

**NISTS 2023**

# BE A CONNECTOR FOR TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS

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The following presentation was given at the 21st Annual Conference for the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students. Please cite responsibly and direct questions to the original presenter(s).

## *Research Spotlight*

### **2821 - Transfer Intersectionality: A Student-Centered Approach to Transfer Transition Support**

Transition Programs and Supports, Matriculation Trends and Issues

If you sat down with your new transfer students, what would they tell you? Do you really know how incoming transfers are experiencing your institution? This session explores the impact of the campus environment on transfer students' sense of belonging. Findings highlight the uniqueness and compounding influence(s) of multiple social identities and roles, and the benefit of supportive relationships in students' sense of connection to the institution. Consider ways to strengthen transfer student integration by thinking beyond procedural efficiency toward individualized identity-based support.

**Julia Butler-Mayes**, *Director of Academic Advising*

**Katie Burr**, *Director of Assessment*

University of Georgia

# Transfer Intersectionality:

## A student-centered approach to transfer student support

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JULIA M. BUTLER-MAYES, PH.D., UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

KATIE H. BURR, PH.D., UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

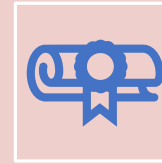
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# Learning Goals

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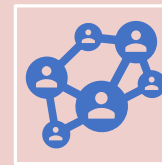
Thoughtfully question **how transfer students engage in the campus culture**, including organizations, campus traditions, and academic communities



Evaluate and (re)consider language used to describe transfer students, in general and local campus contexts, toward an **asset-based approach** and acknowledgement of the transfer student capital



Identify opportunities for **extended support for transfer students**, as they navigate a new campus culture, that are relevant to their own campus contexts



Reflect on ways in which they could update and/or expand transfer-specific initiatives or programs on their campuses to capitalize on the power of **facilitating individual relationships** for transfer student success

# SPOILER ALERT!

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DIFFERENT STUDIES. DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS. DIFFERENT STUDENTS.  
SIMILAR (UNEXPECTED) FINDINGS.

# Background & Overview

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## TRANSFER STUDENTS ...

Are a large and growing demographic

Are more likely to be low SES, first-generation, minority, non-traditional, and other underserved populations

Experience barriers to success and degree completion

## EXISTING RESEARCH ...

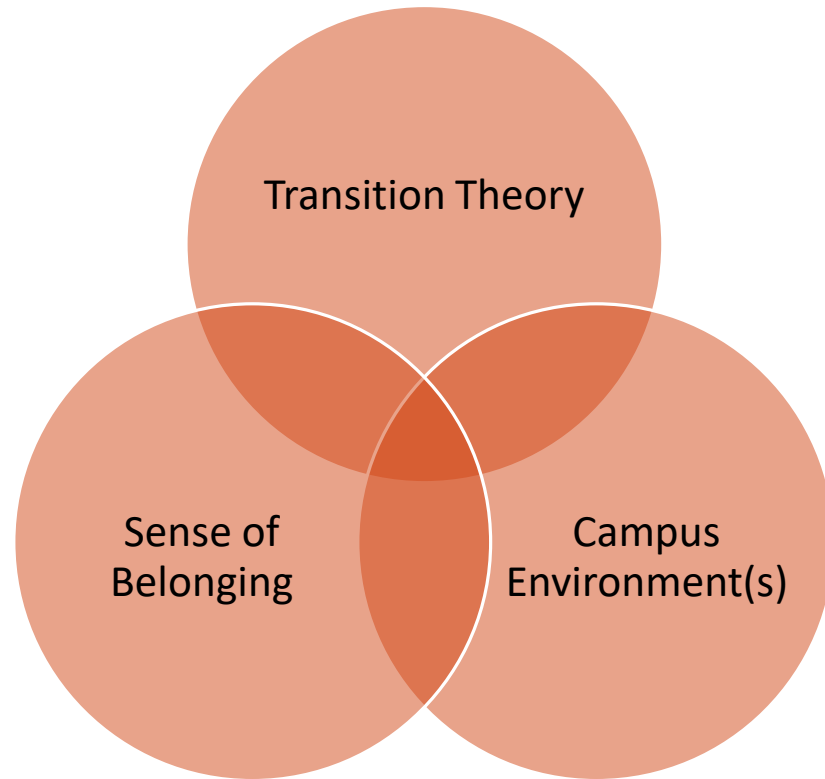
Primarily places the responsibility on the student, not the institution

