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# Assessing Transfer Student Needs At Eastern Illinois University

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*Eastern Illinois University*

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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Assessing Transfer Student Needs at Eastern Illinois University

By

Samantha J. Noblit

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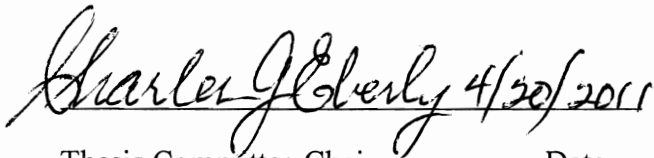
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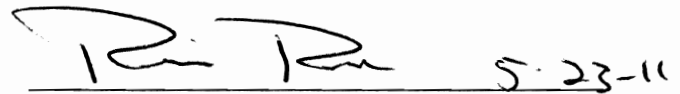
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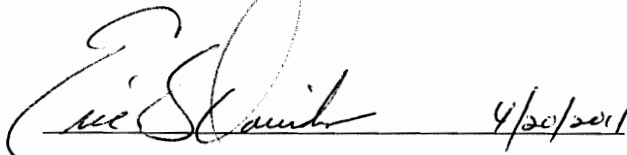
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ASSESSING TRANSFER STUDENT NEEDS  
AT EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

By

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Ms. Kimberlie Moock  
Dr. Jeffrey Cross  
Mr. Eric Davidson

DEDICATION

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to transfer students that enter Eastern Illinois University and other institutions to further themselves as scholars and people. Transfer students add diversity to our institutions of higher education and the different backgrounds that bring them to us are appreciated and celebrated, as there is much to learn from them. These students surpass struggles and hardships entering new institutions and their hard work and endurance is enviable.*

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was designed to assess the transitional needs of transfer students at Eastern Illinois University (EIU). Ten students who transferred to EIU in the fall of 2009 were interviewed to compile valuable feedback and data that could ultimately be used to enhance transfer student programming. Five students who experienced a difficult academic transition and were placed on academic warning were interviewed as well as five students who remained in good academic standing with the institution. With the diverse backgrounds and experiences from the interviewees, many different results were concluded. Transfer student transitions were effected by living on campus, campus involvement, relationships with faculty members, community college advisors, EIU advisors, connecting socially, and finding institutional help and assistance.



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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Students transferring to four-year institutions from community colleges and from other four-year institutions are asking for assistance with their institutional transition but are resisting current forms of transitional programming designed to help them (Lipka, 2008). These students are a unique population with diverse needs, and all of them experience a “complex adjustment process --- academically, socially, and psychologically” (Laanan, 2001, p. 11). Transfer students are students with previous exposure to higher education in community colleges and / or other four-year institutions. Some transfer students are more traditionally aged (18 to 24) and may only have 30 semester hours of academic credit or less, while some have over 30 credits. Older transfer students (age 24+) have taken time away from higher education for an extended period of time and may have taken time off to take care of a family or to pursue another career.

Most transfer students are very connected to the idea that they have already experienced “college life” and they do not require the same kind of personalized attention that traditional freshmen students need (Townsend, 2008). Transfer students have typically experienced at least one orientation program at their campus of initial enrollment, attended classes, navigated campus facilities, and in some cases availed themselves of various student support services offered at their initial institution. What these students fail to understand when they transfer to a new location is that all campuses are different in mission, physical facilities, and organizational structure. Each institution has a unique mission and supporting goals that the majority of

faculty, administration, and staff members strive to meet. Each has a rich history underlying the institution's traditions and culture, academic atmosphere, and support services for students. Not only is the transfer institution physically and culturally different, but some transfer students may misperceive accepting help from the transfer institution's university staff, administration, and faculty members as a sign of personal weakness. Such independent minded students may reject the help offered them as a result (Schein, 1999).

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to discover what transfer students perceived their needs to be and what Eastern Illinois University (EIU) as a receiving institution could do to make their transition more successful. The voices of student participants who volunteered for the study illuminated new ways to ensure transfer student success at EIU from two-year community colleges or other four-year institutions.

#### Research Question

The guiding research question addressed through this qualitative study was the following:

What specific tools and resources do transfer students perceive that they need for a successful transition to Eastern Illinois University?

According to Mook (personal communication, April 4, 2010), a successful college student transition to a second institution is founded on how well students adjust to the new community, new academic expectations, and social conditions. Students experiencing a successful transition into the new academic community reflect their success by their academic standing, personal faculty relationships, and

pursuit of completing undergraduate research. Students who have a successful social transition have found a strong group of peers to relate and identify with as well as involvements outside of the classroom, including student organizations, sports, or other activities. Lastly, students who have successfully transitioned into the EIU community may experience a strong connection to their new institution through expressions of school spirit and pride.

1. Academic transition: How well has the student transitioned academically into the university, and do they remain in good academic standing?
2. Social transition: Has the student connected with a positive group of peers, become involved in student organizations or other supportive student activities?
3. Community transition: Does the student feel connected to the EIU community, or are they remaining attached to their previous institution?

#### Significance of the Study

Due to current economic realities in the general society, more students are beginning their education in community colleges and students are also transferring into four-year institutions that are more affordable (Barr & Sandeen, 2009). To accommodate these students and to make sure that they are receiving the appropriate resources and opportunities to have a successful transition, one must understand what such students feel that they need by listening to their own voices.

