding uses a word or short phrase to summarize the overall topic of a data element (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2013) explained that Descriptive Coding is appropriate for studies with a wide variety of data forms (p. 88), and as
such could analyze the data forms in this case study, allowing for a synthesis of the topics across the data gathering systems.

**Ethical Considerations**

Confidentiality of the data was ensured with practices adhering to the criteria of the American Anthropological Association (Glesne & Pleshkin, 1992). Pseudonyms were used for the alumni who were the face-to-face interview participants. The institution name is also never referred to directly, only by using general identifying characteristics as they pertain to size, type (public or private), and geographical region. Face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded on an iPhone audio-recording application. Each file was downloaded and saved to a portable drive and a hard drive as well. Also, each interview was transcribed and stored on the same portable and hard drives. Only the researcher has access to the data.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure research trustworthiness, quality, and verification, member checking was used for the face-to-face interviews (see Appendix G). As Baxter and Jack (2010) explained, the case study approach converges the various data in order to understand the overall case, and this could be achieved in a credible manner with the synthesis of a variety of data gathering systems.

**Potential Research Bias**

My interest in this topic is based on my current position as an administrator at the institution that is the location of this research. This professional position grew out of the area of academic advising, and as such, I view these transfer students through the lens of student support services in general, and academic advising in particular. In addition, at this institution, I have been an instructor for the Transfer Seminar, and more specifically I have been the instructor for the participants of this study. I have attempted to minimize the bias in this factor by focusing
study on alumni who have completed the Transfer Seminar and have since graduated from this institution. Limiting the study in this way would ensure that participant perceptions were not concerned about grades in a pending class. Yet, the alumni who did choose to participate in this study, as well as those who chose not to participate, may have made that decision based on the fact that I, their former instructor, was involved in the study, and this may impact the data gathered and the results derived from that.

Regarding my positionality, I did not transfer during my undergraduate college years; therefore, I lack the direct experience of transferring from a student’s perspective that might have allowed me to understand transfer students’ perspectives with greater insight. Yet, Briscoe’s (2005) explanation of ideological positioning grants that while ideologies derive from one’s experiences and are influenced by one’s demographic positionality, the researcher can have experiences that allow him or her to develop empathy with the other (p. 33).

My undergraduate college years were spent over 1000 miles from my family, entering a school with no previous personal relationship attached to it. I did contemplate transferring to an institution nearer to my family home throughout my first year at school, though I eventually decided to persist at the college at which I began, in part due to the fact that I made strong social connections. Perhaps my desire to transfer stemmed from homesickness during the first year away from my family and the fact that many of my close friends attended an institution in my home state. It was the social factor that affected me most in persisting, and that first affected me through on-campus residential life. This factor could be significant, as the institution that is the location of this study is in large part a commuter institution, and the social contrast could be important to consider between a student’s experience at a residential institution and one’s experience at a commuter institution.
To explain this more theoretically, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory could be helpful. For instance, the innermost circle of the ecological systems model is termed the “micro,” constituting immediate settings, which involve the individual (in Carlton Parsons, 2008). As exemplified above, my microsystem was completely transformed, and my ontogeny (my individual history) experienced a dramatic shift. My relationship to the significant others in my life, my parents and brothers who had been in close geographic proximity to me, underwent a similar shift, causing me to change in my relation to them and exist on a day-to-day basis as an individual creating a new microsystem with which to feel a sense of belonging. Nnameka’s “Nego-feminism” (in Fennell & Arnot, 2008) explored the limitations of Western individualism and stressed the concept of African communal life. My undergraduate college experience (in a world with communication limited to hand-written letters and long-distance, land-line phone calls, rather than email and FaceTime) demonstrates the difficulty of keeping up communication to the previous microsystem that is no longer in close geographic proximity. As well, it was difficult to establish meaningful communal life in a new microsystem.

As a result, because of my serious considerations to transfer schools during my first year and my difficult transition to college in the first place in establishing my individuality within a communal space, I believe I have accrued the empathy to understand some of what a transfer student may be experiencing.

My positionality and the above biases could affect my research topic, as I seek to study the student experience of transfer to a new institution, and the students’ perception and experience of the Transfer Seminar implemented to support such a transition.

Limitations

One limitation of the proposed study is that the demographic information of the alumni
participants will not be focused on any one factor; rather, students will comprise a variety of age, gender, and ethnic make up. In addition, there will be no sorting of participants in regard to school(s) previously attended, previous amount of credits earned, previous GPA, and educational goals. This limitation is based on the demographic make up of the students entering this institution as transfer students, as the institution does not have typical “feeder schools,” and as it attracts transfers from a variety of locations with a diversity of backgrounds. This limits the findings of the research in that a determination cannot be made as to whether certain demographic or background elements make for a greater likelihood of retention and persistence within the institution that is the location of the research. This puts the focus on the individuals who are the participants of this study for explaining their experiences from their own individual background, making it difficult to expand the findings to relate to the possible or probably experience of a general group.

Another limitation of the proposed study is the fact that this Transfer Seminar has only been in existence since the spring semester of 2013. Since there have only been nine semesters in which this Transfer Seminar has run, there is a limited amount of participants who have since graduated in that time through which to draw for the face-to-face interviews. Yet, since these are transfer students who have earned credits from at least one previous institution, this limitation is balanced by the fact that these students may have necessitated less than that time in order to fulfill the requirements toward graduation.

Similarly, because the face-to-face interviews are to be focused on alumni who have persisted to graduation, this does not include the perceptions and experiences of those students who have experienced the Transfer Seminar and have since left the institution. Knowing those students’ perspectives on the transition experience and the experiences of the Transfer Seminar
could yield further information on how the Transfer Seminar could have been improved to address the concerns that may have led to their departure.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this case study is to understand transfer students’ experiences of their transition to a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. Of particular focus are the students’ experience of a Transfer Seminar required of transfer students in their first semester of enrollment at this institution, and how the experience of this Transfer Seminar affected the transition and the re-enrollment of these students in subsequent semesters.

The research question this study seeks to answer is as follows: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist?

Phase One of the study consisted of document review: the Transfer Seminar course proposal (see Appendix A), course description (see Appendix B), and a representative syllabus (see Appendix C). This provided for an analysis of the Transfer Seminar course itself, specifically how it was established, how it was proposed to run, and how it was, in fact, implemented.

Phase Two consisted of face-to-face interviews with 10 participants from those alumni who have successfully completed this Transfer Seminar and have since graduated from this institution. A short profile of each participant follows. The participant names used are pseudonyms.

Participant Profiles

Ten participants participated in face-to-face interviews for Phase Two of the study. These 10 participants were chosen from those alumni who have successfully completed this Transfer
Seminar and have since graduated from this institution. A short description of each participant follows. The participant names used are pseudonyms.

Felix transferred to this institution as a junior, after having attended a Division I institution on an athletic scholarship and what he termed a “high-performing Division III college.” Though athletic scholarships are not offered at this smaller institution, Felix did participate in the swim team, as well as tutoring service through the math department. He is in his mid- to late-twenties. Felix completed the Transfer Seminar in Fall 2015, and he graduated from this institution in Fall 2016.

Jennifer transferred to this institution as a sophomore, after her Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Air Force. Entering this institution, she moved to Brooklyn, New York, from her military post in South Korea. She is in her late-twenties. Jennifer completed the Transfer Seminar in Fall 2013, and she graduated from this institution in Spring 2015.

Sylvia transferred to this institution as a junior, after earning an associate’s degree from a nearby community college. She was involved in Greek Life at this institution. She is in her early-twenties. Sylvia completed the Transfer Seminar in Spring 2014, and she graduated from this institution in Spring 2016.

Audre transferred to this institution as a junior, after earning an associate’s degree from a nearby community college. She is in her mid-thirties and has had a wealth of professional experience in the field of her academic major, therapeutic recreation. Audre completed the Transfer Seminar in Fall 2014, and she graduated from this institution in Fall 2016.

Mary transferred to this institution as a sophomore, returning to her family home and commuting to school after completing her previous credits while living on campus at another
institution. She is in her early-twenties. Mary completed the Transfer Seminar in Spring 2014, and she graduated from this institution in Spring 2016.

Cecile transferred to this institution as a sophomore. She is in her late-twenties, as she had taken breaks from school to work full-time. Cecile completed the Transfer Seminar in Fall 2013, and she graduated from this institution in Spring 2015.

Joe transferred to this institution as a junior, after earning an associate’s degree from a nearby community college. He is in his late-twenties. Joe completed the Transfer Seminar in Fall 2013, and he graduated from this institution in Spring 2015.

Edith transferred to this institution as a second-semester freshman, having attended two institutions prior, a community college and a four-year institution. She is in her early-twenties. Edith completed the Transfer Seminar in Fall 2014, and she graduated from this institution in Spring 2016.

Ellen transferred to this institution as a sophomore. She was involved in the swim team at this institution. She is in her early-twenties. Ellen completed the Transfer Seminar in Fall 2013, and she graduated from this institution in Fall 2016.

Nomes transferred to this institution as a junior, after her Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Army. She had received previous credits through her military training, as well as from three other institutions of higher learning. She is in her mid-thirties. Nomes completed the Transfer Seminar in Spring 2013, and she graduated from this institution in Fall 2014.

**Summary**

Analysis of the documents and the 10 face-to-face interviews yielded four superordinate themes, the first three with a sub-theme (see Table 4.1). The first superordinate theme was “Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters,
particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution,” with the sub-theme “Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work.” That was followed by the second superordinate theme was “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable,” with the sub-theme “Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students.” The third superordinate theme was “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life,” with the sub-theme “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.” Finally, the fourth superordinate theme was “Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.”

Table 4.1

Superordinate Themes and Related Sub-Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
<th>Related Sub-Theme, if applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic</td>
<td>Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>of the institution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty</td>
<td>Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made students feel welcome and</td>
<td>transitions as transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
comfortable. | students.
---|---
**Student involvement: Work commitments** and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life. | **Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.**
**Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.**

Table 4.2 indicates how the superordinate and sub-themes were determined from the research findings, both in the documents and in the participants. The participant names used are pseudonyms.

The first superordinate theme, “Academic Expectations,” and its attendant sub-theme, “Feedback,” was present in a majority of the documents and for the participants. While all of the documents specifically addressed the concept of establishing Academic Expectations, the concept of Feedback on student work and how that was to be an element of the course was only present in the Course Syllabus. And, while Academic Expectations was mentioned by a majority of the participants, all of the participants mentioned perceptions related to the sub-theme of Feedback.

Similarly, for the second superordinate theme, “Support, faculty,” and the related sub-theme, “Support, staff,” each was present in the majority of documents and for the participants.
Support, faculty was present in each of the documents, while Support, staff was only specifically mentioned in the Course Syllabus. A strong majority of participants mentioned the concept of Support, faculty in their perceptions of the Transfer Seminar. However, Support, staff was only present for two of the participants, Jennifer and Nomes. Each of these participants were specific in the support they received from the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs, which contributed to their overall perceptions of this sub-theme of Support, staff.

The third superordinate theme, “Student Involvement,” was mentioned in each of the documents, while its attendant sub-theme, “Physical space,” was not mentioned in the documents at all. And, while “Student Involvement” was mentioned by a majority of the participants, this superordinate theme was mentioned mainly for how the participants either did not feel involved in the campus community or wished they had but had obstacles related to their doing so. Physical space as a sub-theme was mentioned by each of the participants in how they perceived the campus community, with a majority mentioning the multi-use campus library building.

