

#NISTS2019 CONFERENCE

WORKING TOGETHER TO SIMPLIFY TRANSFER

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"It's Like Wearing a T-Shirt with Holes": Understanding Transfer Transition and Identity Development *Diversity & Inclusion, Special Populations* - Research Spotlight, 2018 NISTS Research Award Winner

Transfer students are a growing population on university campuses nationwide. However, little is known about how students construct identities related to being “transfer students” and how these identities affect their transitions. In this presentation, we present a case study of two four-year institutions in Texas, one private and one public. We use a mixed method approach to understand vertical and horizontal transfer students’ experiences with their transitions and their identity development.

Catherine Hartman, Doctoral Candidate
The University of Texas at Austin

Jeff Mayo, Senior Program Coordinator
The University of Texas at Austin

“It’s Like Wearing a T-Shirt with Holes”: Understanding Transfer Transition and Identity Development

Catherine Hartman

Jeffrey Mayo

The University of Texas at Austin

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Agenda

- Overview of current transfer research
- Study purpose and research questions
- Theoretical framework
- Methods
- Findings
- Questions/Discussion

Transfer is a Major Component of U.S. Higher Education

- Transfer rate for students who started at a four-year institution, regardless of sector: 38.5%
- Transfer rate for students who started at a two-year institution: 37.1%
- The primary transfer destination for two-year starters was a four-year institution (50.5% of transfers).
- Some students transfer from a 4-yr to a 2-yr institution, which contributes to a “swirling” transfer pattern

Source: National Student Clearinghouse (2018)

Transfer Literature

- Growing literature that examines the transition of transfers enrolled at elite public institutions
- The voices of students who have successfully been admitted to and transferred into a four-year institution are limited in the literature.
- For all transfers, there is little data available about students undergoing the acclimation process at their receiving institutions, particularly their identity development
- Frequently, transfer student success is viewed strictly in respect to how well a student performs academically, in particular through the comparison of GPAs with those of first-time in college students.

Sources:

Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solorzano (2011); Wang, (2012)

Research Questions

- What are the academic and social experiences of transfer students?
- What role do students' experiences play in their identity development as transfer students?
- What role do students' identities play into their experiences post transfer?

Theoretical Framework

- Schlossberg's Transition Theory
 - Transition process—moving in, through, and out
 - Four elements that impact an individual's ability to cope with a transition: Situation, self, support, and strategies
- Psychosocial Identity Development
 - Personal and social identities
 - Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Source: Jones & Abes, 2013

Methodology and Methods

- Case study
 - Within case and cross-case
 - Student voices
- Student interviews
 - With 25 students at Southern and 27 at Northern; half horizontal and half vertical
- Survey
 - Asked students about academic and social engagement, satisfaction with transfer, and if identity as a transfer is important to them
- Field observations
 - Transfer student spaces and events at both campuses

Research Site—Northern

- Private, doctoral university
- Selective: 38% admit rate for freshmen; 58% acceptance rate for transfers (Fall 2017)
- Urban environment
- Medium enrollment
 - Total: 9,000
 - Transfer: 19% of new students
- Cost of attendance: \$33,000
- Pell grant recipients: 12%
- Race/ethnicity
 - White: 71%
 - Hispanic: 12%
 - Black or African American: 5%
 - Asian: 3%

Research Site—Southern

- Public, doctoral university
- Selective: 40% admit rate for freshmen; 48% acceptance rate for in-state transfers, and 27% for OOS transfers (Fall 2017)
- Urban environment
- Large enrollment
 - Total: 43,000
 - Transfer: 22% of new students
- Cost of attendance: \$16,000
- Pell grant recipients: 24%
- Race/ethnicity
 - White: 43%
 - Hispanic: 20%
 - Black or African American: 4%
 - Asian: 18%

Identity and Experiences

Findings

1) Transfers *do* identify as transfer students

- Southern: **80%** of surveyed students said they probably (18%) or definitely (62%) considered themselves transfer students. Only 10% said they probably or definitely did not. **44%** of students said that being a transfer student is an important reflection of who they are.
- Northern: **85%** of surveyed students said they probably (11%) or definitely (74%) considered themselves transfer students. Only 10% probably or definitely did not. **51%** of students said that being a transfer student is an important reflection of who they are.

What does it mean to be a transfer student?

- “Cutting college costs significantly”
- “Show the initiative to do something bigger,” like making a big step in your life
- Transfer is “an aspect of identity in relation to education, not human on a larger scale”
- Calling myself a transfer student is “not like a sense of pride. It’s more of a sense of it’s shaped who I am. So every single experience that I have, it’s shaped who I am so transferring definitely shaped my college experience. It’s more of a ‘yes, I’m a transfer student and I’ve been here for a different amount of time than everyone else and have had a different experience.’ So definitely part of the identity.”
- “I don’t think I’m fully accustomed to Southern yet.”
- “I always feel behind.”

When does transfer identity emerge?

- The second I got on campus
- The first semester coming to Northern or Southern
- When I transferred
- When I got accepted
- Never, really. Just considered myself a Southern student.
- When I enrolled at Southern. I still consider myself a bulldog, but I will always be a transfer student. I really liked my old school.
- When I wanted to leave my previous institution
- As soon as I enrolled in community college as a freshmen, I knew I would transfer
- When people began to ask about why I chose Northern and why I transferred. It made me feel out of place when being a “transfer student” was a huge part of my identity.
- When I got to Southern, and I feel like I’m an outsider transfer student nearly 3 years later
- When I couldn’t explain what year I was

Reflect and Discuss

What message are we signaling if we don't call transfer students "transfers"?