Characterizes transfer students from a deficit-based perspective and/or as victims of unwieldy processes

Is limited in what we know about transfer students' experiences integrating into campus culture

# Framing Theories & Concepts

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# The Studies: Julia

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## Research Questions:

How do transfer students experience the physical, human aggregate, organizational, and socially constructed components of their campus environment at the receiving institution during their first year post-transfer?

Based on these experiences, what environmental supports do transfer students believe aid in their transition?

What environmental barriers do transfer students believe hinder a successful transition?



# The Studies: Julia

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**Qualitative case study** involving student interviews, written responses, administrator interviews, and observations

## Site & Participants

- Kennesaw State University (GA)
- 14 new transfer students
- 3 campus administrators



# The Studies: Katie

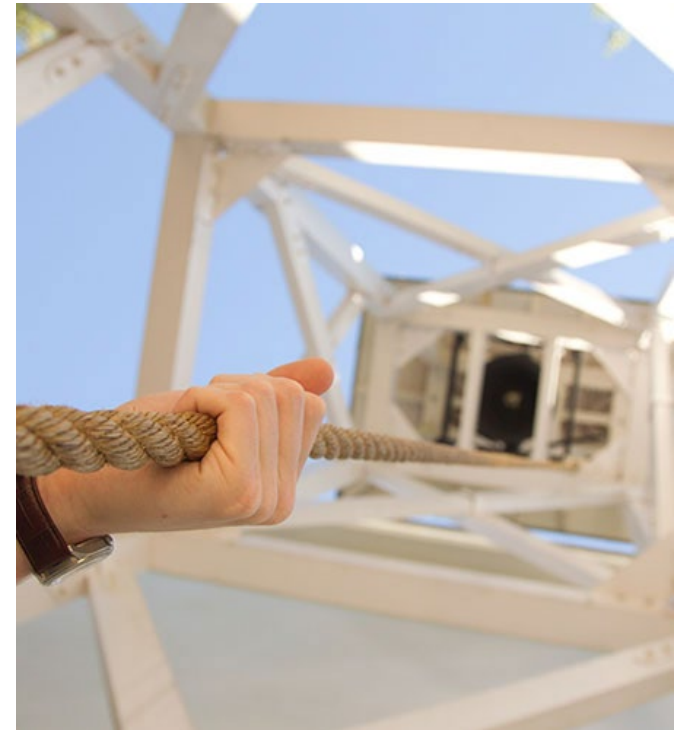
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## Research Questions:

What role do iconic campus traditions play in the institutional enculturation of transfer students?

How do transfer students describe their engagement with campus traditions?

Which campus traditions are most salient for transfer students and why?