Finally, the fourth superordinate theme, “Impact on persistence,” was not mentioned in any of the documents. This superordinate theme was mentioned by all but one of the participants, that being Jennifer. A majority of participants mentioned the Transfer Seminar as positively related to its impact on their persistence to graduation at this institution.

A summary of each superordinate theme and sub-theme as they relate to the data is presented below (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

| Document and Participant Responses to Derive Superordinate Themes and Sub-Themes |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Course Proposal | Course Description | Course Syllabus | Felix | Jennifer | Sylvia | Audre | Mary | Cecile | Joe | Edith | Ellen | Nomes |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------|--------|-------|------|--------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
Superordinate Theme One: Academic Expectations: Assignments and Course Topics

Related to Practical Academic Matters, Particularly Writing and Research Skills, Set Clear Academic Expectations of the Institution

The first superordinate theme found through analysis of the documents and interview transcripts was that of how assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution. Each participant addressed the concept of the academic expectations of the institution in his or her interview, and six of the 10 participants linked the Transfer Seminar’s assignments and topics of writing and research to be directly linked to concurrent or subsequent coursework at the institution. As well, these students found the assignments and topics to relate well and be relevant to the academic standard of the institution as a whole.
All of the documents (N = 3) specifically addressed the concept of establishing Academic Expectations, particularly through assignments requiring writing and research skills. The Course Syllabus includes a statement on assignments thusly, “Students will be given a variety of writing and research assignments, leading up to a Capstone essay. Capstone essay assignment topics will be elicited from faculty in each student’s department, yet general topics will also be given in class.” This statement established the assignments for the Transfer Seminar as directly related to formal writing and research, and stemming directly from the academic department of each student in the course.

A majority of participants (N = 6) specifically mentioned how the Transfer Seminar established the Academic Expectations of the institution through these assignments. Participant Felix stated, “The expectations and the assignments were clearly communicated, the deadlines were up front” and “definitely felt that the academic standards and expectations were clear and consistent.” He also explained his perceptions on the nature of the assignments to create that sense of Academic Expectations. Felix stated:

I felt like [one assignment’s] real purpose was to understand how to use the library as a resource, which I’m guessing that was the real purpose of that assignment. Which was helpful because in subsequent courses that semester and following semesters I had to use the library. So, I saw the assignments as not random assignments given out, but tools to help us use the university. So, I think that helped me want to do the assignments well and on time.

This perception clearly made the link from the particular assignments given in the course to the concepts of Academic Expectations they set out to establish.
Participant Audre also found the assignments established Academic Expectations, as the concepts learned followed her through her subsequent semesters at this institution. Audre stated, “In the course, we went to the library, we did some studies on how to do research on certain things, so it was very helpful throughout the two years I was here.” In a similar way, participant Cecile commented on how the lessons of the Transfer Seminar continued to benefit her in subsequent semesters: “I think that it prepared you for, in general, if you needed help where to go. As far as research, tutoring, stuff like that. That’s where I think I took the most out of it.”

These and other representative statements from the documents and interviews are below (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

*Superordinate Theme One: Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Syllabus</th>
<th>“…students will be given a variety of writing and research assignments, leading up to a Capstone essay. Capstone essay assignment topics will be elicited from faculty in each student’s department, yet general topics will also be given in class.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>“I felt that the expectations and the assignments were clearly communicated, the deadlines were up front . . . I definitely”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
felt that the academic standards and expectations were clear and consistent.”

“I felt like [one assignment’s] real purpose was to understand how to use the library as a resource, which I’m guessing that was the real purpose of that assignment. Which was helpful because in subsequent courses that semester and following semesters I had to use the library. So, I saw the assignments as not random assignments given out, but tools to help us use the university. So, I think that helped me want to do the assignments well and on time.”

**Audre**

“In the course, we went to the library, we did some studies on how to do research on certain things, so it was very helpful throughout the two years I was here.”

**Cecile**

“I think that it prepared you for, in general, if you needed help where to go. As far as research, tutoring, stuff like that. That’s where I think I took the most out of it.”
Sub-Theme One: Feedback: Students Felt Encouragement Through Positive Feedback on Written Work

While only one (N = 1) document, the Course Syllabus, specifically mentioned the concept of Feedback on student work, all of the participants (N = 10) perceived Feedback as a strong perception of the course. In particular, participant Edith linked the Feedback she received in the course to the concept of Academic Expectations: “I did enjoy the papers, and I think [the faculty member] gave good feedback, which I think prepared me for a lot of the in-depth essay courses that I had to take from that point forward, so that did set a standard.” She continued to comment on her perception of the role of Feedback on her work. Edith mentioned:

I’m very, I love feedback, I love critical feedback. And I noticed on every essay, it wasn’t just like, you know, here’s a bad grade or you did great. It was like, this is great, and [the faculty would] point out certain areas that I guess [were] appreciated or that were written very well, and that not only helped me in the course, but also kind of made me more comfortable in the school in general.

The detail of the Feedback on her work was beneficial to Edith, not only in the short-term working of the course itself, but also in how the Transfer Seminar laid the foundation for her subsequent coursework at the institution.

Participant Ellen found that her self-diagnosis of being a writer who needs Feedback to improve was addressed by the Feedback provided to her in the course. The nature of this Feedback also followed her positively through subsequent coursework. Ellen stated,

I would go back and read those things for future papers, because I would know that I’m doing the same things that I did then. And I would remember because I kept going back
to either what [the faculty] said or somebody said and reread and make sure I am hitting specific points or whatever.

The Feedback Ellen received was beneficial to her in how she developed throughout her future courses.

These and other representative statements from the documents and interviews are below (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions. While all participants (N = 10) commented on the Transfer Seminar in terms of how or if the course provided each participant with an understanding of the academic expectations of this institution, the interview comments were categorized into one superordinate theme and one sub-theme. The first superordinate theme was “Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution,” with the sub-theme “Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work.” The prevalence of academic expectations in this superordinate theme could be because transfer students may have more of a primary focus on academic work than do their native counterparts.
Several participants’ comments referred to this superordinate theme as one that was directly related to concurrent and subsequent courses in which they enrolled at this institution. This shows the practical nature “writing assignments” and “research tools” have in providing skills that students new to an institution may need to accurately understand the academic expectations of the institution as a whole. Being provided with these skills and ways to practice them through assignments in the Transfer Seminar could be beneficial to preparing students for subsequent courses’ academic work, as well as establishing a clear standard of the academic expectations of the institution.

The related sub-theme was that students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work. The prevalent findings on this sub-theme were that students perceived the positive feedback they received on writing assignments to relate to both the assignment at hand and the social and emotional experience of transitioning as a transfer student. Students perceived that the positive feedback made them feel comfortable at the institution, as well as it minimized anxiety, while still providing preparation for their subsequent coursework. These aspects of student perceptions of the academic expectations of the institution could show that transfer students who may be more focused on academic work than their native counterparts still do perceive coursework as a somewhat social and emotional transaction.

Building from the topic of students’ academic expectations of the institution, the next topic that was prevalent in participants’ responses is that of the support transfer students receive in their transitions to the institution. Participants found support from faculty and support from staff to have had the most impact, and these two elements, respectively, head the following superordinate and sub-theme.
Superordinate Theme Two: Support, Faculty: An Open Class Environment and a Supportive, Accessible Faculty Made Students Feel Welcome and Comfortable

The second superordinate theme found in the documents and transcripts was that of support from the faculty of the Transfer Seminar. In particular, there was the prevalence of the superordinate theme as follows: “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable.”

Support, faculty was present in each of the documents (N = 3). A strong majority of participants (N = 7) mentioned the concept of Support, faculty in their perceptions of the Transfer Seminar.

The course proposal for the Transfer Seminar explains the role of the faculty in the course. The statement provided as the reason for introducing the Transfer Seminar course is as follows: “To facilitate the integration of new transfer students into the social and academic community.” This specific wording of “facilitate” was perceived by the participants as leading to the “open class environment.”

In each interview (N = 10), participants addressed the concept of support the student perceived from the faculty as a transfer student in that first semester of matriculation. Participant Felix stated that the faculty of the Transfer Seminar “presented as there and available for help. And there were courses that I took at [the institution] where I needed a little bit of extra help, and I followed exactly what I did with [the faculty].” In this concept of Support, faculty, Felix had the perception that the support he received in the Transfer Seminar would likely be the same level of support he would expect from all of his subsequent instructors at the institution. When he needed that support in the future, he followed the lessons he learned in the Transfer Seminar for how to approach faculty for that support.
Participant Audre perceived that the accessibility of the faculty of the Transfer Seminar made her feel comfortable in pursuing her degree at this institution. She stated, “I really felt that I was supported. [The faculty of the Transfer Seminar] made it seem like, ‘You’re not here by yourself,’ so if you needed help or guidance, I had that opportunity to come to [the faculty].” The support from the faculty created in her a sense of community that she felt was valuable in its support.

Participant Cecile perceived the faculty of the Transfer Seminar as a “point of access” to the institution, one that allowed her to perceive her transition in supportive terms. Cecile stated, “Because of that class, they introduced you to this is the person you ask for help, so you already have someone in your mind, you don’t have to go and have 10 different people to speak to about the same thing because we have this point of access that this is where you ask questions. And every question that you had, you would see this person weekly to discuss.

Cecile perceived that the consistent presence of the faculty member in the weekly class and the access created streamlined the process of seeking support from the institution in her first semester after transfer.

Finally, Participant Joe provided his overall perception that the Transfer Seminar was “a kind of support system.” That support system was a lesson learned early about the level of support he could expect from the institution.

These representative statements from the documents and interviews are below (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5
Superordinate Theme Two: Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course proposal</th>
<th>The statement provided as the reason for introducing the Transfer Seminar course is as follows: “To facilitate the integration of new transfer students into the social and academic community.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>“[The faculty of the Transfer Seminar] presented as there and available for help. And there were courses that I took at [the institution] where I needed a little bit of extra help, and I followed exactly what I did with [the faculty].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>“I really felt that I was supported. [The faculty of the Transfer Seminar] made it seem like, ‘You’re not here by yourself,’ so if you needed help or guidance, I had that opportunity to come to [the faculty].”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecile</td>
<td>“Because of that class, they introduced you to this is the person you ask for help, so you already have someone in your mind, you don’t have to go and have 10 different people to speak to about the same thing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because we have this point of access that this is where you ask questions. And every question that you had, you would see this person weekly to discuss.”

Joe

“[The faculty of the Transfer Seminar was] always the person I just leaned on when I was here. That’s what the course created, a kind of support system.”

Sub-Theme One: Support, Staff: Military-Affiliated Students in Their Transition Found

Support in Navigating Their Transitions as Transfer Students

While the minority of participants (N = 2) were transfers coming from military backgrounds, these participants perceived the sub-theme of Support, staff from the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs. Participant Jennifer in particular perceived that she received that support in a variety of areas in her transfer transition. Jennifer stated:

I was speaking with them from when I was in Korea. It was leaving the military, coming from Korea, moving to New York, never having lived here before. It was just a lot of different things, but they helped with that. And the military situation, the VA situation, with the money, really helped. And that, and it mainly had to do with school, and choosing courses, but it also had to do with the financial end of it too, so I think they really went above and beyond in helping me out.
Jennifer’s perception of the concept of Support, staff was strong in how she felt supported in a variety of aspects as a transfer student. This support was related to financial aid and academic advising in her perceptions of a smooth transition from the military.