Beyond understanding what these students look for throughout their transition, it is also important to understand when in their transition they feel that they need specific resources. Perhaps there are ways to reach out to students before they leave

their original institution, once they have been admitted to their receiving institution, and once they begin taking classes at their receiving college or university. The results of this study should contribute to understanding transfer student needs and how institutional professionals can aid in their transitional process.

#### Limitations of the Study

No generalization to all transfer students is implied in the results of the present qualitative study (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2006). Results reflect the voices of students interviewed only, and apply only to the campus of transfer. Since the PI is a front-line student services orientation program coordinator, some prior interaction with research participants may have influenced the content of student interviews. Every effort was made to minimize the influence of prior exposure.

#### Definitions of Terms

**Lateral transfer:** Lateral transfer is defined as transferring between two institutions of the same kind. This can be from two-year institution to another two-year institution or from a four-year institution to another four-year institution (Bahr, 2009).

**Upward transfer:** An upward transfer is from a community college to a four-year institution (Bahr, 2009).

**Transfer shock:** Transfer shock is when students transferring from a community college to a four-year institution experience a drop in their grade point average due to more rigorous coursework and increased academic demands (Flaga, 2006).

**Transfer Ecstasy:** The Transfer Ecstasy phenomenon happens when students experience an increase in their grade point average after transferring to another institution (Milligan, Nelson, & Rhine, 2000).

**Transfer function:** Transfer Function serves as the critical point of entry toward the baccalaureate for an increasing number of students. The Transfer Function is paramount to maintaining access to higher education. It achieves this by providing the lower division course work for a baccalaureate degree for those students who, after high school, may be ineligible for admission to a 4-year college or university (Laanan, 2007, p. 37).

**Receiving institution:** A receiving institution is the institution to which the student is transferring (Townsend, 2008).

**Initial or previous institution:** An initial or previous institution is the college or university from which the student is transferring.

### Summary

Employees of higher educational institutions will see an increase of transfer students within the next several years as many students are beginning their education in community colleges or other four-year institutions (Barr & Sandeen, 2009). Professionals in higher education must understand what transfer students need for a successful transition into their receiving institutions so that they can implement beneficial programming and student service accommodations.

Transfer students may resist outreach as they feel that their previous experience with an institution of higher education gives them an advantage over other, first-time new students (Townsend, 2008). Transfer students may not understand the uniqueness of college campuses and may be unaware that services, tools, and resources offered are different depending on traditions and conditions

associated with each local campus. Transfer students may experience transfer shock (Flaga, 2006) as they enter their new place of education or a sense of transfer ecstasy (Milligan, Nelson, & Rhine, 2000). This study will help pinpoint what exactly transfer students want when transferring and how professionals can make sure that they have a successful transition upon entry to their new institution.

Chapter II reviews literature focused on transfer student transition into the receiving institution, academically, socially, and within the new institutional environment. Chapter III describes the qualitative methodology employed in the present study, and Chapter IV reports emerging themes based on a content analysis of interview transcripts. Chapter V reports conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Student Transition Process*

According to Townsend (2008), there are two parts to a student's transition into college. The first part happens when students are being admitted to the receiving institution. The second part happens after students have been accepted and arrive on their new campus. They are all expected to participate in orientation programs, welcome-week programs, and acclimate themselves to the campus whether they are living in residence halls or at an off-campus location.

Flaga (2006) identified five dimensions of transition for a transfer student: "learning resources, connecting, familiarity, negotiating, and integrating" (p. 6). The first dimension, learning resources, happens when a student learns information about the tools and resources available for their use on campus. The second dimension, connecting, is done through creating connections and relationships with others in "academic, social, and physical environments" (p. 6). The third dimension, familiarity, happens when students feel comfortable at their new institution. The fourth dimension, negotiating, happens when students "adjust their behavior and surroundings as necessary in order to be successful within the academic, social, and physical environments" (p. 8). The fifth and final dimension is integration. Integration happens when there is a "developmental change resulting from the student's relation to the academic, social, and physical environment" (p. 8).



*Institutional Outreach Programs*

Many institutions create outreach programs specifically dedicated to transfer student success. Colorado State University started *The Vital Connections Transfer Program* to assist community college students in Colorado and Wyoming (Davies & Kratky, 2000). The program offered assistance to students throughout the application process and also provided information on transfer student events and campus advising services. A study conducted in fall 1996 assessed program quality and service delivery. Student participants reported that the “implications for practice included more timely and accurate dissemination of information, more interactive campus visits, improvement in the transfer peer mentoring programs, and assisting students in accepting individual responsibility” (p. 1).

The Vital Connections Program did not guarantee transfer students admission but it did aid students in the application process. Students who were in the program had to be in the community college atmosphere for one year, as this amount of time increased their willingness to complete their course requirements and gave them a sturdier academic background upon admission to the four-year institution. Once students applied to Colorado State University, their names were put into a database, which in return sent them information about transfer events and advising information (Davies & Kratky, 2000).

Smith College, a selective private college, offers the Ada Comstock Scholars Program, which is a program specifically for non-traditional female students transferring from community college. Most women transferring to Smith College and entering the Ada Comstock Scholars Program have between 30 and 70 credits from a

previous institution. The program was created to provide support for students throughout their transition into the four-year environment as well as educational support (Wyner, 2006). Additional support included “reduced course loads, special academic advising, career counseling, and diverse housing options ([www.smith.edu/admission/ada.php](http://www.smith.edu/admission/ada.php)).” The program has been a success with the non-traditional students graduating at comparable rates to the traditionally aged students and their diverse life experiences have enriched the Smith classrooms (Wyner, 2006).