2) Transfer identity plays an important role in social and academic experiences

- **Southern:** 56% of surveyed students indicated that being a transfer student played a significant role in their academic and social experiences.
- **Northern:** 62% of surveyed students indicated that being a transfer student played a significant role in their academic and social experiences.

Social Experiences

- Transfer students are often expected to assimilate with little accommodation
- “There's no adjustments in the system for the student. The student has to adjust for the system type of thing...**It's like merging into traffic kind of thing.** We're already going, we're already on the path and you need to figure out your timing and place here, you know? Sometimes people slow down and make room for you and it's great. Sometimes, you just have to find your spot.”

Academic Experiences

- "[Advisors at my previous university] didn't tell me, I had no idea like, hey if you wanna be a chemical engineer, you need to take calc one and calc two, bio and or chem, and physics. **No one told me that. I needed a Southern advisor like at [my old school].** I wish someone from Southern worked there."
- Summing up university policy on changing colleges: ""I feel like no one is helping me. Yeah, I don't feel connected...I feel like there's a glass door...**like when people in jail, and they have to talk through a glass thing. I feel like I'm that.**"

Academic Experiences

- *"Do I really deserve to be here? Was there a gap in the system? What's going on?" I did in fact have those thoughts... My [transfer learning community], outside of the actual meeting, we were kinda saying, 'I don't know, maybe you should have just gone somewhere else, because I'm having a hard time here'... We kind of just started talking about where we came from, like our different universities, or community colleges. "Yeah, but it's nothing compared to here. I'm having a really hard time getting my grades up." One of them said they had to retake a class here that they already took, because I guess the credit didn't count. It was 10 times harder here than it was when they had taken it. They were like, 'It's the same content, but now all of a sudden I can't do it.'"*

3) Transfer is often not the most prominent identity for students in special populations – students over 25, veterans or active military, low SES, and first-generation

- “Being that I would be a first generation college graduate when I do finally graduate, I never imagined coming to Northern, I never thought I had the ability to be a student at Northern. So if I was at the point of looking, say I was back in high school, I never would have considered Northern. I never thought that I would be at that level so I feel like I've had to prove myself.”
- “I come from like a lower income background, so Northern is like mostly on the higher spectrum of kind of the ... a little bit culture shock, kind of for me, which is interesting. I didn't leave the country, but I felt like I had gone to a whole new place. And so that was a hard thing to kind of get use to. And so I thought I would transfer.”

Multiple Identities (Age 25+)

- "I would say maybe difficult just because of the fact that I have a family and I'm not a young college student. I'm 32 so sometimes I am the oldest one in the classroom or maybe there's one or two other people who might be kinda near my age or a little older than me. That's the only downside, I don't get to fully experience all that Northern has to offer just because I have to leave and come home and take care of my family."

Multiple Identities (Veteran/Military)

- “The fact that I am a veteran to me is more prominent than being a transfer student...[also] being a dad.”
- “Being a Marine. That's a huge part...Because you face so many challenges, and in the end you always figure out a way...Yeah, even like, you know, this semester didn't really go great for me, but I'm not discouraged at all, you know, cause nothing ever goes as planned, and as long as you just, like, you put your nose to the dirt and just keep truckin' forward.”

Practice, theory, and research

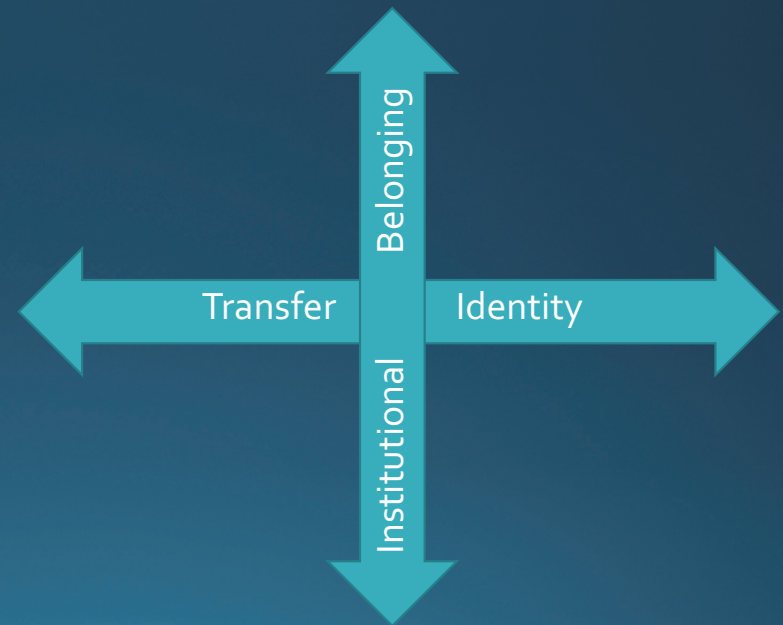
Implications

Transfer Identity

Perception



Proposed Framework



Research and Practice

- How does your campus treat transfer students differently than FTICs?
- What strategies is your campus using to support transfer students?
- What is your campus doing to positively support transfer student development or create a positive connotation of transfer?
 - A transfer receptive/welcoming culture?
 - What policies do you have in place that reinforce a positive or negative association with transfer identity?
- What parties are involved in the transition? Faculty? Staff?
- In what ways are we validating transfer students?
- How do we support transfer students who don't identify as such?