Participant Nomes commented that her perception of the Transfer Seminar as a supportive environment was welcome: “It was a really nice welcome, coming from the military, to be in such a supportive environment.” Nomes’s perception was one of surprise at how much the institution dedicated to this concept of Support, staff in her transfer transition.

These representative statements from the documents and interviews are below (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>“I was speaking with them from when I was in Korea. It was leaving the military, coming from Korea, moving to New York, never having lived here before. It was just a lot of different things, but they helped with that. And the military situation, the VA situation, with the money, really helped. And that, and it mainly had to do with school, and choosing courses, but it also had to do with the financial end of it too, so I think they really went above and beyond”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions. The topic of support was a prevalent topic, addressed in the Transfer Seminar course proposal and in each of the participant interviews. This topic is stressed by the superordinate theme of “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable” and the sub-theme of “Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students.”

In regard to the superordinate theme of “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable,” the first mention was from the course proposal, which states that the course is designed “to facilitate the integration of new transfer students into the social and academic community.” To accomplish this, the faculty of the Transfer Seminar would not only implement, or “teach” the Transfer Seminar, but also she or he would act as facilitator of learning. Utilizing the term “facilitator” seems to highlight that the role of the faculty member in this Transfer Seminar is one that supports and encourages students. The faculty becomes a guide, in this course assisting students in navigating their transition as transfer students. The nature of how this guidance was perceived is clear from the participant’s responses in the interviews, as they found this faculty support to be the main source of how they felt welcome and comfortable during the transition in their first semester at this institution.
In the interviews, participants commonly used the words to describe the support given to them by the faculty of the Transfer Seminar as “help,” “support,” and “guidance.” It was clear that for the participants the faculty succeeded in performing her or his role as facilitator of their “integration into the social and academic community of the institution,” as the course proposal stated. In particular, the faculty’s use of an open class environment was one element that created the perception of students that they could ask questions and they could discuss issues, which allayed fears and anxieties and allowed the students to feel comfortable. Students’ perceptions were such that they felt the Transfer Seminar was catered toward them and their needs in this way. The weekly discussions, allowing for students to voice questions and concerns regarding issues of their transition as transfer students, provided the sense to students of this class as a support system, an attribute that was led by the faculty member as facilitator.

The faculty member’s accessibility to and for the students in the Transfer Seminar was also an important characteristic of the welcoming and comforting experience students perceived. According to the syllabus, the course met once per week, and the weekly meetings provided the accessibility participants mentioned relative to the open environment of the class. Yet, participants felt that faculty member’s accessibility outside of the classroom as well, whether via office hours or email communication, and this perception led to students feeling the faculty member was a reliable point of contact on campus or virtually. In fact, Cecile referred to the faculty of the Transfer Seminar as her “point of access” to the institution. That point of contact and access was perceived as important, which may be because transfer students are transitioning to a new environment where they may not know anyone else. The faculty member of the Transfer Seminar can become the link to the rest of the institution, in ways facilitating and moderating the student’s experiences and assisting the student in various ways, not just in the
class itself. The value participants placed in this was typified by the feeling from Audre, who stated that the faculty member provided her with the feeling that “You’re not here by yourself,” which gave her the opportunity to ask for help, as well as the welcoming and comfortable feeling of a link to the social and academic community.

Related to the sub-theme, regarding support from the staff, what was found was that transfer students who were military-affiliated perceived that the staff of the institution, in particular the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs, provided the support that was needed to navigate the transition to this institution. This element of staff support for military-affiliated students was emphasized due to the fact that military-affiliated students were making their transition not only to this institution, but also at times to civilian life after the military. In addition, military-affiliated students may be more in need of such staff support as they are in many cases navigating the additional process of financial aid through their federal military benefit or counseling and wellness. These students did feel staff exhibited this support to meet their additional needs during their transition to this institution.

While participants found that they were supported in their transitions as transfer students to the social and academic community of this institution, they found that there were other obstacles for their involvement in campus life. Their perceptions on this topic are discussed below.

**Superordinate Theme Three: Student Involvement: Work Commitments and Age Made for Significant Obstacles for Student Involvement in Campus Life**

The third superordinate theme relates to student involvement in the campus community: “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life.” All of the documents (N = 3) and a majority of the participants (N
addressed the topic of student involvement in the campus community. Yet, while the course documents emphasized student involvement, the participants themselves found that work commitments and age made it difficult to become involved in the campus community.

In addition to stating the reason for the introduction of the Transfer Seminar as being proposed “to facilitate the integration of new transfer students into the social and academic community,” the Transfer Seminar Course Proposal also links one of its learning outcomes to one of the goals of the institution, “To facilitate [a] transfer student’s transition into becoming an active member of the community.” Both of these elements stress the social function of this institution, rather than just the academic, and the Transfer Seminar was created, in part, to facilitate the social integration of transfer students. The course description itself is more pointed, stating that students will explore “opportunities for campus and community involvement.” This statement clarifies the institution’s goal of a student as “an active member of the community” in that it mentions both the campus community and the wider community.

The Transfer Seminar’s Course Syllabus detailed the way the course has been implemented in practice. The course met weekly for one-hour meetings, for thirteen weeks. Three of these thirteen weeks were devoted solely to the topic of student involvement in the campus community, illustrating the emphasis placed on student involvement in the course proposal and the course description. Week Four of the course syllabus states the class topics as follows: “Building and maintaining involvement in campus life, clubs and organizations, the Student Leadership Experience.” This institution provides multiple ways of providing students with opportunities for getting and staying involved in the campus community, from the informal “clubs and organizations” presentation of what is available to sign up for, to the more formal Student Leadership Experience, which is an interactive, campus-based program that focuses on
helping students develop leadership skills. In addition, Weeks 12 and 13 of the Course Syllabus provide a self-directed Student Leadership Experience Workshop, requiring students in the Transfer Seminar to participate in at least two workshops on campus that will be scheduled as part of the Student Leadership Experience. As it is self-directed, students can choose their own workshops to attend, yet the syllabus provides the suggested topics of Health and Wellness, Communication and Conflict Resolution, Strategies for Career and Personal Success, and Social Media.

Participant Felix commented on how he wished he had known more about how to become involved more in the campus community. He stated, “This past fall semester I felt that I was more involved. I felt like my first year I could have been more involved, but I didn’t know how to go about it.” This statement pointed to one element of integrating transfer students to the campus community that could be improved.

However, while the institution provided the emphasis on student involvement to show these newly enrolled transfer students in the Transfer Seminar the value it placed on that practice, the participants found that work commitments and age were obstacles for their becoming and staying involved in the campus community beyond this Transfer Seminar course. Participant Audre stated,

I really didn’t spend time here. If it wasn’t for this Seminar class, I wouldn’t have experienced anything of the school. I’m a little older, and I came during the daytime. In the daytime, I didn’t really ‘student-ly’ fit in. And I came here with a little experience, so I was kind of like the second professor in most of my classes.

Audre’s perception that age was a factor was mirrored in other participants as well.
Participant Cecile stated, “I wasn’t involved as much as I would have been involved if I was younger. I worked, I was working full-time. And the only thing I really participated in was tutoring.” She locates her obstacles in both age and work commitments, which was akin to what others perceived about the campus community.

Participant Joe’s obstacles for Student Involvement related to his perception of fitting in to the general student body. He mentioned,

I didn’t want to join anything. There was never anything that interested me, one. And two, I never felt comfortable here. We didn’t have anybody that was really older. I felt that everyone was 18-22 or 24 at the oldest, and it was just there was never that much of a connection. I felt a lot of these kids still had this idea of like college should be all about having fun or whatever. There’s always that prototypical college mindset, and I feel it’s really embraced over here. It didn’t work.

Joe’s perceptions called to mind his integration on campus, or at least his difference as a transfer student.

Participant Nomes related her difference in life experience as being an obstacle for Student Involvement,

I was kind of on the margins. I tried to plug into it, but I think as an older student and as a veteran it was kind of a surreal experience for me. It wasn’t something I could really plug into because of my own life experiences, so I think that made it harder.

Nomes felt “on the margins,” and that perception linked to that of other participants in how they perhaps felt they wanted to integrate more to the campus community but perceived obstacles because of age or work commitments.

Representative statements from the participants are below (see Table 4.7).
Table 4.7

*Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>“This past fall semester I felt that I was more involved. I felt like my first year I could have been more involved, but I didn’t know how to go about it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>“I really didn’t spend time here. If it wasn’t for this Seminar class, I wouldn’t have experienced anything of the school. I’m a little older, and I came during the daytime. In the daytime, I didn’t really ‘student-ly’ fit in. And I came here with a little experience, so I was kind of like the second professor in most of my classes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecile</td>
<td>“I wasn’t involved as much as I would have been involved if I was younger. I worked, I was working full-time. And the only thing I really participated in was tutoring.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Joe    | “I didn’t want to join anything. There was never anything that interested me, one. And two, I never felt comfortable here. We
didn’t have anybody that was really older. I felt that everyone was 18-22 or 24 at the oldest, and it was just there was never that much of a connection. I felt a lot of these kids still had this idea of like college should be all about having fun or whatever. There’s always that prototypical college mindset, and I feel it’s really embraced over here. It didn’t work.”

Nomes

“I was kind of on the margins. I tried to plug into it, but I think as an older student and as a veteran it was kind of a surreal experience for me. It wasn’t something I could really plug into because of my own life experiences, so I think that made it harder.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme One: Physical Space: The Physical Space of Campus was Experienced</th>
<th>Primarily for Academic Purposes, Through the Multi-Use Library Building</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related to student involvement in the campus community was the sub-theme that was found: “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.” Participants’ experience of the physical space</td>
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</table>
of the campus was prevalent in their use of the multi-use library building, primarily for academic work while on campus.

Perhaps due to work commitments and age, as well as life experience, participants had a consistently and primarily academic viewpoint on the physical spaces of the campus. A majority of participants experienced the campus most through the multi-use library building. Participant Mary’s comments linked this physical space to her perceptions of academic focus. Mary stated her preference for the physical space of campus thusly,

Definitely the library. Yeah, I was always in there. I used the computers, I would go to study. Just sit and wait to meet up with people. That would be our designated meeting area. I had classes a lot in there. I basically was in there all the time. Everything you need is pretty much in there – computers, and food.

The multi-use building of the library held sway for Participant Cecile as well. She stated, “I just spent my time in the library because all my classes were there. Mostly the library, because you have the cafeteria. You spend all your time there and you’re writing things, then you’re going downstairs to eat and coming back up.” Her perception was mirrored in that of Participant Joe, who stated his preference for physical space in a similar way,

The library just because they had computers, and I would get on the computer and listen to music. I went to the library sometimes just to read, just pick up, just randomly walk up and down the shelves and be like, okay. Pick it up and, just see something, you know.

Again, the multi-use aspect of this campus building, focused on academics, had an impact on how these participants experienced the Physical space of campus.