Along the same selective college spectrum, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation was created for community college transfer students who not only succeed academically but who may not have the money to attend a private, selective institution. Community college students are nominated by faculty members based on the diligence of their work in the classroom, academic success, and their financial need. On average, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation awards 50 community college transfer students up to \$30,000 to attend the nation’s top private, selective higher education institutions. The program was created in 2002 and in 2004 had students transferring to the selective institutions and averaging a 3.5 grade point average during their educational career (Wyner, 2006).

The University of California at Los Angeles offers students transferring out of local community colleges the opportunity to be a part of the Transfer Alliance Program. This program allows students to enroll in an honors class at their community college with hopes of improving their transition into a four-year institution (Laanan, 1996). The program has had challenges as students perform well at a community college level but struggle once they begin classes at a four-year

college or university. Students transferring to UCLA from the Transfer Alliance Program “experienced increased levels of stress, and difficulty adjusting to the 10-week quarter system (Laanan, 2006, p. 5).” Students that experience academic difficulty when they begin coursework at a four-year receiving institution, typically resulting in a drop of grade point average, are going through a phenomenon called “transfer shock” according to theorist J. R. Hills (Flaga, 2006).

#### *Transfer Shock and Transfer Ecstasy*

“Transfer shock” happens to students transferring from a community college environment because they find that the classes move at a faster pace at four-year institutions, and courses are more writing intensive (Townsend, 1995), meaning that students experience more and longer writing assignments at the receiving institution. Students who tend to experience transfer shock are students in programs such as business, math, and science. Students that experience transfer shock are typically transferring to four-year institutions with 2.5 grade point averages or less (Glass, & Harrington, 2002). Other factors that affect student’s academic adjustments are too much reliance on counselors and self-confidence issues pertaining to intellectuality, and institutional competitiveness (Laanan, 2007). Seeking assistance from counselors is not detrimental within itself, but students who spend the most time with counselors are typically having greater difficulty with their transition. Students who are not confident in their academic abilities will show that in their coursework, and students who focus too much on competition in the classroom will give less attention to their studies.

Transfer students do not always experience difficulties with four-year institution coursework and academic requirements. There is a population of transfer students who experience another phenomenon called “transfer ecstasy” (Milligan, Nelson, & Rhine, 2000, p.447). Transfer ecstasy is when students see an “increase in their grade point average following transfer to a four-year institution” (p.447). Students that experience transfer ecstasy are typically students majoring in fields of “education, fine arts, humanities, and social sciences (p.447).”

### *Transfer Student Value*

The community college environment encourages students to be responsible and develop skills that will help them be successful in their college careers. Community colleges have leadership opportunities for students just like four-year institutions. Students can get involved with student organizations, student government, and also with the surrounding community. Opportunities such as these often help community college students “emerge as both vocal and silent leaders and are able to rally others” (Sygielski & Urso, 2007, p.15). Even though transfer students are usually less prepared for the academic coursework demands of a four-year institution, there are a large number of transfer students that are doing just as well as native students of the four-year institution to which they transferred (Glass, & Harrington, 2002).

Findings are showing that community college transfer students can help four-year institutions with their financial positions. When community college transfer students come to an institution with an Associate’s degree, it costs less to provide aid to them for the remaining two years (Wyner, 2006). Beyond finances, community

college transfer students also offer new diversity to the student body. Not only do these students come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, but they may also come to institutions as parents with families at home, which differentiate them from traditional 18-24 year old students (Sygielski & Urso, 2007). Racial diversity may also be increased as students from community colleges transfer into four-year institutions, and in particular, to highly selective institutions (Wyner, 2007).

### *Transfer Student Engagement*

Not only do transfer students transferring from a community college face the challenge of more rigorous coursework demands (Flaga, 2006), but they also face many administrative obstacles along with concerns about a satisfying social life upon their arrival at a four-year institution (Milligan et al., 2000). Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) revealed that transfer students are not as commonly found working with professors, participating in student community service, or partaking in other activities (Arenson, 2005). Studies show that students who are involved in student clubs and student organizations have an easier time adjusting socially to their new environment (Laanan, 2007). Students who socialize with other students adjust easier than those who do not and in return experience a boost in self-confidence.

It is important for transfer students to be a part of the campus culture because they have a lot to teach and offer other students. Transfer students from community colleges may tend to bring a new mindset and different life experiences to offer in their classes at their new institution. There are some students coming from two-year institutions who have taken full advantage of the resources offered to them on their

community college and junior college campuses. They have had individualized attention from faculty in smaller classes, which has increased their confidence. Their increased confidence in the four-year environment allows them to challenge not only their peers but faculty as well, which makes the classroom experience richer for everyone. Transfer students bring different experiences to the student body as they sometimes are not traditionally college aged and from different socioeconomic statuses than entering four year college students (Srgielski & Urso, 2007).

#### *Transfer Students at Highly Selective Institutions*

Students attempting to transfer to more selective colleges have an even more difficult journey than others. There are many transfer students that attended community college due to low income or proximity to home that have the academic vigor necessary to be successful at more prestigious institutions. “The median size of a junior-year class at the 38 most selective private colleges is 645 students. Among those institutions, the median enrollment of all transfer students --- from both two and four-year colleges --- is only 19 students” (Wyner, 2006, p. 2). Out of the 19 students in that junior class, only one student transferred from a community college. There is a common misconception among a majority of professionals at prestigious institutions that assumes community college students cannot succeed at their institution.

