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Research Spotlight

2374 - A Place for Me? African American Transfer Student Involvement at a PWI in the Midwest

Matriculation Trends and Issues, Special Populations

The purpose of this session is to explore the experiences and sense of belonging of African American transfer students attending a predominantly White institution in the Midwest when resources tailored to this specific group were available. The study sought to explore the effect that support services (or lack of) and staff had on the lived experiences and student involvement of African American transfer students on a particular campus.

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A Place for Me?:

African American Transfer Student Involvement at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest



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 - BS, Southeast Missouri State University
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- Transfer Student
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Meet the Presenter



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Introduction

Overview



The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and sense of belonging of African American transfer students attending a predominantly White institution in the Midwest. This study sought to explore the effect that support services (or lack of) and staff had on the lived experiences and student involvement of African American students on a particular campus.

Review of the Literature



African American Students

- Historically, African-American students were not always welcomed at PWI's (HBCU's are the result)
- This needed sense of belonging provides affiliation with the campus community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997)
- Experience belonging differently based on identity and experiences on campus (Strayhorn, 2012)
- The student experience is often "White normed" (Hui & Jackson, 2017)

Transfer Students

- Different experience than traditional four-year students (Nunez & Yoshini, 2017)
- Students may not have the same resources available
- Sense of belonging affected by the missed opportunity to form relationships during the first year

Review of the Literature

African American transfer students

- Research for African American transfer students and their experiences is limited
- Population experiences the issues of transfer and African-American students at a PWI as stated by Cooper & Hawkins (2014):
 - Negative stereotypes from peers
 - Feelings of being outcasts and lack of connection with faculty, administrators, and staff

African American students still must overcome barriers as stated by Padilla in 1997:

- Discontinuity
- Lack of nurturing
- Lack of presence
- Resource barriers

Theoretical Framework

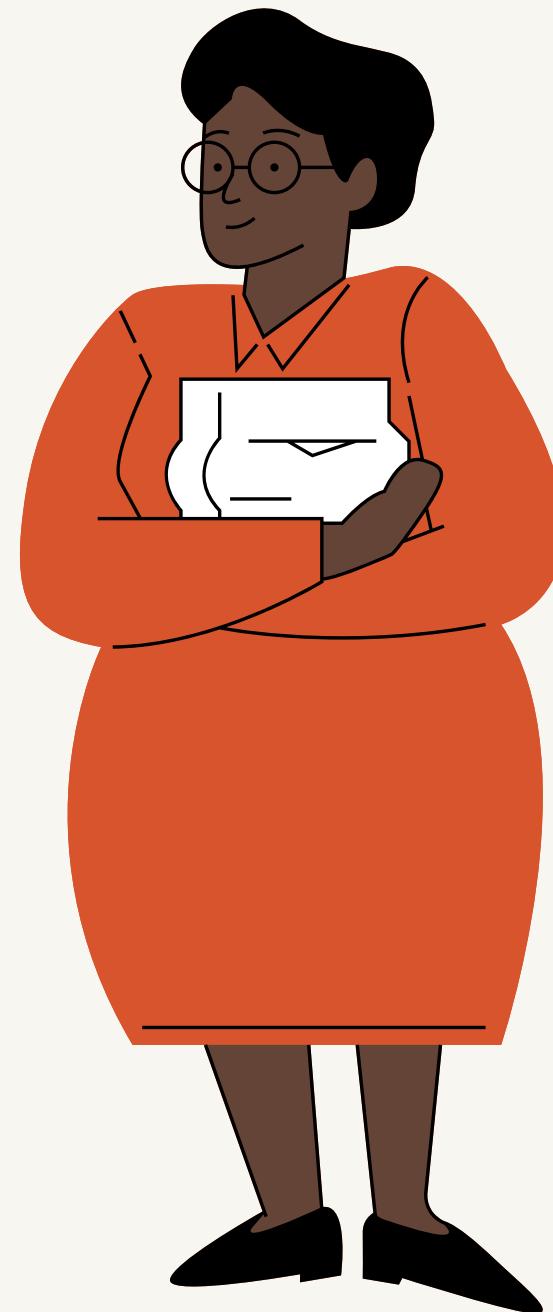
Schlossberg Mattering & Marginality (1989)

- Temporary or permanent state a student experiences during their transition to a college environment
- Student may feel as if they do not matter to others because of changing roles within the institution

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984)

- Five postulates studying amount of psychological and physical energy a student spends to take part in extracurricular and classroom activities

Research Questions



Primary
Question

How do African American transfer students describe their experiences at a PWI in the midwest?

Sub-
Question 1:

How do African American transfer students obtain a sense of belonging on campus?

Sub-
Question 2:

How does this sense of belonging affect the level of involvement in campus activities and organizations for African American transfer students?