Representative statements from the participants are below (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8
*Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>“Definitely the library. Yeah, I was always in there. I used the computers, I would go to study. Just sit and wait to meet up with people. That would be our designated meeting area. I had classes a lot in there. I basically was in there all the time. Everything you need is pretty much in there – computers, and food.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cecile</td>
<td>“I just spent my time in the library because all my classes were there. Mostly the library, because you have the cafeteria. You spend all your time there and you’re writing things, then you’re going downstairs to eat and coming back up.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>“The library just because they had computers, and I would get on the computer and listen to music. I went to the library sometimes just to read, just pick up, just randomly walk up and down the shelves and be like, okay. Pick it up and, just see something, you know.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions. The third superordinate theme relates to Student Involvement in the campus community: “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life,” with the sub-theme “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.” Student Involvement in the campus community was a prevalent topic, being addressed in all of the documents ($N = 3$) and a majority of the participants ($N = 7$). However, while documents from the course emphasized student involvement and provided opportunities for getting involved, participants found that there were other obstacles for their Student Involvement in campus life. Perhaps relatedly, participants related that they spent most of their time on campus in the multi-use library building, studying, using computers, and taking meal breaks in the cafeteria in the same building. The majority of participants found this multi-use building to provide the main location for their use of the Physical space of campus.

However, while the institution provided the emphasis on Student Involvement to show these newly enrolled transfer students in the Transfer Seminar the value it placed on that practice, the participants found that work commitments and age were obstacles for their becoming and staying involved in the campus community beyond this Transfer Seminar course. The participants related that working, in some cases full-time, precluded their Student Involvement in campus life, even if they had the motivation and desire to become involved. This need to work professionally while attending school may be more likely for transfer students since they may be older than their native counterparts in the institution, and may have a higher likelihood of having dependent families.
In addition to work commitments, age differences between the participants and students in the general population of the institution became the most prevalent factor in participants’ lack of involvement in the campus community. Participants perceived that the campus was heavily skewed toward students aged 18-24 years. Any student older than that may have difficulty integrating into the social environment of the institution, as pertains to student involvement. This may be because of the general atmosphere, as some participants perceived that the campus felt like a “prototypical college mindset,” as Joe stated, “in that college should be about having fun.” These participants did not share that mindset.

Related to age, other life experiences caused a difference between the participants and the general student populations. Age brought professional experience for Audre, and her experience caused her to feel separate from her classmates. She describes feeling “like the second professor in most of my classes,” rather than integrated into the student body. Nomes locates this life experience difference in her experience in the military. She referred to campus life as “a surreal experience” due to her age and veteran status. Even though she attempted to “plug into” the student experience of campus life, she found that these factors were significant enough that she could not experience student involvement at this institution, instead existing “on the margins.”

Perhaps due to work commitments and age, as well as life experience, participants had a consistently and primarily academic viewpoint on the physical spaces of the campus. A majority of participants experienced the campus most through the multi-use library building. This campus building houses a traditional library with book stacks and reference desk, multiple computer labs and computer work stations, study areas for group or silent study, classrooms, and a cafeteria. Participants named this location as meeting all of their perceived needs, mainly academic (e.g., classrooms, areas for academic study, computers for academic use), though occasionally social
or personal (e.g., social meeting spaces, computers for recreational use, cafeteria). The multi-use building provided many participants the perception that they only needed to utilize this one physical space on campus to be successful at the institution.

While the Transfer Seminar emphasized student involvement in the campus community, and while the participants perceived obstacles to that involvement, participants still perceived that the Transfer Seminar did impact their decisions to re-enroll at the institution in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation. This section on participant perceptions on how the Transfer Seminar did impact their decisions on persistence to graduation is what follows.

**Superordinate Theme Four: Impact on Persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s Welcoming and Supportive Environment Eased the Tension of Transfer Transition and Positively Impacted Student Decisions to Persist**

The fourth and final superordinate theme relates to the participants’ perceptions of how their experience of the Transfer Seminar impacted their decisions to re-enroll at the institution in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation. This superordinate theme found is as follows: “Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.” The majority of participants perceived that the Transfer Seminar positively affected their decisions to re-enroll in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation at this institution, due in part to its welcoming and supportive environment.

The majority of participants (N = 9) perceived that the Transfer Seminar positively affected their decisions to re-enroll in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation at this institution. While there were several participant mentions of the comfort level they had at the institution, as well as the welcoming environment it provided to them, participants listed the
social and academic foundation it set for the institution and its support as additional reasons the Transfer Seminar positively impacted their decisions to re-enroll and persist at this institution.

To start, a perception of comfort with and welcome to the institution was the most prevalent reason for the Transfer Seminar’s positive impact on participants’ re-enrollment in subsequent semesters and persistence to graduation at this institution. Participant Felix stated it clearly: “I wanted to persist, because I felt comfortable.” He equated that feeling with the Transfer Seminar easing his transition to the institution and creating that foundation. The perception of comfort was particularly important to Participant Audre, who commented that her comfort level led to her feeling encouraged and empowered by the institution to be able to accomplish her goal of degree completion. Moreover, she stated that she had been “bouncing around” to several other schools before transferring to this institution, and that she learned some of her classmates in the Transfer Seminar had transferred multiple times as well. Audre stated,

Speaking from a student perspective, you can have, like, jitters. Especially coming from where was, bouncing around from here to here to here to here. So, it gave me the sense that I can do this. And hearing the other students speak, some bounced around also. It kind of gave you a sense that you’re not weird. Life happens. It kind of boosts your ego to know that you can do this.

Audre’s prior enrollment mobility having been stabilized by this institution in general and the Transfer Seminar in particular could be a strong indicator that such a course creates an environment where students have a greater likelihood of persistence to graduation due to these perceptions of comfort and welcome the student may not have had at previous institutions.

Participants also felt the Transfer Seminar’s impact on persistence through it creating a clear and accurate foundation for their subsequent social and academic experiences at this
institution. Participant Mary stressed the social aspect of the Transfer Seminar as a learning community, one where social interaction and social learning were encouraged. She commented, “Obviously, transferring’s not easy, so when I started it was nerve racking just because you’re not used to the environment, but having something that was reoccurring every week with people who were going through the same transition as you was helpful, and having a nice teacher was helpful as well. That always kept me coming back. I just liked having that feel of being in an environment where you can feel that you’re important. I know that sounds like something a kid would say, but it’s important as an adult too.”

In this way, Mary had a similar impression to Audre above, in that there was perceived value in learning alongside other transfer students who may have had similar experiences. Academically, Sylvia stated that the Transfer Seminar set that academic foundation, as it helped her “integrate better into the classes and to the workload.” In sum, participants perceived the Transfer Seminar did set a clear and accurate foundation for the social and academic environment of the institution, which had a positive impact on their persistence.

Finally, a prevalent perception for participants was that the support of the Transfer Seminar, through the faculty member, was an element that positively impacted their persistence. The concept of support may be the perception underlying all of the other stated reasons, as it is so fundamental. Yet, participants also specifically cited “support” as a positive factor in and of itself. Participant Cecile referred to the Transfer Seminar as “all about support,” which is why it impacted her decisions to persist. Participant Mary commented on the faculty member’s impact in that support as well, stating that “having a nice teacher was helpful as well.”

Representative statements from the interviews are below (see Table 4.9).
**Impact on persistence:** The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Felix</th>
<th>“I think the Transfer Seminar really helped me ease my way in to the campus. And figure out what was going on and feel comfortable on campus. Because of that, I wanted to persist, because I felt comfortable. The Transfer Seminar helped ease me through that change period.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>“It really did set the foundation for me. It helped me integrate better into the classes and to the workload, because I had a sense taking the class of, ‘Okay, my professors are going to be really on top of me with assignments. I can’t slack. I have to get things done.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>“Speaking from a student perspective, you can have, like, jitters. Especially coming from where was, bouncing around from here to here to here to here. So, it gave me the sense that I can do this. And hearing the other students speak, some bounced around also. It kind of gave you a sense that you’re”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Obviously, transferring’s not easy, so when I started it was nerve racking just because you’re not used to the environment, but having something that was reoccurring every week with people who were going through the same transition as you was helpful, and having a nice teacher was helpful as well. That always kept me coming back. I just liked having that feel of being in an environment where you can feel that you’re important. I know that sounds like something a kid would say, but it’s important as an adult too.”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cecile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Having to take the Transfer Seminar, I think it definitely impacted my way of graduating because it’s all about support. And you don’t even think about these things until you graduate because you’re just like focused.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

This superordinate theme found is as follows: “Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.” The majority of participants (N = 9) perceived that the Transfer Seminar positively affected their decisions to re-enroll in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation at this institution. While there were several participant mentions of the comfort level they had at the institution, as well as the welcoming environment it provided to them, participants listed the social and academic foundation it set for the institution and its support as additional reasons the Transfer Seminar positively impacted their decisions to re-enroll and persist at this institution.

To start, a perception of comfort with and welcome to the institution was the most prevalent reason for the Transfer Seminar’s positive impact on participants’ re-enrollment in subsequent semesters and persistence to graduation at this institution. Participants also felt the Transfer Seminar’s impact on persistence through it creating a clear and accurate foundation for their subsequent social and academic experiences at this institution. Participants perceived the Transfer Seminar did set a clear and accurate foundation for the social and academic environment of the institution, which had a positive impact on their persistence.

Finally, a prevalent perception for participants was that the support of the Transfer Seminar, through the faculty member, was an element that positively impacted their persistence. The concept of support may be the perception underlying all of the other stated reasons, as it is so fundamental. Yet, participants also specifically cited “support” as a positive factor in and of itself. Cecile referred to the Transfer Seminar as “all about support,” which is why it impacted
her decisions to persist. Mary commented on the faculty member’s impact in that support as well, stating that “having a nice teacher was helpful as well.”

In sum, participants perceived that the Transfer Seminar did have a positive impact on their persistence to graduation at this institution. In addition to its aspects of creating a comfort level and a welcoming environment, participants listed the social and academic foundation it set for the institution and its support as additional reasons the Transfer Seminar positively impacted their decisions to persist.

**Conclusion**

The research question this study seeks to answer is as follows: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist? Participants’ perceptions were grouped into four superordinate themes, the first three with sub-themes. The first superordinate theme was “Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution,” with the sub-theme “Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work.” That was followed by the second superordinate theme was “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable,” with the sub-theme “Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students.” The third superordinate theme was “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life,” with the sub-theme “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.” Finally, the fourth superordinate theme was “Impact on
persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.” These superordinate themes and sub-themes were analyzed and the conclusions on the findings are what follow.

The first superordinate theme was “Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution,” with the sub-theme “Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work.” The prevalence of academic expectations in this superordinate theme could be because transfer students may have more of a primary focus on academic work than do their native counterparts. Several participants’ comments referred to this superordinate theme as one that was directly related to concurrent and subsequent courses in which they enrolled at this institution. This shows the practical nature “writing assignments” and “research tools” have in providing skills that students new to an institution may need to accurately understand the academic expectations of the institution as a whole. Being provided with these skills and ways to practice them through assignments in the Transfer Seminar could be beneficial to preparing students for subsequent courses’ academic work, as well as establishing a clear standard of the academic expectations of the institution.

The related sub-theme was that students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work. The prevalent findings on this sub-theme were that students perceived the positive feedback they received on writing assignments to relate to both the assignment at hand and the social and emotional experience of transitioning as a transfer student. Students perceived that the positive feedback made them feel comfortable at the institution, as well as it minimized anxiety, while still providing preparation for their subsequent coursework. These aspects of student perceptions of the academic expectations of the institution could show that transfer students who
may be more focused on academic work than their native counterparts still do perceive coursework as a somewhat social and emotional transaction.

The second superordinate theme was “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable” and the sub-theme of “Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students.”

