Research Spotlight

College Closure and the Impact of Forced Transfer
Matriculation Trends and Issues, Transition Programs and Services

The financial implications of college closure are well documented, still, no research exists that examines the impact on affected students. This session will present findings from a longitudinal qualitative study that sought to explore the impact of college closure on students who were suddenly forced to transfer. Results revealed the forced transfer event has implications for students, as well as sending and receiving institutions. Findings can better prepare students for the impact of a college closure.

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COLLEGE CLOSURE AND THE IMPACT OF FORCED TRANSFER

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NISTS 2021 VIRTUAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE
GOING OUT OF BUSINESS
PROBLEM

The financial implications of college closure are far-reaching and well documented.

- Media emphasis on financial aspect
- Less discussed are the implications of the closure to the students
  - Supports received before, during, and after the transition
  - How many students continue, take a break or leave college as a result of the closure
- Limited oversight
- Currently no research exists that examines the impact of college closure on affected students
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to capture the lived experiences of students navigating a forced transfer event due to college closure.
DEFINITION OF FORCED TRANSFER

A student enrolled in an academic program at a degree granting institution with plans to fulfill all academic requirements for complete degree at that institution, however as a result of a discontinued program or institutional closure, the student cannot finish academic requirements necessary to earn their degree at that institution, instead forced to seek education elsewhere.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What were the academic, social, and career-related impacts on students who experienced a *forced* transfer event?

How did students employ coping mechanisms to navigate and manage a *forced* transfer event?
SCHLOSSBERG’S TRANSITION THEORY

Schlossberg

Transition theory
- Events prompt change
- Individuals have assets and liabilities available to navigate the change
RESEARCH DESIGN

QUALITATIVE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
PARTICIPANTS

• Participant (n=30) criteria:
  • Met the working definition of *forced* transfer
  • Attended a college that closed unexpectedly between 2016 – 2020
  • All transferred from a closed institution to another institution

• Overall sampling method: Purposeful
• Secondary sampling method: Snowball
INSTRUMENTATION/ DATA COLLECTION

- Pre-qualifying questionnaire
- Semi-structured interview guide
- Post-reflective questionnaire
LIMITATIONS

- Researcher bias/positionality
- Self-reporting
- Generalizability
- Timing

- Criterion for participation
DATA ANALYSIS

• Coding was employed (Saldaña)
  • 4’s System
• Structural description (Creswell)
• Flesh out commonalities
FINDING #1

Identifying immediate outlets to help mitigate the [shock] associated with the unexpected transfer

I read the announcement several times, but it was very vague like [the sending college] was trying to “trick us”. After 45 minutes or so panic set in and I remember thinking “how will I get my grades” and “do I even go to my next class?”. To this day I don’t know how I got home in one piece because I don’t remember driving. I was like hysterical on the road.

People started screaming, yelling, crying to their friends. It was a like scene from a movie – like everyone reacted at the same time to this shared event.

When we were notified, you could see a crowd of students just stop what they were doing...like a bomb, then some started crying, others screaming.
FINDING #2

Making sense of the unexpected transfer experience

I will never be able to understand why this happened. I keep playing it over and over in my head trying to make sense of it all. I mean [receiving school] isn’t where I go, That’s what it feels like, at least – that I still go to [sending institution], but that’s not what my transcripts will say. That’s not what my resume will say. It’s kind of a fake thing in my life.

I never pictured myself leaving [sending institution] – it was my home. So, when they took that away it really broke me, and sometimes, I do struggle with it.

Like I don’t trust things. You trust your college is going to stay open. Yah, you plan out different scenarios that could happen like “what if I fail out” or “what if I run out of money”, but never “what if my college closes”. I planned out those scenarios. But now it’s like there’s this feeling in the back of my mind where I can’t rely on things as well.
FINDING #3

Sense of belonging to the new institution and the campus community

I do not feel like I belong [at the receiving institution]. Everyone refers to us as the kids who transferred. I don’t want to be known as the kid who transferred – I want to be a [receiving institution] student just like everyone else. But no one will let us forget where we came from.