Methods, Procedures, & Types of Analysis

- **Methods**
 - Research questions were answered through a case study protocol, observations made by the researcher, and artifacts gathered from public information made available by the university
- **Procedures**
 - The study utilized semi-structured interviews based on research related to African-American and Transfer students, as well as information based on staff involvement.
- **Types of Analysis**
 - Each interview was transcribed using a transcription service to ensure accuracy
 - The analysis involved identifying themes that emerged from the data associated with the study
 - Sense of Belonging
 - Involvement
 - Support

Limitations of the Study



1

Potential researcher bias

2

No previous relationship to/with participants

3

Discouraging to participants/lack of participation

Research Institution

- Private liberal arts university located in the Midwest
- Clubs and organizations which cater to all students, lifestyles, Ethnic groups
- Population: 10,200 (All 50 states and 58 countries represented)
- Main Campus Student population:
 - 3,700 on-campus students
 - 70% identified as White/Caucasian, 21% other Ethnic groups, 9% African-American
 - 225 students identified as Transfer
 - .05% of Transfer population identified as African-American

Participants

Student Participants' Year/Age/Major/Involvement

PSEUDONYM	YEAR	AGE	MAJOR	ACTIVE ON CAMPUS?
Student 1	Senior	22	BFA – Graphic Design	Yes – FAB Lab
Student 2	Sophomore	20	BFA – Graphic Design	Yes – Work Study (Commuter)
Student 3	Sophomore	20	Pre-Secondary Education	Yes – Assoc. of Black Collegians
Student 4	Junior	19	Pre-Dentistry	No – Looking to be involved (commuter)
Student 5	Senior	22	Criminology/Criminal Justice	No – Commuter
Student 6	Junior	20	Psychology	Yes – Sports (Softball)

Participants

Staff Participants' Position and Years of Service

PSEUDONYM	POSITION	YEARS OF SERVICE
Staff Member 1	Assistant Director of Admissions	18
Staff Member 2	Assistant Vice President	30
Staff Member 3	Assistant Dean	10
Staff Member 4	Program Coordinator	2
Staff Member 5	Vice President	15
Staff Member 6	Program Coordinator	3
Staff Member 7	Director – Student Success	6

Findings



Major themes gathered from the data:

- Lived Experiences of African American Transfer Students
- Views of Campus Community
- Level of Involvement and Sense of Belonging
- Relationship Building
- Staff and University Support
- Are We (the staff) Doing Enough?

Lived Experience of African American Transfer Students

" I guess, for example, having a safe place to come, and you know, be a part of something you're familiar with. I had a good friend, she's biracial and most of her experiences were with White people. She is now the president of the Association of Black Collegians (ABC). They made her feel comfortable enough to learn about her culture and be a part of it." – **Student 4**

"I've had a lot more good experiences than bad. This past year, in May, I was crying in the back because I was having a bad day. There was just a lot of stuff going on personally. And she, staff member 6, saw me crying and she just checked in on me. She took me to personal counseling and from then on, she continued to check on me and make sure I was alright. Just that sense of support and being there for me was like, so encouraging to me. It was like, "Wow, I have somebody like, outside of my family, outside of my friends that like, really cares." – **Student 3**

Lived Experience of African American Transfer Students

“ I can only speak for the DVA (Design and Visual Arts) part of campus. Overall, it’s pretty great and I know I made the right choice choosing this school. The faculty are really supportive and I have a friendly and ongoing relationship with the other students.” – **Student 2**

“One experience that makes me vastly uncomfortable is that cars near public safety have “BLUE LIVES MATTER” stickers on them. Blue lives matter is directly in protest to black lives matter. I don’t know which safety officer it is, it could be any of them. However, that lets me know that they support other students but not me and not others like me. My student ID is a bit discolored and the bar code doesn’t work anymore. I won’t get a new one because one, it’s \$20, and I only have another semester. I can read the numbers if I have to. Two, I won’t go up there unless I have a Black Lives Matter shirt on so they know where I stand.” – **Student 2**

Views of the Campus Community

“ With students, per se, I’m mostly cool with everyone. It’s easier to connect and communicate with Caucasian people in the actual classroom. But I mean, outside of it, they would either choose, you know, to say “Hi”, or not. But, I mean, if you take it personally that’s on you. But most of the other students I don’t identify with, we’re cool. We speak but don’t hang out or have a conversation, which is fine. Some of them are very standoffish I would say.” – **Student 4**

“I really like the campus environment. The staff and students are very nice and are willing to go out of their way to help you if needed.” – **Student 6**

“I would say the campus as a whole, I’ve never run into an issue where someone was blatantly rude to me or anything like that.” – **Student 3**