In regard to the superordinate theme, the first mention was from the course proposal, which states that the course is designed “to facilitate the integration of new transfer students into the social and academic community.” The faculty becomes a guide, in this course assisting students in navigating their transition as transfer students. The nature of how this guidance was perceived is clear from the participant’s responses in the interviews, as they found this faculty support to be the main source of how they felt welcome and comfortable during the transition in their first semester at this institution.

The faculty member’s accessibility to and for the students in the Transfer Seminar was also an important characteristic of the welcoming and comforting experience students perceived. According to the syllabus, the course met once per week, and the weekly meetings provided the accessibility participants mentioned relative to the open environment of the class. Yet, participants felt that faculty member’s accessibility outside of the classroom as well, whether via office hours or email communication, and this perception led to students feeling the faculty member was a reliable point of contact on campus or virtually. In fact, Cecile referred to the faculty of the Transfer Seminar as her “point of access” to the institution. That point of contact and access was perceived as important, which may be because transfer students are transitioning to a new environment where they may not know anyone else. The faculty member of the
Transfer Seminar can become the link to the rest of the institution, in ways facilitating and moderating the student’s experiences and assisting the student in various ways, not just in the class itself.

Related to the sub-theme, regarding support from the staff, what was found was that transfer students who were military-affiliated perceived that the staff of the institution, in particular the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs, provided the support that was needed to navigate the transition to this institution. This element of staff support for military-affiliated students was emphasized due to the fact that military-affiliated students were making their transition not only to this institution, but also at times to civilian life after the military. In addition, military-affiliated students may be more in need of such staff support as they are in many cases navigating the additional process of financial aid through their federal military benefit or counseling and wellness. These students did feel staff exhibited this support to meet their additional needs during their transition to this institution.

The third superordinate theme relates to student involvement in the campus community: “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life,” with the sub-theme “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.” Student involvement in the campus community was a prevalent topic, being addressed in the Transfer Seminar course description, the course proposal, the syllabus, and seven of the 10 interviews. However, while documents from the course emphasized student involvement and provided opportunities for getting involved, participants found that there were other obstacles for their involvement in campus life. Perhaps relatedly, participants related that they spent most of their time on campus in the multi-use library building, studying, using computers, and taking
meal breaks in the cafeteria in the same building. The majority of participants found this multi-use building to provide the main location for their use of the physical space of campus.

Finally, the fourth superordinate theme found is as follows: “Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.” The majority of participants perceived that the Transfer Seminar positively affected their decisions to re-enroll in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation at this institution. While there were several participant mentions of the comfort level they had at the institution, as well as the welcoming environment it provided to them, participants listed the social and academic foundation it set for the institution and its support as additional reasons the Transfer Seminar positively impacted their decisions to re-enroll and persist at this institution.

A perception of comfort with and welcome to the institution was the most prevalent reason for the Transfer Seminar’s positive impact on participants’ re-enrollment in subsequent semesters and persistence to graduation at this institution. Using Audre’s example of having been “bouncing around” from school to school in the past, prior enrollment mobility having been stabilized by this institution in general and the Transfer Seminar in particular could be a strong indicator that such a course creates an environment where students have a greater likelihood of persistence to graduation due to these perceptions of comfort and welcome the student may not have had at previous institutions.

Participants also felt the Transfer Seminar’s impact on persistence through it creating a clear and accurate foundation for their subsequent social and academic experiences at this institution. Finally, a prevalent perception for participants was that the support of the Transfer Seminar, through the faculty member, was an element that positively impacted their persistence.
Participants perceived that the Transfer Seminar did have a positive impact on their persistence to graduation at this institution. In addition to its aspects of creating a comfort level and a welcoming environment, participants listed the social and academic foundation it set for the institution and its support as additional reasons the Transfer Seminar positively impacted their decisions to persist.

The findings here followed from the research question: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist? The following chapter will include a discussion of these findings in terms of their implications for practice and recommendations for further research.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

**Introduction**

The purpose of this case study is to understand transfer students’ experiences of their transition to a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. Of particular focus are the students’ experience of a Transfer Seminar required of transfer students in their first semester of enrollment at this institution, and how the experience of this Transfer Seminar affected the transition and the re-enrollment of these students in subsequent semesters.

The research question this study seeks to answer is as follows: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist?

The theoretical framework that was used to frame this study was Tinto’s (2006) theory on enhancing student persistence. In particular, this theoretical framework affected the study by organizing it around the four major topics of Tinto’s theory: a faculty member’s high expectations for student learning; the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum; frequent and timely feedback on student academic performance; and student involvement in the campus community.

Because of the case study approach, students’ own perceptions were understood through a variety of data gathering methods, including document review of materials from the Transfer Seminar course and face-to-face interviewing of participants drawn from alumni who have successfully completed the Transfer Seminar and have since graduated from this institution. The case study approach of this study investigated students’ own perceptions, in terms of Tinto’s (2006) findings. The documents were reviewed in terms of the four major topics of Tinto’s
theory, and the semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with an interview protocol that stemmed from those same four topics: a faculty member’s high expectations for student learning; the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum; frequent and timely feedback on student academic performance; and student involvement in the campus community. The data was analyzed through descriptive coding, which led to the findings grouped into the following superordinate and sub-themes.

Analysis of the documents and the 10 face-to-face interviews yielded findings grouped into four superordinate themes, the first three with a sub-theme. The first superordinate theme was “Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution,” with the sub-theme “Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work.” That was followed by the second superordinate theme: “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable,” with the sub-theme “Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students.” The third superordinate theme was “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life,” with the sub-theme “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.” Finally, the fourth superordinate theme was “Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.” These superordinate themes and sub-themes form the basis of the discussion that follows.
This chapter is organized based on the findings of the research, with reference to Tinto’s (2006) persistence theory as the theoretical framework. Each of the seven findings will be situated within the current literature, starting with a statement that connects that finding to the theoretical framework. A conclusion section will follow when all of the findings have been discussed. Following that will be sections on recommendations for practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

**Finding One: Academic Expectations: Assignments and Course Topics Related to Practical Academic Matters, Particularly Writing and Research Skills, Set Clear Academic Expectations of the Institution**

The first finding is as follows: “Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution.” According to Tinto (2006), students learn best when held to high expectations for their learning and provided with clear and effective guidelines for what is expected for student success. This finding links directly to Tinto’s persistence theory in regard to the first of the four elements that foster student persistence: “a faculty member’s high expectations for student learning.”

This finding supports the current literature in the overall fact of it being essential for all students that the academic expectations of the institution be conveyed in a clear manner (Kippenhan, 2004). In particular, this finding supports research related to the student success of transfers. Stewart and Martinello (2012) examined first-year grades and course withdrawals to find differences between the performances of native and transfer students, found that students transferring from community colleges to universities face a difficult transition, yet once they
identify these differences – or when an institution addresses them preemptively through support mechanisms – the transfer students’ performances improve markedly.

The Transfer Seminar was found to provide a location for communicating and clarifying an institution’s academic expectations, linking with Stewart and Martinello’s (2012) finding above, and providing transfer students with the necessary opportunity to identify needed areas of improvement, as well as for the institution to preemptively identify those areas as well. In the present study, several participants’ comments referred to the academic expectations of this institution being communicated clearly through writing assignments and research tools assignments in the Transfer Seminar. These participants perceived that these academic expectations set in the Transfer Seminar were directly related to concurrent and subsequent courses in which they were enrolled at this institution. This shows the practical nature “writing assignments” and “research tools” have in providing skills that students new to an institution may need to accurately understand the academic expectations of the institution as a whole and to succeed. Being provided with these skills and ways to practice them through assignments in the Transfer Seminar could be beneficial in preparing students for subsequent courses’ academic work, as well as establishing a clear standard of the academic expectations of the institution.

This finding also supports Laanan’s (2001) findings on the increase of transfer student success over time. Laanan’s study commented on conflicting data surrounding transfer students, as studies range from noting transfer shock – characterized by an initial drop in Grade Point Average (GPA) – to transfer ecstasy – characterized by an increase in GPA after transfer. Laanan’s (2001) findings point to the fact that over time transfer students can transition and find success in their new institution, including a resultant increase in GPA. Participants did find that
completing this Transfer Seminar provided them with a base of knowledge about the institution that fostered their transition and aided them in their success in subsequent semesters.

Similarly, this finding supports Kates (2010) in that institutions need to focus greater attention on pedagogy and practice to address academic differences between a two-year community college and a four-year college or university. Yet, Kates points out that while transfer students by definition have college experience, they may need intervention regarding time management, study skills, library resources, and learning literacy, such as how to read a syllabus. A four-year institution taking time to provide these seemingly remedial tasks and clarify their expectations for success can help smooth the transfer transition and help as many students as possible succeed (Kates, 2010). While the participants in the present study focused more on the benefit in the “writing assignments” and “research tools” provided by the Transfer Seminar, Kates’s study points out a benefit of expanding the main topics of the Transfer Seminar to general college literacy in order for transfer students to transition to and navigate a new institution’s environment. Because of that, Kates shows how the Transfer Seminar could be improved for increased success in enhancing student persistence.

In addition to how participants perceived the establishment of the academic expectations of the institution through writing assignments and research tools, the next finding relates to how the faculty member of the Transfer Seminar communicated positive feedback on student work.

**Finding Two: Feedback: Students Felt Encouragement Through Positive Feedback on Written Work**

The second finding is as follows: “Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work.” While linked with the importance of the institution’s high expectations for student learning, faculty feedback on student performance provides another key
factor in student persistence (Tinto, 2006). This finding links directly to Tinto’s persistence theory in regard to the second of the four elements that foster student persistence: “frequent and timely feedback on student performance.”

This finding supports the literature, as Valdez, Shea, Knutsen and Hoody (2014) reported on the efficacy of faculty formative feedback, finding that students perceived faculty feedback as beneficial, even in courses with student-directed activity and peer feedback mechanisms. For participants in the Transfer Seminar, the detail of the faculty feedback on work was beneficial, not only in the short-term working of the course itself, but also in how the Transfer Seminar laid the foundation for subsequent coursework at the institution.

Related to this long-term affect of the quality of faculty feedback to students, and supporting this finding, Stern and Solomon (2006) found connections between faculty members’ substantive, macro-level feedback and subsequent student performance. Stern and Solomon conclude that providing substantive feedback to students at every opportunity is the best way to facilitate learning.

Finally, strongly supporting the need for faculty feedback on student work, Wiggins (2012) stressed that learning cannot occur without faculty feedback. He found that it was the student action to perform learning, coupled with the attendant feedback and opportunities to apply it, that actually caused the learning itself, lending itself to one of the key factors in student persistence at an institution. The prevalent findings on this sub-theme were that students perceived the positive feedback they received on writing assignments to relate to both the assignment at hand and the social and emotional experience of transitioning as a transfer student. Students perceived that the positive feedback made them feel comfortable at the institution, as well as it minimized anxiety, while still providing preparation for their subsequent coursework.
Building on the finding of how the Transfer Seminar communicated positive feedback on student work, the third finding relates to the support transfer students receive from the faculty of the institution.

**Finding Three: Support, Faculty: An Open Class Environment and a Supportive, Accessible Faculty Made Students Feel Welcome and Comfortable**

The third finding is as follows: “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable.” Tinto (2006) stressed that the period of transition to an institution of higher learning requires that students make a series of academic adjustments. Academic support is needed to increase the likelihood of successful adjustments, transition to a new institution, and ultimate persistence at that institution (Tinto, 2006). This finding links directly to Tinto’s persistence theory in regard to the second of the four elements that foster student persistence: “support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum.”