I am sick of talking about [the transfer]. I have to break into this like traumatizing story of like how my school closed once people find out I was a student from [sending institution]. It is exhausting.

It was literally the worst year. It’s like we’re just going through the motions. It’s just weird. We’re not part of the community.

They put us on the same floor in the same residence halls together. We were all so like unified that I feel like it inhibited us. We didn’t have classes with any other [receiving institution] students. We were very segregated. We didn’t feel like we belonged.
FINDING #4

Redefining the academic journey

It feels like I have a lot more stability [at receiving institution] because my tutor knows my writing style and I have scheduled appointments with my success coach every week, which is not something I had before. In my opinion, my new institution has made me feel more successful in my academic progress.

The reason I decided to attend [receiving institution] is because I got a team of academic support that could help me get back on track with my academic path. This team of coaches helped me realize I hadn’t wasted all my time [at sending institution] and that the academic coursework actually transferred towards a degree I was interested in studying.

One faculty transferred with us. I feel like we wanted her to help us become more involved but she was dealing with her own transition, and at the time we didn’t see that, so we thought well she abandoned us just like everyone else did. Looking back, I can see it must have been really hard for her as well.

Oh god, it would have been awful [to have new faculty teaching us]. I wouldn’t have [come here], the only reason I decided to go to [receiving institution] was because it was going to be the same teachers-really the same everything-like I don’t think I would have done as well at all with the transition otherwise.

I was a forensic science major. They didn’t have that major at [receiving institution], so when I transferred, I became a psychology major. They didn’t have a lot of faculty advising, no academic support services [during this transition process], so I just picked what I thought was the closest match, but it isn’t forensic science.
FINDING #5

Clarity and resiliency around post-graduate goal attainment

I didn’t used to be very confident, but this transition has made me more confident in my career path and my future goals. I had to decide to take this transfer positively. I’ve taken things one step at a time and my career experiences have grown in a positive way, so I trust there will be a better future for me.

I am learning a lot about my skills from my work study and I’ve also been researching graduate school, something I never thought of doing before coming here. My faculty advisor has been great in helping me navigate the career-related questions I’ve had so far. There are so many things I can do with my degree – I am in the exploration stage, so I am ready when graduation comes.

Long-term, whatever happens to me, whether I get rejected for a job interview or something scary like that, this closure will always be in the back of my mind. Like if I can get through this [transition], I think I can get through anything really. This situation made me a stronger person. No one ever told me what to do or how to get through. I came here undeclared, but now I’m studying education. I never thought I could be a teacher, but now I know I can.

When the closure happened, I just thought that was kind of like the end, I wouldn’t graduate from college because I didn’t see myself actually going to another college. I wouldn’t finish my education and my life would consist of a different experience. But then I visited the career center [at receiving institution] and they really spent time listening to me and, yah, just helping me figure it out. Now I’m really excited about my major and my future.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. Increase scope by identifying institutions supporting students with successful transfer programs from sending to receiving institution.
2. Interview advising staff who work closely with students forced to transfer to glean experiences from a different lens.
3. Follow students after they move from sending to receiving institution to track retention and academic, social and career success.
4. Conduct follow-up mixed or quantitative study.
CONCLUDING THOUGHT

• As of January 2020, approximately 50 institutions of higher education appear on the college closure watch list.

• Because successful management of the transfer event begins long before a student moves from one institution to another, and essential to this management is the recognition that how students’ approach and cope with the transition event is as varied as the students themselves, a forced transfer event disrupts the longitudinal timeline typically needed to prepare for such a transition.

• While this research yielded important findings, learning more about the impact of this emerging transfer event: the forced transfer will help researchers and college support staff understand whether current interventions are effective in meeting the needs of this transfer event.
Thank You!

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