Institutional administrators, faculty members, and counselors need to be more aware of the difficulties that transfer students face throughout their transition to help ease their adjustment process (Milligan et al., 2000). Transfer students receive less attention from universities than traditional freshmen (Barr, & Sandeen, 2009). Less

attention is put on the student's actual transition and more on the credits that will transfer into the receiving institution (Barr, & Sandeen, 2009). When students enroll in a university as freshmen, there are introductory programs, courses, or activities available for them to facilitate their entry into the university environment. Transfer students see less of this support upon their entry to four-year institutions as introductory programs are typically not offered for their population (Arenson, 2005). Community colleges admit over six million students (Wyner, 2006) and 400,000 students graduate from community colleges each year (Sygielski & Urso, 2007), and those graduates only make up a fraction of the transfer student population. When community college students transfer to selective four-year institutions, they expect the necessary tools to be available to them for success.

### *Institutional Communication*

To ensure successful transition from community colleges to four-year institutions, communication across all constituencies involved must be improved. Better communication between the community colleges to the students, from the community colleges to the four-year receiving institutions, and between faculty members at each institution would ensure a more positive transfer experience for all students coming from different colleges or universities. Communication needs to be improved between community colleges and receiving four-year institutions in ways that show students they are welcomed at the four-year institutions. Community college faculty members need to communicate with instructional faculty at four-year institutions so that it is understood what transfer students need as far as course instruction is concerned at the receiving institution to facilitate their transition easier.

Understanding the curriculum that students are experiencing prior to their transition is imperative in their success at their receiving institution (McClure, 2008).

### *On-Campus Housing*

Another dilemma for transfer students making the transition into four-year institutions comes from the manner in which student housing is marketed. Certain institutions, such as Fordham University in New York City, do not offer housing to transfer students. Forcing transfer students to live off campus takes away from their chance to create a community with other students and peers on campus (Peters, 2009).

Interacting with other students and identifying a group of supportive peers leads students to become more goal oriented. Residence hall environments offer students not only the chance to connect with each other but also to connect with faculty members (Arboleda, Shelley, Wang, Whelan, 2003). This connection provides “comfort that may facilitate students’ integration into academic activities and learning experiences” (p. 17). Students who choose to get involved in their residence hall environment are more likely to learn and develop than students in off-campus housing, which ultimately increases institutional retention.

### *Reasons for Student Transfer*

Students attending community colleges and transferring to a four-year institution at a later point in their educational careers is now commonplace. Students are enrolling in community colleges due to their proximity to their homes, more reasonable tuition rates, and course times that work better with their personal and/or family commitments (Millegan, et al., 2000).



Transfer students generally decide to transfer for their own personal reasons because they are not being recruited in the same manner that true freshmen students are. They are more difficult to recruit because of their diversity in graduation dates and academic histories. Aside from the difficulties that come with recruiting transfer students, many upper level recruiters are not putting equal effort into convincing these students to attend their four-year institutions. Unfortunately, a large amount of transfer student recruitment occurs as a consequence of the receiving institution's failure to meet freshman enrollment targets. When this happens, admissions officials scurry to area community colleges to bolster their enrollment quota (Handel, 2010).

Another important issue associated with transfer students is chronological age and retention to graduation (Glass & Harrington, 2002). Their 1997 study at Quinebaug Valley Community College focused on the relationship between the age of a transfer student and their likelihood to graduate. In effect, "the older the transfer student, the longer it takes to graduate (p.417)." The same study also showed that even though older transfer students may take longer to graduate, their cumulative grade point averages are still higher at their time of graduation than younger students.

### *Campus Involvement*

Students who get involved outside of their classrooms have an easier transition into the social community at their receiving institution. Transfer students are not participating in student life opportunities like their traditional counterparts, and it is effecting integration into the institutional community (Johnson & Woosley, 2006). In a 2006 study comparing the academic and co-curricular outcomes of residence hall transfer students and native students, results showed that "the

satisfaction with student activities among transfer students was significantly lower than the satisfaction among non-transfer students” (p. 27).

### *Academic Advising*

Ashburn, Bartlett, and Wolverston (2006) found that students at two-year institutions rarely used their assigned academic advisors. Most students utilized their instructional faculty members as a source of academic advising and relied on family, friends, and peers as their secondary means of academic assistance. When the researchers asked community college faculty members if students came to them for academic advising, they reported they spent little or no time advising students. These results suggest that many students are not receiving any meaningful academic advisement at their community colleges.

### *Articulation*

One of the most common difficulties among lateral and upward transfer students is the challenge they face with credits crossing over from institution to institution. Many states require their four-year institutions to admit transfer students in large numbers (Handel, 2010). Texas and North Carolina both belong to this group of states, and these two states have “developed requirements for lower-division courses that their community college students may use regardless of the public four-year institution they wish to attend” (p. 3). Although many states are pushing towards increasing transfer student enrollment, student affairs staffs and academic advising staffs are finding that they are a difficult population to advise because their lower-division requirements may be different from institution to institution.

### Summary

The present literature review examined important aspects of the transfer student population including reasons why they succeed, why they have difficulties at their receiving institution, and ways to enhance their transitional experience at four-year institutions. The content in this literature review will be used to supplement a rich, detailed, and informative study of what transfer students at Eastern Illinois University need for a successful transition.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

Qualitative interview methodology was used for the purposes of the present study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative interviewing allows research participants to expand upon their ideas and to go into greater detail about their needs and expectations through personal interviews. Semi-structured personal interviewing also allows for follow-up questions and clarifications when needed.