Related to the specific location and context of the present study, the student-centered learning environment of the American liberal arts college in particular was found to have a positive indirect effect on the cognitive development of students, supporting this finding. Students in these institutions were found in general to be exposed to more clearly organized classroom instruction and timely and frequent feedback on academic performance than in a larger research university, which led to a greater likelihood of deep learning (Pascarella, Wang, Trolian, & Blaich, 2013). The first mention of such support was from the course proposal, which states that the course is designed “to facilitate the integration of new transfer students into the social and academic community.” To accomplish this, the faculty of the Transfer Seminar would not only implement, or “teach” the Transfer Seminar, but also she or he would act as facilitator of learning. Utilizing the term “facilitator” seems to highlight that the role of the faculty member
in this Transfer Seminar is one that supports and encourages students. The faculty becomes a guide, in this course assisting students in navigating their transition as transfer students. The nature of how this guidance was perceived is clear from the participant’s responses in the interviews, as they found this faculty support to be the main source of how they felt welcome and comfortable during the transition in their first semester at this institution.

One relation to the current literature related to transfer students’ access to the faculty at the new institution. Academically, the transition period for transfers is also characterized by a more difficult time finding faculty and obtaining academic advising at the university than they were used to from their community college experience (Berger & Malaney, 2003). However, the faculty member of the Transfer Seminar was found to provide students with a “point of access” to the institution.

The faculty member’s accessibility to and for the students in the Transfer Seminar was an important characteristic of the welcoming and comforting experience students perceived. According to the syllabus, the course met once per week, and the weekly meetings provided the accessibility participants mentioned relative to the open environment of the class. Yet, participants felt that faculty member’s accessibility outside of the classroom as well, whether via office hours or email communication, and this perception led to students feeling the faculty member was a reliable access point on campus or virtually. That point of access was perceived as important, which may be because transfer students are transitioning to a new environment where they may not know anyone else, as Berger and Malaney (2003) point out. The faculty member of the Transfer Seminar can become the link to the rest of the institution, in ways facilitating and moderating the student’s experiences and assisting the student in various ways, not just in the class itself.
While participants perceived a strong level of support from the faculty, support from the staff of the institution was another finding that could affect student persistence.

**Finding Four: Support, Staff: Military-Affiliated Students in Their Transition Found**

**Support in Navigating Their Transitions as Transfer Students**

The fourth finding is as follows: “Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students.” Building on the finding of “Support, faculty” above, Tinto (2006) stressed that the period of transition to an institution of higher learning requires that students make a series of social adjustments, as well as academic ones. Academic, social, and oftentimes financial support is needed to increase the likelihood of successful adjustments, transition to a new institution, and ultimate persistence at that institution (Tinto, 2006). This finding links directly to Tinto’s persistence theory in regard to the second of the four elements that foster student persistence: “support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum.”

While students without a military affiliation found their support at this institution came mainly from faculty, military-affiliated students had strong perceptions of the efficacy of the support from staff. This supports the literature, as Davies and Krtaky (2000) noted the need for clear institutional communication and the integrated support needed to convey it. This support should address usual transfer student concerns as varied as assistance with the application process, information about transfer events and tours, and scholarship, financial aid, and advising and tutoring services. Yet, for many students in the general student population, these services are provided from several offices and staff members, which could lead to a divergence in the consistency of communication and level of service provided. What military-affiliated students found was that the institution’s Office of Military and Veterans Affairs was well equipped to
address many or all of their concerns and needs in these varied areas, through that centralized staff office. This consistency and clarity of service was perceived by these participants to be very important in fostering a smooth transition to the institution.

This element of staff support for military-affiliated students was further supported in the current literature, relative to the added support military-affiliated students may need. The emphasis could be due to the fact that military-affiliated students were making their transition not only to this institution, but also at times to civilian life after the military. Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013) observed the anxiety involved in the transfer process in general. They found that as soon as possible students need to acquire the knowledge necessary for navigating through the university. This knowledge is critical for students to succeed, as students who did receive support of counseling and wellness centers showed an increase in student success (Laanan, 2001). Overall, transfer students are seen to face stress, frustration, and even anxiety, leading to academic and social struggles. All of these issues contribute to transfer students’ at-risk status, making them a population an institution should endeavor to understand. Anticipating and supporting these major issues, and stemming their tide, can foster increased student satisfaction and retention. Military-affiliated students may be more in need of such staff support as they are in many cases navigating the additional process of financial aid through their federal military benefit or counseling and wellness through transition to civilian life or even symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The participants in the present study did feel staff exhibited this support to meet their additional needs during their transition to this institution.

One other lesson to be learned from this finding is related to the current literature on orientation programming. One of the major findings of Mayhew, Vanderlinden, and Kim (2010) was the strong relationship between having a dedicated office for orientation programs and
orientation’s impact on student learning for first-year and transfer students. This finding showed clearly in how military-affiliated students felt well-served by a single office dedicated to addressing all of their various concerns and needs, just as students in Mayhew, Vanderlinden and Kim felt through a dedicated orientation office. If all transfer students were served in such a dedicated way regarding support from staff in a centralized location, rather than have to receive their services from a variety of different offices, perhaps their transitions would feel as smooth, further enhancing their persistence.

Finally, one particular element related to support from staff mentioned in the literature but absent from participant perceptions relates to a peer mentoring program an institution can implement to support transfer student transitions (Warren-Sohlberg, Jason, Orosan-Weine, & Lantz, 1998; Townsend, 2014). Current students could more clearly speak to transfer student concerns from the student perspective, particularly if these mentors were themselves transfer students. Warren-Sohlberg, et al. (1998) stressed that transfer students, regardless of age, frequently experience a loss of social status and need to adjust to new peer groups. Peer mentoring can provide information, social support, and opportunities to reflect on emotions and experiences. Based on the current literature, transfer students could benefit from such a peer mentoring program, and perhaps such a program was absent from participant perceptions in the present study due to the fact that participants were not aware such a program could exist.

While participants found that they were supported in their transitions as transfer students by faculty and staff to the social and academic community of this institution, they found that there were other obstacles for their involvement in campus life. The findings on this topic are discussed below.
Finding Five: Student Involvement: Work Commitments and Age Made for Significant Obstacles for Student Involvement in Campus Life

The fifth finding is as follows: “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life.” Tinto (1993) linked student involvement in the institution to his or her persistence at that institution. Yet, Tinto (2006) found that isolated learning, rather than integrated student involvement, is what characterizes the experience of most students, pointing to the need for institutions to build more learning communities that involve all students, fostering their engagement, their attachment to the institution, and subsequently their persistence. This finding links directly to Tinto’s persistence theory in regard to the fourth of the four elements that foster student persistence: “student involvement in the campus community.”

Tinto (2006) is clear that student involvement in the campus community is a way to foster students’ attachment to the institution. In addition, Kurland and Siegel (2013) found that there is a strong relationship between secure student attachment to the institution and his or her overall psychological health, and that securely attached students reported low levels of depression and anxiety, which could lead to increased academic performance (Kurland & Siegel, 2013). Yet, the overwhelming majority of participants in the present study indicated that they had minimal involvement in the campus community during their time at this institution. In particular, these participants perceived that their work commitments and their age were obstacles to becoming involved in the campus community.

These work- and age-related obstacles to campus community involvement for transfer students are supported by the current literature. Lester, Leonard, and Mathias (2013) noted the demographics of transfer students: they are oftentimes older, hold full- or part-time jobs, and
have significant family obligations. These students could devalue the social aspects of college, putting their priority in the classroom, leading to less of a feeling of social engagement with and involvement within the school. However, while the institution provided the emphasis on student involvement to show these newly enrolled transfer students in the Transfer Seminar the value it placed on that practice, the participants found that work commitments and age were obstacles for their becoming and staying involved in the campus community beyond this Transfer Seminar course. In fact, participant Cecile found that the only campus community involvement she experienced at the institution was through the Transfer Seminar itself, that if she hadn’t been required to complete the Transfer Seminar she would not have been involved at all.

The finding here also supports the current literature in that many campus involvement programs are addressed toward first-year or native students. In fact, while many institutions have implemented first-year seminars, not as many have separate seminars for new transfer students. According to Townsend (2014), transfers do not want to be treated like first-years, and found that many times the institution forgets to cater programs and opportunities for student involvement to their particular transfer perspective. Because of these differences in student profile, relative to work commitments and age, the participants in the present study perceived their alienation from the campus community, rather than their integration with it.

To further foster student integration into the campus community, an institution could look toward its use of the physical space of campus. The findings on how participants perceived the physical space of campus are detailed in the following section.

**Finding Six: Physical Space: The Physical Space of Campus was Experienced Primarily for Academic Purposes, Through the Multi-Use Library Building**
The sixth finding is as follows: “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building.” As in the finding above on student involvement in the campus community in general, Tinto (2006) found that isolated learning, rather than integrated student involvement, is what characterizes the experience of most students, pointing to the need for institutions to build more learning communities that involve all students, fostering their engagement, their attachment to the institution, and subsequently their persistence. This finding links directly to Tinto’s persistence theory in regard to the fourth of the four elements that foster student persistence: “student involvement in the campus community.”

The finding on “Physical space” does support Fetterman’s (2010) literature of ethnography, in that it allowed the participants to provide their perceptions in a more open-ended way, providing illustrative examples for how they did experience the physical space of the campus, even if they did not, in general, feel involved in the campus community. Perhaps due to work commitments and age, as well as life experience, participants had a consistently and primarily academic viewpoint on the physical spaces of the campus. A majority of participants experienced the campus most through the multi-use library building. This campus building houses a traditional library with book stacks and reference desk, multiple computer labs and computer work stations, study areas for group or silent study, classrooms, and a cafeteria. Participants named this location as meeting all of their perceived needs, mainly academic (e.g., classrooms, areas for academic study, computers for academic use), though occasionally social or personal (e.g., social meeting spaces, computers for recreational use, cafeteria). The multi-use building provided many participants the perception that they only needed to utilize this one physical space on campus to be successful at the institution.
While the Transfer Seminar emphasized student involvement in the campus community, and while the participants perceived obstacles to that involvement, participants still perceived that the Transfer Seminar did impact their decisions to re-enroll at the institution in subsequent semesters and persist to graduation. The section following addresses the findings on how the Transfer Seminar did impact their decisions on persistence to graduation.

**Finding Seven: Impact on Persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s Welcoming and Supportive Environment Eased the Tension of Transfer Transition and Positively Impacted Student Decisions to Persist**

The seventh finding is as follows: “Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.” As such, this finding relates to several elements of Tinto’s (2006) theory of enhancing student persistence, particularly the first and second elements of Tinto’s theory: respectively, a faculty member’s high expectations for student learning; and support from the faculty, staff, and curriculum.

To start, a perception of comfort with and welcome to the institution was the most prevalent reason for the Transfer Seminar’s positive impact on participants’ re-enrollment in subsequent semesters and persistence to graduation at this institution. Yet, participants also felt strongly about the Transfer Seminar’s impact on their persistence through the course creating clear and accurate expectations for their subsequent social and academic experiences at this institution. This finding supports the current literature in the overall fact of it being essential for all students that the academic expectations of the institution be conveyed in a clear manner (Kippenhan, 2004). Furthermore, this finding supports research related to the student success of transfers. Stewart and Martinello (2012) found that students transferring from community
colleges to universities face a difficult transition, yet once they identify these differences – or when an institution addresses them preemptively through support mechanisms – the transfer students’ performances improve markedly. The Transfer Seminar allowed for the institution’s high expectations to be communicated and clarified, supporting student academic needs.