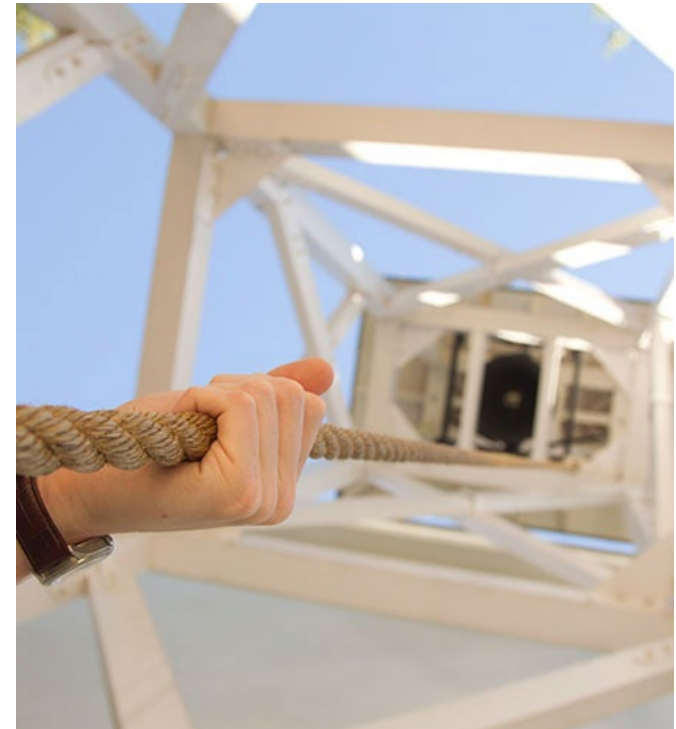
# The Studies: Katie

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**Narrative inquiry** involving the stories of individuals who were currently enrolled or recently transferred

## Site & Participants

- University of Georgia (GA)
- Interviewed 9 current or recently graduated transfer students
- Place-based interviews at or near location of meaningful campus tradition(s)



# Findings: Julia

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## Experience of Campus Environment

- Overwhelmingly large
- Impact of human connections
- Confusion around systems/processes
- Importance of access and identity

## Environmental Supports

- Police presence
- Diversity of opportunities
- Individual encouragement

## Environmental Barriers

- Marginalized identities
- Structural deprioritization
- Lack of access

# Findings: Julia

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**“I guess just you see where you fit in.  
... Whatever you like, there's  
something for you, and then, I feel  
like that's your little community.  
Even though it might be small,  
it's still a part of a bigger community  
at Kennesaw.”**



# Findings: Katie

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## Intellectual Climate

- The intellectual climate at UGA was a rich thematic element woven through participants' stories in different ways and played a role in their identity validation as a UGA student.

## Traditions as Key Cultural Knowledge

- Because football, the Arch, the chapel bell, jumping in the fountain, and other campus traditions were primary culture icons, participants felt compelled to participate.

## Markers of Personal Accomplishment\*

- Acceptance to UGA
- Transfer capital
- Sense of place related to accomplishment
- Traditions and racial identity

## Traditions and Racial Identity

Kinna, a Black woman, recalled her feelings when she first rang the iconic chapel bell:

*“The chapel bell is supposed to signify accomplishments or whatever. And so, looking at it like that, I did do that. But also considering that the history behind it, like who actually rang it when UGA first started, I guess from a historical standpoint, and from a cultural standpoint, I [was] ringing it to kind of celebrate the fact that like, not that my ancestors specifically, but people who were slaves used to ring it. And just to be able to be a college student who actually is attending UGA – ring it for my celebration instead of, like, to change classes, I feel like shows the progression of change from hundreds of years ago.”*

# A-HA MOMENT

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INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY > COLLECTIVE PROCESS



# The Big Reveal

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While findings revealed common themes among transfer students, primarily, findings from both studies highlight the **uniqueness of transfer students' experiences and the compounding influence(s) of multiple social identities and roles** on their integration into campus culture and sense of connection to the institution.



# So... What do we do?

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CONSIDER THE “BOTH/AND” OF COLLECTIVE SUPPORT AND INDIVIDUALITY. WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON YOUR CAMPUS?

# Implications for Practice

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Create new (or utilize existing) transfer-specific initiatives to foster individual interactions and relationships.

Harness these and other points of connection to facilitate engagement with identity-based “mini-communities.”

Examples: transfer peer mentoring program, transfer seminar, transfer centers, individualized coaching

**Paradigm shift → what ~~challenges~~ assets do these ~~transfer students~~ individuals bring?**



# Thank you!

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JULIA : JMBM@UGA.EDU

KATIE : KATIEBURR@UGA.EDU