#### Design of the Study

The focus of the study was to discover what transfer students perceived their needs to be in order to make a successful transition to EIU, and what EIU as a receiving institution did to enable their transition. A total of ten students were individually interviewed for the purposes of the study. Five students who transferred in good academic standing in fall 2009 and remained in good academic standing in spring 2010 were selected for the study. These students were assumed to have made a successful transition into the EIU environment. In addition, five students who transferred in good academic standing in fall 2009, but who were placed on academic warning in spring 2010 were also selected for the study. These students were assumed to have been unable to make an initial successful academic transition to EIU. Comparing and contrasting the “voices” of academically successful and unsuccessful transfer students was designed to enable the identification of emerging themes from the qualitative data that reinforced the strengths of the current transfer experience and revealed areas for further development.

### Participants

A mass e-mail was sent in September 2010 to every transfer student who matriculated into EIU in fall 2009 in order to solicit research participants (Appendix D). All students who contacted the PI expressing interest in the study were scheduled for individual interviews until five students in good academic standing were identified, and five students on academic warning were identified.

The online student records system was used to determine if volunteer participants had taken EIU 2919, *Strategies for Academic Success*. Three of the student volunteers who responded to the mass e-mail had taken EIU 2919 in spring 2010. A fourth and fifth participant not in good academic standing, but whose names were included in the mass email group, were referred by colleagues to meet the criterion of five research participants not in good academic standing.

Student participants transferred from community colleges, junior colleges, four-year institutions, and some transferred with experience in both types of institutions. Incoming academic credits earned varied from 15 upon entry to over 70, and incoming grade point averages ranged between 2.3 to 3.5. Selected characteristics of the research participants are displayed below (Table 1). Names in the table are pseudonyms used in place of the actual respondents' names.

Table 1

*Academic Background of Students*

<u>Student</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Credits</u>	<u>Transfer GPA</u>
Charles	Private Four-Year Institution	15	2.9*
Jessica	Community College	64	3.0*
Louis	Private Four-Year Institution	57	2.8*
	Community College		
Eric	Community College	74	2.7*
	Four-Year Public Institution		
Brianna	Community College	28	3.0*
Wendall	Community College	47	2.3
Aaron	Community College	60	2.7
Justin	Community College	50	2.7
Christopher	Community College	28	2.7
Kim	Community College	60	3.4

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\*Academically successful at EIU

### Data Collection

Individual interviews took place in study rooms located in Booth Library at EIU. Students filled out a brief questionnaire about their academic background and demographics and then were asked to review and sign an informed consent form (Appendix B) after the purpose for the study was explained to them. The informed consent document highlighted that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could choose to be removed from the study at any point.

### Interview

Interview protocol content was developed from transfer studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Georgia Institute of Technology, Northern Illinois University, and Purdue University. Questions focused on academic, social, and community transitions. The protocol also was designed to acquire an understanding of the students' faculty relationships, resources received and used from the students previous institutions and EIU, their campus involvement, and help that they wish was available for them in their transfer process. The protocol consisted of 13 root questions with follow-up options (Appendix A). Interviews lasted between a half hour and an hour. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the Principal Investigator immediately afterwards.

### Data Analysis

Data were first coded into categories within each participant group, successful transition as defined by GPA above 2.0 after the initial semester at EIU, and unsuccessful transition as defined by academic warning status and enrollment in EIU 2919, Academic Strategies for Success. After data were coded using constant

comparative analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) within participant groups, data were coded across both groups. When emerging themes were found within participant groups, they were compared with the other group. Common emergent themes among all students were then summarized.

### Summary

Qualitative interview methodology was used to collect data from ten students who transferred from community colleges and four-year institutions. Five students who were enrolled in EIU 2919: Strategies for Academic Success and five students who were in good academic standing were interviewed. Themes relating to the transition process for transfer students emerged from the resulting analysis.

Chapter IV first reports emerging themes within participant groups, then combines themes across all participating students without regard to academic standing. Chapter V will integrate the results of the present study with prior literature, then provide recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research.



## CHAPTER IV

## RESULTS

This chapter contains emerging themes found from interviewing five transfer students who had a difficult academic transition and five students who succeeded academically. Themes were identified using constant comparative analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) by first looking within participant groups, then across students in both groups. Some themes related directly to academics, student affairs, and university resources, while other themes pertained to family, friends, and outside issues. Themes are listed by students who had successful transitions based on their grades and by those who did not, then common themes across both successful and unsuccessful students are summarized.

**Academically Successful Students*****Family Pressure***

Family pressure was a major theme emerging from the voices of successful students. Louis was a legacy at EIU, and his father continuously checked on him to make sure he was attending classes, completing his coursework, and staying on track for success. Charles, whose mother did not receive her degree from EIU but had a Masters from a different institution, kept updated on his progress as well. There appeared to be a definite relationship between students whose parents had collegiate experience and how they were involved in monitoring their student's academic success.

### ***Community College Preparation***

Many interviewees stated that they felt starting their education at a community college equipped them with the tools to be academically successful at a four-year institution. “I don’t think I was ready to succeed at a big college yet. Spending time at a community college helped me prepare myself for a larger campus,” said Louis when discussing his experience transferring to a four-year institution from a community college. Other interviewees said that starting their education at a community college allowed them to take general education courses that may be more academically difficult at a four-year institution.