Support from the faculty was also perceived by participants in how the Transfer Seminar course was implemented, perhaps related to the student-centered learning environment of the American liberal arts college. Pascarella, Wang, Trolian and Blaich (2013) found that this type of institution had an effect on the cognitive development of students, supporting this finding. Students in these institutions were found in general to be exposed to more clearly organized classroom instruction and timely and frequent feedback on academic performance than in a larger research university, which led to a greater likelihood of deep learning. The nature of how faculty guidance was perceived is clear from the participant’s responses in the interviews, as they found this faculty support to be the main source of how they felt welcome and comfortable during the transition in their first semester at this institution, positively impacting their persistence.

Finally, a prevalent perception for participants was that the support of the Transfer Seminar, through the faculty member, was an element that positively impacted their persistence. The concept of support may be the perception underlying all of the other stated reasons, as it is so fundamental. Yet, participants also specifically cited “support” as a positive factor in and of itself. This is supported by the current literature. Academically, the transition period for transfers is also characterized by a more difficult time finding faculty and obtaining academic advising at the university than they were used to from their community college experience (Berger & Malaney, 2003). However, the faculty member of the Transfer Seminar was found to provide
students with a “point of access” to the institution. The faculty member’s accessibility to and for the students in the Transfer Seminar was an important characteristic of the welcoming and comforting experience students perceived, which positively impacted their decisions to persist at this institution.

Conclusion

The research question this study sought to answer is as follows: how do the students who transferred into this four-year institution and who experienced a Transfer Seminar reflect on this institutional mechanism in regard to their decisions to persist? The answer to that question became clear through seven findings from the analysis of the data collected in this case study: “Academic Expectations: Assignments and course topics related to practical academic matters, particularly writing and research skills, set clear academic expectations of the institution,” “Feedback: Students felt encouragement through positive feedback on written work,” “Support, faculty: An open class environment and a supportive, accessible faculty made students feel welcome and comfortable,” “Support, staff: Military-affiliated students in their transition found support in navigating their transitions as transfer students,” “Student involvement: Work commitments and age made for significant obstacles for student involvement in campus life,” “Physical space: The physical space of campus was experienced primarily for academic purposes, through the multi-use library building,” and “Impact on persistence: The Transfer Seminar’s welcoming and supportive environment eased the tension of transfer transition and positively impacted student decisions to persist.” These findings form the basis of how this study fits with the current related literature in this field.

Tinto’s (2006) theory on enhancing student persistence formed the theoretical framework of this study. The seven findings address all of the four elements of Tinto’s (2006) theory on
enhancing student persistence: a faculty member’s high expectations for student learning; the support of faculty, staff, and the curriculum; frequent and timely feedback on student academic performance; and student involvement in the campus community.

In particular, the findings of this study support the findings of Stewart and Martinello (2012), who found that students transferring from community colleges to universities face a difficult transition, yet once they identify differences between these types of institutions – or when an institution addresses them preemptively through support mechanisms – the transfer students’ performances improve markedly. The Transfer Seminar was found to be a significant support course experience for entering transfer students, one that positively impacted their decisions to re-enroll and persist at this institution. For the student, the Transfer Seminar identified academic or social areas for improvement. For the institution, the Transfer Seminar became the location through which to proactively provide the support that transfer students commonly need to ease their transitions and create that increased likelihood for success, re-enrollment, and persistence to graduation.

The support from the faculty member of the Transfer Seminar was found to be significant as well. According to Berger and Malaney (2003), academically, the transition period for transfers is characterized, in part, by a more difficult time finding faculty and obtaining academic advising at the university than they were used to from their community college experience. However, the faculty member of the Transfer Seminar was found to provide students with a “point of access” to the institution. The faculty member’s accessibility to and for the students in the Transfer Seminar was an important characteristic of the welcoming and comforting experience students perceived. That point of access was perceived as important, which may be because transfer students are transitioning to a new environment where they may not know
anyone else, as Berger and Malaney point out. The faculty member of the Transfer Seminar can become the link to the rest of the institution, in ways facilitating and moderating the student’s experiences and assisting the student in various ways, not just in the class itself.

The faculty of the Transfer Seminar also positively impacted the participants’ experiences in their perceptions on the faculty member’s feedback on their work in the course. This finding supports the literature, as Valdez, Shea, Knutsen and Hoody (2014) reported on the efficacy of faculty formative feedback, finding that students perceived faculty feedback as beneficial, even in courses with student-directed activity and peer feedback mechanisms. For participants in the Transfer Seminar, the detail of the faculty feedback on work was beneficial, not only in the short-term working of the course itself, but also in how the Transfer Seminar laid the foundation for subsequent coursework at the institution.

Finally, this present study highlights the findings on student involvement in the campus community, especially in regard to that of transfer students. While the institution provided the emphasis on student involvement to show these newly enrolled transfer students in the Transfer Seminar the value it placed on that practice, the participants found that work commitments and age were obstacles for their becoming and staying involved in the campus community beyond this Transfer Seminar course. These work- and age-related obstacles to campus community involvement for transfer students are supported by the current literature. Lester, Leonard, and Mathias (2013) noted the demographics of transfer students: they are oftentimes older, hold full- or part-time jobs, and have significant family obligations. These students could devalue the social aspects of college, putting their priority in the classroom, leading to less of a feeling of social engagement with and involvement within the school.
These findings and their relation to the current literature lead into the following sections, on recommendation for practice and recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The findings of this study illuminate ways in which these findings could be used to inform practice in the field of assisting transfer students in their transitions to a new institution and fostering their persistence to graduation at that institution. There are four main recommendations: fostering the idea of faculty as the “point of access” to the institution; providing a centralized transfer office that could integrate needed services, developing of a peer mentoring program, and broadening campus community involvement opportunities to address the needs and schedule limitations of transfer students who may be older and have large work commitments.

As participants perceived significant support from their Transfer Seminar faculty member as an important “point of access” to the institution, the institution could foster that idea by staffing the Transfer Seminar with faculty members who have the broad-based institutional knowledge or with faculty drawn from academic advising. Faculty and academic advising can be seen as the hub of the student services wheel, providing the linkages with other support services, such as career development, counseling centers, offices of financial aid, and tutoring services (King, 1993). In these ways, the faculty member of the Transfer Seminar would be positioned and prepared to assist transfer students in a variety of ways.

In a similar way, an institution could provide a centralized transfer office that integrates needed services. This office would be a collaboration between offices of academic affairs, student affairs, and enrollment management. Davies and Kratky (2000) showed that the issues surrounding the transfer process are widespread and need to be addressed by a variety of staff,
offices, and departments throughout the institution. A centralized transfer office could provide a needed holistic institutional approach to supporting the entering transfer student. Participants in the present study who were military-affiliated found such an integrated approach of the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs met their various needs, and this could be similarly beneficial for other transfer students as well.

Another recommendation for practice could be a student peer mentoring system geared to support entering transfer students. Current students could more clearly speak to transfer student concerns from the student perspective, particularly if these mentors were themselves transfer students. Warren-Sohlberg, Jason, Orosan-Weine, & Lantz (1998) stressed that transfer students, regardless of age, frequently experience a loss of social status and need to adjust to new peer groups. Student mentoring can provide information, social support, and opportunities to reflect on emotions and experiences.

A final recommendation would be to broaden campus community involvement opportunities to address the needs and schedule limitations of transfer students who may be older and have large work commitments. First, there could be more programming and involvement opportunities addressing the interests and practical life needs of transfer students who may be older or who have significant work commitments. According to Townsend (2014), transfers did not want to be treated like first-years, and found that many times the institution forgets to cater programs and opportunities for student involvement to their particular perspective. Second, the opportunities to get involved could be offered at multiple times during the day and evening, to increase the likelihood that students could participate.
Building on this present study and its findings, as well as addressing areas highlighted in the recommendations for practice, the following section emphasizes some recommendations for future research in this area of transfer transition and persistence.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The recommendations for future research in this area of transfer transition and persistence relate to studying transfer students using a different theoretical framework than the one in the present study, focusing on a different institution type than the one in the present study, exploring the significance of a commuter campus versus a residential campus on the transfer experience, studying the transfer perceptions of specific groups of transfer students, and studying the perceptions of transfer students during the time of their enrollment in a Transfer Seminar in their transition period, rather than after they have completed the course and have graduated, as in the present study.

The first recommendation would be to study transfer transition and persistence using a different theoretical framework than the one used in the present study, Tinto’s (2006) theory of enhancing student persistence. This would allow the researcher to focus on a different aspect of the same issue. For instance, attachment theory could yield more understanding from a psychological perspective on if, when, and how the student felt as if he or she had fully transitioned as a transfer student; while social learning theory could lead to more understanding of the impact interacting with other transfer students in a learning community had on transfer students’ transition experiences. These are only two examples, and studying this issue using different frameworks could lead to a portrait of the transfer experience that is more fully developed.
A second recommendation would be to study transfer students at a different institution type than the one in the present study. The institution in the present study was a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, one with an approximate enrollment of 1100 undergraduates. It could provide valuable comparative data to study transfer students in a similar way at a larger institution, a public institution, a professional institution, or any one of a number of other differences in institution type.

In a similar way, a third recommendation would be to study the experience of transfer students at a residential institution, using that to compare and contrast with the commuter institution of the present study. Doing so could more fully understand the significance of a commuter campus versus a residential campus on transfer student academic and social integration.

Fourthly, it could provide a focus to the data to study the perceptions of specific groups of transfer students who have experienced an institutional intervention such as a Transfer Seminar. For instance, such a study could focus on military-affiliated students; students who transferred from two-year colleges; students who transferred from for-profit institutions, or students of a certain race, ethnicity, or age range. Such a study could provide insight into the impact these identifying characteristics may have on the transfer student experience.

Finally, it could yield valuable data to study the perceptions of transfer students during the time of their enrollment in a Transfer Seminar, as this would most likely be during their transition period in the initial semester of matriculation. A study conducted that was focused on students during that important time period in their transfer transition could better understand the efficacy of a Transfer Seminar or similar institutional intervention during the student experience.
of it. As well, such a study could elicit the perceptions of transfer students who decide to not re-enroll or persist at the institution.
Appendix A: Transfer Seminar Course Proposal

To the Provost

Proposal for new course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Short Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transfer Seminar</td>
<td>1</td>
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Catalogue description:

This one-credit course will introduce new transfer students to the mission and goals of [the institution]. Additionally students will explore learning and research skills, opportunities for campus and community involvement and the nature of the liberal arts as envisioned by SJC.

This course is required of all transfer students as a vital part of the process of becoming familiar with the ethos of [the institution] and helping them to integrate into our social and learning environment.

To be offered for Core     X     Elective     Major     

Reason for introducing this course:

To facilitate the integration of new transfer students into the social and academic community.