Level of Involvement and Sense of Belonging

“ When I came in, I was able to join an organization within Diversity & Inclusion. The staff and the program helped me feel like oh yeah, I belong here. And that was kinda of a shoo-in for me to kinda get involved in other things. It does affect my involvement in other things.” – **Student 3**

“ I feel I find my sense of belonging through sports. I have played sports for most of my life and had the opportunity to play here. The girls and my coach help me feel like I belong. I feel like sometimes having this sense of belonging really helps me go to different activities around campus and participate in different clubs.” – **Student 6**

“The university does well with the advertising of campus events and organizations. They try to make sure everyone knows about it. So it's no just on the digital signage. People walk around trying to get others involved.” – **Student 4**

Level of Involvement and Sense of Belonging

“I don’t have many friends on campus and, in a way, I blame that on the fact I have to work a lot and don’t live on campus so I don’t get to interact. I don’t know that I ever really have gained a sense of belonging on campus.” – **Student 5**

“I do not believe that I fit in here because it is predominantly White. It is not that I cannot make White friends, but I find it so much easier to connect to people I can relate to. Unfortunately, I do not have much time outside of class, so I was not able to participate in diverse programs. I am a lot less likely to get involved because I feel that I cannot relate to most of the students here as easily.” – **Student 1**

Relationship Building

"I would say it is all relationship-building. This institution as you know it's very relational and I think in student life we really pick up the approach that it is really about getting to know the students both individually and as part of their group. Because each group has its own identity too. Individually you make up the group but the group itself also has an identity"

- Staff Member 2

"If I see them studying in the CSE (Center of Student Engagement) or the building, then I make direct contact with them, give them my business card, let them know that they can come to me with anything. A lot of times, once I show them the popcorn machine, hen just that we're a place where they can come between classes, we'll start to see more participation from them." - Staff Member 3

Staff and University Support

“There were lots of meet ups for transfer students specifically that helped me understand the way things work around here. Lots of students independently reach out to me also” – **Student 1**

“The university did not really assist me in my transition. I felt it especially difficult to connect to people because I am a transfer student who is a year behind. Everyone in my classes were starting their first year.” – **Student 2**

Staff and University Support

“We just don’t spend a lot of time talking about transfer versus first-year. We talk about new.” – **Staff Member 2**

“If I can be completely honest, that’s where our office lacked. I think myself, and another program coordinator, we always wanted to start an initiative for transfer students and first-gen students. Because we focused a lot on traditional first-year students coming to campus. And we did see students who were transfer, who would come in, because we would see this new face. But I feel like those students, that wasn’t a priority from our top down leadership. From our supervisor.” – **Staff Member 6**

Are We (the staff) Doing Enough?

“The unfortunate reality is students of color who are transferred get treated the same as White students who are transferred. There are not getting anything that’s going to better them and that’s how it is. To alumni relations, they’re not going to want to give back because they’re not involved and there’s nothing to get them involved in. There’s no initiative, there’s no one, not one office, not one person that they’re designated job is to recruit and retain transfer students. And that’s the sad part.” – **Staff Member 6**

“I remember a day where, like, you would meet somebody, and then just grab ‘em by the hand and walk em’ over here, and then I’d be able to sit with ‘em. Those days are long gone, because you got a line of students outside your door, there’s things that will happen between getting them from point A to point B. So we have to be more intentional about putting a guide post to students as they are navigating around campus.” – **Staff Member 3**

Are We (the staff) Doing Enough?

“I think that transfer students, specifically transfer students of color, they’re not a high priority at a lot of institutions which is unfortunate. Sometimes you see that they create a commuter student organization or commuter student space or there’s initiative and money put behind for commuter students. But there’s no initiative or money put aside for transfer students to keep them. And sometimes people lump them in and that’s the problem.” – **Staff Member 6**

“I think there is more that can be done. I’m very intentional but that’s because I have a passion for African American students and their ability to be retained, persist, and graduate. I think it depends but that’s just my level of passion. I don’t think we’re intentionally neglecting those students but I could imagine them getting lost in the shuffle and would like more resources.” – **Staff Member 7**

Recommendations

- Target email communications before students arrive and during their stay on campus
- Programming targeting transfer students who identify as African American
- Development of a transfer student office
- Staff members dedicated to serving African American transfer students
- Orientation sessions dedicated to the needs of transfer students including African American transfer students

A close-up photograph showing the hands of two students. One student's hand is in the foreground, holding a black pen and writing in a notebook. Another student's hand is visible behind it, also holding a pen. They appear to be working on a assignment or taking notes together.

Conclusion

- The study showed different levels of involvement among students
 - Some were convinced the institution lacked what was needed
- Sense of Belonging did indeed affect the level of involvement exhibited by the students
- Staff members proved lack of resources available
- The population is in need of support from university leadership



Thank
you!

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Don't forget the session evaluation!

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