### ***Class Sizes***

Students favored the smaller class sizes offered at EIU compared to their prior institution. If they transferred from a community college where they were used to smaller class sizes, they liked that they were able to transfer and still benefit from that factor. Eric, a transfer student from a four-year public institution, claimed that he felt more supported in a small, personal class rather than in a large classroom where there was not as much individualized attention. “The smaller class sizes made me feel more wanted and it helped with faculty members actually knowing who I was,” said Eric. When Louis was talking about small class sizes and how it aided him in creating personal relationships with professors, he said, “I had one teacher who is a doctor but doesn’t like you to call him that. It makes it more comfortable and not so professional.”

## *Advisors*

### *EIU Advisors*

Students who were able to meet with academic advisors during the EIU Transfer Orientation Program prior to their matriculation on campus found the experience to be highly beneficial. Jessica discussed her experience coming to her Transfer Orientation Program and said, “I felt that as soon as I got here they had everything ready for me. I felt really organized that way.”

Brianna, a transfer student from a community college, discussed her experience with her academic advisor once she started classes and said, “My advisor was really good. He would schedule an appointment and he would make sure that I had classes that I wanted to take, was on track, and that my credits would transfer.”

Students also found Transfer Relations (see Appendix E) to be helpful upon their arrival to EIU. Brianna said that she also received a lot of help from Transfer Relations advisors at EIU. When talking about her transfer advising experience, she said, “On the Eastern end of things, it was actually really easy. I had a lot of help from the Transfer Relations office. I didn’t receive very much help from my community college.”

Jessica felt comfortable with her experience during her Transfer Orientation Day but was frustrated as her experience with advising progressed. Being an English major with a teacher’s certificate she had independently been loading her schedule each semester with 18 credits. She was unaware of options for summer classes that would have ultimately lightened her course load and helped her graduate earlier. She said, “I would have been willing to take summer classes but my advisors didn’t know

anything about that, and I wish that they would have set up appointments with both advisors from both departments.” When she continued to talk about how she will be spending more time on her education at EIU than she originally planned, she also stated, “I feel that if there would have been a little bit more communication about what classes would have doubled over, I could have been done a full semester earlier.”

### ***Previous Institution Advisors***

Eric was a transfer student with a very unique experience because he transferred from an Illinois community college to an Illinois public institution and then back to a community college. When Eric was reflecting on his advising experience at the public state institution in Illinois, he said, “Honestly, my advisor was pretty worthless. He basically just signed me up for classes that I didn’t need to fill up my schedule.” When he reflected on his advising experience at the community college that he attended, he said, “The community college was very good at keeping me on track and helping me get where I needed to be and doing what I wanted to do.”

Louis, a student that had very high remarks for his transition aside from his academic experience, was asked to expand on why he rated his academic transition only at a three. Because he was advised to take a class that proved to be irrelevant to his major, he was not satisfied with his experience. “My advisor put me in a wrong class at my community college, and it didn’t help me at all once I got to EIU,” he explained.

***Student-Faculty Relationships***

There was a definite correlation with the students that had succeeded academically and their relationship with faculty members. These students knew where to find their professors offices, had engaged in personal conversation with their professors, and Jessica was planning on participating in undergraduate research with one of her faculty members. Louis said, “Knowing that the teachers actually care about your grades and want you to pass, makes it a more comfortable environment. I’ve only had one or two teachers say that it’s all our responsibility.”

Louis also found his faculty members to be very helpful especially when he has experienced difficulty excelling in his writing intensive courses.

I’ve met with a lot of my professors when I have had to complete a lot of writing assignments in the courses. They have an open-door policy and are always willing to meet with me in their office hours to help me out.

Eric has had the opportunity of creating a very solid relationship with his professor and program director. When he transferred to EIU, he never gave thought to the idea of graduate school and a Master’s degree. It was not until he developed a relationship with his program director that she convinced him to look into a higher degree. “My program director is really helpful. She has helped me so much as far as looking into graduate programs and educating myself beyond my time here,” said Eric.

*Student Services*

Students that utilize student services professionals generally seem to get the help from them that they are seeking. Several of the interviewees mentioned Career Services when discussing student services. Transfer students are closer to entering the job market than freshmen students, so they find this to be a very useful resource. Two of the students interviewed took the ACT Discover<sup>®</sup> career guidance inventory that highlights what careers students may find fit their interests. Charles said, “It’s helpful because it tells you what you’re good at and what you should think about doing for the rest of your life.”

Jessica felt that Health Services did not communicate with students very well. She said, “When I went to get my flu shot, the lady told me that they couldn’t do anything because they didn’t have my immunization records but no one ever told me about that.” Jessica felt that more time should have been spent on topics like financial aid, health services, and student accounts. “Transfer students have heard about doing things on campus and joining groups before, but we want to know about things that affect our money,” she said when discussing Student Services.

Students also discussed Transfer Relations and the programming that they offer for students throughout their time at the institution and not only just before they arrive. Louis discussed socials put on by Transfer Relations such as bowling nights where he was able to network and meet other transfer students. He said, “It’s nice that they keep up with you and make sure you are doing well even after your transfer is over.”