To be first offered on ___________ both ___________ Campus in

_______________________________ Semester Year

Course which it will replace or which will be suppressed: _______ none _______

List the goal(s) of the College related to this course:

1. To help students develop and refine their writing, reading, speaking and technology skills in preparation for advanced work in their major area and their future academic studies and professional lives.
2. To acquaint students with the tools or research, especially those available here at [the institution] and in their field.
3. To encourage students to explore what it means to have a liberal arts degree
4. To facilitate transfer student’s transition into becoming an active member of the community
5. To support students towards developing and enhancing their role as citizens through volunteerism, global awareness of and sensitivity to diversity
Appendix B: Course Description

Transfer Seminar

This one-credit course will introduce new transfer students to the mission and goals of St. Joseph’s College. Additionally, students will explore learning and research skills, opportunities for campus and community involvement, and the nature of the liberal arts as envisioned by SJC.

This course is required of all transfer students as a vital part of the process of becoming familiar with the ethos of St. Joseph’s College and helping them to integrate into our social and learning environment.
Appendix C: Sample Syllabus

Transfer Seminar

This one-credit course will introduce new transfer students to the mission and goals of [the institution]. Additionally, students will explore learning and research skills, opportunities for campus and community involvement, and the nature of the liberal arts as envisioned by [the institution].

This course is required of all transfer students as a vital part of the process of becoming familiar with the ethos of [the institution] and helping them to integrate into our social and learning environment.

Objectives

In this course, students will
- develop and refine their writing, reading, speaking and technology skills in preparation for advanced work in their major area and their future academic studies and professional lives.
- integrate the tools or research, especially those available here at [the institution], with their field.
- explore what it means to have a liberal arts degree.
- transition into becoming active members of the community.
- develop and enhance their roles as citizens through volunteerism, global awareness of and sensitivity to diversity.

Assignments

In addition to becoming familiar with [the institution] through informational, cultural, and academic workshops, students will be given a variety of writing and research assignments, leading up to a Capstone essay. Capstone essay assignment topics will be elicited from faculty in each student’s department, yet general topics will also be given in class.

Schedule

**Week 1 (1/22): Orientation** – What You Need to Know (overview of college resources, administrative offices, facilities, academic advisement session); Introduction to SJC 200

**Week 2 (1/28): Technology** – navigating campus systems, email, portal, WebAdvisor, Blackboard; first writing exercise

Week 4 (2/11): Student Life – building and maintaining involvement in campus life, clubs and organizations, the Student Leadership Experience

Week 5 (2/25): Technology & Academic Integrity – Policy on Academic Integrity, introduction to Turnitin.com, Microsoft Office and other relevant software

Week 6 (3/4): Library Orientation (Library computer lab) – library systems, databases, research, e-portfolios. Assignment: choose at least 1 scholarly article from the major field and write 1-page summary (due in Week 7)

Week 7 (3/11): Scholarly article summary presentation and discussion – discussion of articles & connections to study in the major field, explanation of Capstone essay assignment

Week 8 (3/18): Advisement and Registration Process


Week 10 (4/8): Capstone essay due - review and discussion

Week 11 (4/15): Course completion celebration & assessment – Capstone essays returned to students

Weeks 12 & 13 - Students will be required to participate in at least 2 Workshops that will be scheduled throughout the semester as part of the Student Leadership Experience. Suggested topics: Health and Wellness, Communication and Conflict Resolution, Strategies for Career and Personal Success, Social Media
Appendix D: Initial Explanation/Invitation Contact Email for Participants

Dear _____,

My name is Matt Kubacki and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am working on my thesis that seeks to understand student experience as a transfer student, of your transition to St. Joseph’s College, New York, with a particular focus on your experience of the SJC 200 Transfer Seminar course. This research is being conducted by student researcher Matt Kubacki, under the advisement of principal investigator Natalie Perry, PhD, through the Doctor of Education program in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University.

This interview will take approximately one-hour at a location you choose. As a thank you for your time, you will be provided with a $25 Visa gift card.

Participation is entirely voluntary.

Please email me at kubacki.m@husky.neu.edu if you have any questions or would like to volunteer to participate. Thank you for your consideration.

Matt
Appendix E: Informed Consent Document

Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, Department: Education (CPS)

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator: Natalie Perry, PhD Student Investigator: Matthew R. Kubacki

Title of Project: Transfer Seminar: A Case Study of Transfer Students’ Experiences at a Private, Four-Year College in Brooklyn, New York, Using Tinto’s Model of Persistence.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You have been recruited for this study because you have transferred to the institution that is the site of the study – St. Joseph’s College, New York – you have completed the course SJC 200 Transfer Seminar, and you have since graduated from this institution.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand transfer students’ experiences of their transition to a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, with a particular focus on the students’ experience of a Transfer Seminar course.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to take part in a 60-minute interview that will be audiotaped and transcribed with your permission. This is so that the researcher can be certain that all information gathered is accurate. You will be assigned a pseudonym so that your name is never used and confidentiality is maintained. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon time and location. After the interview’s transcription, the interview transcript will be sent to you, to check for accuracy or clarification.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The 60-minute interview will take place in a mutually agreed-upon location (e.g., café, park, restaurant), including the option for interviewing virtually via Skype, FaceTime or other virtual means. After the interview, when the transcript is sent to you for checking, that checking may take up to 30 minutes. This checking can be done on your own in a location you feel is appropriate.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There is no foreseeable risk, and the risk of participation is the same amount of risk one may encounter in a classroom setting.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit by you participating in this study. However, your participation may benefit future transfer students, in having an institution proactively identify areas of necessary support that can
enhance student retention and persistence to graduation. Benefits can also be for this particular institution by evaluating the efficacy of this support mechanism of the Transfer Seminar within the institutional context, as well as for other four-year institutions that seek to enroll transfer students.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Who will see the information about me?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Pseudonyms will be used for the face-to-face interview participants. Each participant will be assigned a numeral corresponding to the sequencing of the interviews over time (e.g., Interview 1 to Interview 10). Face-to-face interviews will be audio-recorded on an iPhone audio-recording application. Each audio file will be downloaded and saved to a portable “zip” drive and a portable hard drive as well. Also, each interview will be transcribed and stored on the same two drives. All files saved in the locations noted will utilize the corresponding Interview numeral in their titles. A “key” document will also be saved, only on the portable hard drive, noting the participant’s name, the corresponding numeral, and then a corresponding pseudonym to be used in the study narrative.

The institution name will also be pseudonymous, only using general identifying characteristics as they pertain to size, type (public or private), and geographical region.

Data will be stored on a portable “zip” drive and on a portable hard drive. Each participant will be assigned a numeral corresponding to the sequencing of the interviews over time (e.g., Interview 1 to Interview 10). Face-to-face interviews will be audio-recorded on an iPhone audio-recording application. Each audio file will be downloaded and saved to a portable “zip” drive and a portable hard drive as well. Also, each interview will be transcribed and stored on the same two drives.

For encryption, all files saved in the locations noted will utilize the corresponding Interview numeral in their titles. A “key” document will also be saved, only on the portable hard drive, noting the participant’s name, the corresponding numeral, and then a corresponding pseudonym to be used in the study narrative. Identifiers and links to identification of participants will be destroyed after 3 years following the end of the study.

Audio data and transcriptions (without identifiers and links to identification) will be retained indefinitely, on the portable hard drive, as data is not likely to be sensitive in nature and data will be secure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?</th>
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<tr>
<td>If you do not want to participate in this study, you may opt out at any time.</td>
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<th>What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?</th>
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<tr>
<td>There is no foreseeable likelihood of harm stemming from this research. As an alumnus of St. Joseph’s College, New York, you may utilize counseling, health and wellness services by calling the Office of Counseling and Wellness at 718-940-5853.</td>
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<th>Can I stop my participation in this study?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Contact information would be provided here]</td>
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</table>
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Matthew R. Kubacki at 347-417-3490 or kubacki.m@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Natalie Perry, PhD, the Principal Investigator, at 617-602-2302 or n.perry@northeastern.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will be given a $25 Visa gift card as soon as you complete the interview.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There are no foreseeable costs to participate.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

____________________________  __________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

____________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________  __________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

____________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education program
Principal Investigator: Natalie Perry, PhD
Student Investigator: Matt Kubacki, Doctoral Student, kubacki.m@husky.neu.edu
Title of Project: Transfer Seminar: A Case Study of Transfer Students’ Experiences at a Private, Four-Year College in Brooklyn, New York, Using Tinto’s Model of Persistence

Interviewees: Thank you for participating in this research study. We have reviewed the consent form together, and you have been provided a copy of the form for your records. You have given your verbal consent to participate. This interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and is being audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes only. The information shared in the interview will be confidential. Your name will not be included in this study to protect your privacy. Next, we are going to be talking about your experiences as a transfer student at this institution, particularly through your experience of the Transfer Seminar course. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

- What were your thoughts when you were told that the one-credit course Transfer Seminar was a required course in your first semester at this institution?

One element that can enhance student persistence is a faculty member’s high academic expectations, characterized by clear and consistent guidelines that compel students to study the given material (Tinto, 2006). The next series of questions will focus on the topic of the academic expectations of this institution, particularly through this Transfer Seminar course.
• How did this course provide you with an understanding of the academic expectations of this institution?

• What was it about the course that compelled you to complete it successfully?

Secondly, students can persist based on support from the faculty, staff, and the curriculum (Tinto, 2006). The next questions will focus on those supports.

• Do you feel the faculty of the Transfer Seminar supported you as a transfer student through this course? If so, how? If not, what other support did you need?

• Do you feel other staff members of this institution supported you in your transition as a transfer student? If so, how? If not, what other support did you need?

• Do you feel the curriculum of the institution supported you as a transfer student? If so, how? If not, what other support did you need?

Thirdly, timely, accurate, and sensitive feedback on academic work to students can provide students with opportunities to understand their academic strengths and weaknesses (Tinto, 2006).

• How would you characterize the feedback you received on your work in this Transfer Seminar course?

Finally, student involvement in the campus community can add to a student’s decision to persist (Tinto, 2006, fourth element of persistence model). These next questions relate to your campus involvement, including how you experienced the physical spaces of the campus.

• How much were you involved in the campus community at this institution?
• Looking at the map (http://www.sjcnyc.edu/brooklyn/about/campus-map), what are the areas of campus where you spent most of your time?
• How did you spend most of your time in these areas?

• In general, how much do you think the Transfer Seminar impacted your decisions to re-enroll and persist to graduation at this institution?
• What elements of the Transfer Seminar most stand out to you in their impact on you and your decisions to persist?

Thank you for your responses and your participation in this interview. Is there anything more you would like to add?

I will be transcribing this interview within the next few weeks, and I will provide you with a copy of that transcript, to check it for accuracy. Please contact me in person, at 347-417-3490, or at kubacki.m@husky.neu.edu if you need to clarify any information you presented in this interview or would like to ask any additional questions. Thank you.
Appendix G: Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in the interview for this study. The purpose of the study is to understand transfer students’ experiences of their transition to a private four-year college in Brooklyn, New York, with a particular focus on the students’ experience of a Transfer Seminar course. After the interview’s transcription, the interview transcript will be sent to you, to check for accuracy or clarification. If at any point you have questions, you can contact the student researcher, Matthew R. Kubacki, at 347-417-3490, who will answer your questions. If at any point I have comments or concerns about the conduction of the research or questions about my rights as a study participant, I should contact the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 617-373-7570.

Thank you.

Matt
References


accommodation of it: Rethinking science education research. *Science Education.*


educational research. *Compare, 38*(5), 525-538.


doi:10.1177/0091552113496141