*New Student Programs*

When discussing transitional programming put on by New Student Programs, a number of the students mentioned that it was helpful when getting to know people on the first weekend. As Louis said,

Prowl forces you to get up and become acclimated with campus with all the people you come in with. All of the people that you come in with are the people who are going to be in your classes and if you know a few people before you step into the class the first day then you are going feel more comfortable talking in class and succeeding. Not attending those activities really closes you off to other students.

When asked about the Transfer Orientation program at EIU, Jessica stated, “I felt that everyone was annoyed and didn’t want to be there. They rushed through the important stuff and dumbed down the easy stuff.” She also said that there was a lack of social interaction, and she left the day without receiving any contact information from any student that she had encountered. The goal of programs such as Transfer Orientation is to make students feel more comfortable and excited to begin school rather than being nervous about school.

Eric discussed his experience with New Student Programs as a commuter student.

They spent a lot of time at the Transfer Orientation Program talking about living on campus and getting involved. I felt like that was useless information for me since I was commuting. They told us that we had to participate in Alcohol EDU also. I’m twenty-two years old and I didn’t need to hear about all of that.

Two students said that when they were going through their transfer process, the initial institution did not know information regarding their orientation day or the transitional programs that were offered by EIU. Their advisors were unable to steer them toward information they needed such as whether or not to take their parents,

what to expect, and whether or not it was mandatory. No student was aware of the Illinois Articulation Initiative that was created solely for transfer students. The website offers information regarding credit transfer and course titles. The program has over 100 Illinois institutions of higher education that participate, and it would be a useful tool for students to use during their Transfer Orientation Day ([www.itransfer.org](http://www.itransfer.org)).

### ***Campus Involvement***

Students who became involved on campus and in the community seemed to have a better social transition than students who chose not to take advantage of those opportunities. When asked about making social connections, Charles stated, “Getting involved on campus with athletics and my fraternity really helped me meet people.” When asked what contributed to their easy social transition, several students gave credit to their involvement on campus.

Students that were interviewed that had a positive social transition were involved with fraternity / sorority life, student government, Residence Hall Association, Hall Council, athletics, the Newman Center, the Knights of Columbus, Panther Nation, academic organizations, and were involved in community service.

Eric commuted to EIU every day from Champaign, Illinois, and he discussed how being a commuter student left him with little chance to get involved with campus activities. He said, “I get along with all of the people in my program pretty well and it’s small and personal so I feel like it is an organization in a way.”



### *Living On Campus*

Another principal factor in a successful social and academic transition was living on campus in residence halls. When Louis decided to come to EIU, one of his parent's requests was that he live on campus throughout his entire education. Louis came to EIU with his younger brother and when talking about his on-campus experience he said,

We wanted an apartment, but living on campus has made us more honest with our academics. The closer you are to your classes, the more likely you are to go. Since you are on campus, you don't have to walk six blocks to get to class, but you can just wake up five minutes prior and go.

Brianna discussed her experience living in Ford Hall and said, "I felt very welcomed moving into a smaller residence hall. There are no more than 200 people and sometimes it's even smaller, so getting to know everybody really helps."

Jessica had a different experience with university housing. Upon her arrival at EIU, she perceived that only freshmen students lived on campus and that it was not somewhere that a transfer student who was a little bit older would be welcome. She was unaware of upper classmen housing options and opted to live in University Court. University Court is considered University Housing, but since the buildings are apartment style, the physical structure keeps students from interacting in the same sense that a residence hall community encourages. When discussing her social transition, she spoke unpleasantly about her experience.

I think it was my fault because I chose to live in University Court rather than in a residence hall. I think you meet more people in the residence halls. Now I know that I could have lived on campus and it wouldn't have been the way that I was thinking but it is presented to you like it is more of a freshman and sophomore thing.

When Eric discussed his social transition, he gave it a neutral score and went on to discuss how that as a commuter student, he did not receive the social transaction that students living on campus do. He said, “Being on campus helps with the social stuff, and I’m not here.”

### **Students Placed on Academic Warning**

#### ***Community College Classes***

Many interviewees claimed that their easier classes at their community colleges set unrealistic expectations for them when going into four-year institutional classes. Many students compared community college class difficulty to that of high school. Because of this, they experienced decreases in their grades because of their false expectations. Kim, a transfer student from a community college, said “I wish someone would have told me that it was different than community college. I was told it was like high school but longer papers.” Kim transferred to EIU with a 3.4 grade point average and 60 credits of coursework.

Students did not feel equipped for classes that were writing intensive. The transition from MLA writing style to APA writing style was also difficult for Kim. When she asked her professor about APA, she was made fun of by other students in her class for not having a solid understanding of the writing style. Students said things to her like, “What class level are you at?” and “Where have you been?” This kept her from asking questions in the future, which ultimately resulted in an unsatisfactory grade in the class.

Another theme found from these students when talking about community college classes compared to that of a four-year institution was that they felt there was

no consistency with the level of difficulty in their classes. Wendall, a transfer student from a community college, stated that, “When I first got here my classes were pretty easy but then it went downhill fast because I wasn’t expecting the increase in work.”

Two of the student interviewees said that they wished faculty had kept them updated with their grades when they were suffering. “The teachers really didn’t care if you showed up, and I was used to teachers telling you if you were doing bad, and they didn’t do that here,” said Kim. A similar comment was presented in Aaron’s interview as well when he said, “Faculty members should check up on you every once in awhile with grades and see how you are doing.”

### ***Balance***

Over half of the students interviewed from this group spoke about how they had an easy social transition by immediately getting involved with fraternity / sorority life, student organizations, and intramural sports. From being involved with other activities, they were not giving the attention to their academics that was needed to succeed. It is important for students to have an all-inclusive experience at college, and they are highly recommended to become involved with student life but there must be a level of balance. For these students, too much time went into their activities taking away time for homework, studying, and class. Christopher, a transfer student from a community college, said, “I spent too much time with new friends and less time studying. I wanted to get involved with Greek Life and I had a lot of fun but should have done my school work first.” Aaron, a transfer from an Illinois community college, said, “Joining a fraternity helped expand my social network but I should have spent more time studying.”

### *Self-Discipline*

Balancing social life with academic life requires a level of self-discipline. Because the majority of these students came from a community college and living at home, they suddenly did not have their parents or family members to make sure that they were completing their coursework and taking time for studying. Moving away from home comes with a new level of independence and it is important to be able to stay disciplined. When Christopher was asked why he rated his academic transition so low he explained, "I went from living at home with my parents to having independence in what I did. I didn't have my mom in the back of my head saying, 'You have to do this, you have to do this!'"

### *Advisors*

#### *EIU Advisors*

When asked about her experience with advising since she began her educational career at EIU, Kim stated that she had a difficult time making it through certain classes with passing grades.

I told my advisor that I wasn't good with social sciences, and he said to take three classes and I would be done. I should be student teaching next semester, and I'm not even in Block One yet, so that bombarded me.

Ed also had a negative experience with his EIU advisor. "I wish my advisor had been more helpful. She hasn't really helped me too much, she just sat back and let me do my own thing without giving me very much input."

Wendall seemed to be the most dissatisfied with his advising experience. He felt that he was not treated as if he had experienced college before and seemed highly offended by his encounter.

The first time you talk to your advisor, they treat you like a freshman. I don't know if they realize that they are doing it, and I actually think it just comes with their job. They don't treat you like you already know what you're doing.

He went to visit his advisor later on in the semester and said, "What really got me was when I went back the next semester, he couldn't even remember my name. He didn't remember one inkling of the meeting we had before."

Justin had a different experience with his advisor at EIU. His advisor was very helpful and motivated him to work hard in his courses.

My advisor is actually one of my professors. He has an open-door policy and doesn't shun you or kick you to the curb if you can't get your act together. It's nice to see the patience and willingness to help.

### ***Previous Institution***

Kim not only had a negative experience with her academic advisor at EIU, but also at her community college. When asked about help that she received from her community college advisor, she replied, "I wish I had a better advisor. None of the credits that I took helped me out once I got here."

Justin had no assistance from his community college advisor as he discussed all of the research that he did on his own to transfer. Justin was a first generation college student, so he struggled on his own to find the correct information to aid him with his transfer experience.

### ***Willingness to Ask for Help***

A common theme found among the transfer students who had difficulty with their transition was that they did not seek out help. When asked about Student Services, Wendall said, "They tell you about the Counseling Center and all of the student help centers but no one tells you how to go about doing it." Justin talked

about how he avoided getting help from his advisors. “It always seems like it is more trouble, and no one knows what they are talking about”

Wendall also discussed his experience with the Student Success Center. After being placed on Academic Warning, he was mandated to complete the EIU 2919: Strategies for Academic Success, which is offered through the Student Success Center. “I haven’t decided how I feel about that office yet. I had a teacher reach out to me because she was concerned, but I find it to be annoying.”

Aaron seemed to be aware of the fact that student services are helpful if students utilize the available tools and resources. “Staff and administration tell students information all of the time. I didn’t really use it and discovered most of the things here myself, and that did not turn out so well.”

### ***Opening Weekend Events***

Wendall, who reflected the most negative experience out of all of the students interviewed, did have a positive experience with the Prowl program, which is put into place to assist new students with their transition. He discussed the positive outcomes of the New Student Picture and Jumpstart 2 G.I.V.E.

Prowl really helped you get involved. When you take the picture on the field and they give you an Eastern t-shirt, and you are with others who are in the same boat as you, you just feel like another student and not a ‘transfer’ student.

Kim felt that the Prowl events were for extroverted students and that because she is quiet, she would not have gotten anything out of it. “I basically would have sat there and not talked to anyone,” she said. Justin also did not attend Prowl events at the beginning of the school year.

There is way too much going on during the first weekend and it's really overwhelming. I understand the concept of it, but they say that you have to go, which I don't believe that. I don't think that they can kick you out of school if you chose not to go.

### ***On-Campus Housing***

Kim seemed to have the most difficult social transition among the students that were interviewed. Upon her arrival to EIU, instead of applying for on-campus housing, she opted to live off campus with her best friend since the first grade. The roommate relationship was not a successful one and hindered her from getting into the campus community to meet other peers. "My first semester here was horrible because of my roommate. I didn't really go out and do anything in the community, so we stayed at the apartment and did nothing."

Students that did choose to live on campus appreciated the amenities that on-campus housing offered. Justin said, "I'm 25 and still live on campus but I like it because of the social aspect." He discussed the importance of not only getting involved but also being social with other students on campus to develop a peer network.

### ***Campus Involvement***

As discussed earlier, three students interviewed that had an unsuccessful academic transition were not involved on campus. When Kim was asked if she was involved on campus, she said, "I wish there were activities to do. I basically know my roommate and that's it. I want to get involved, but all I hear about are sororities, and I'm not into that sort of thing."

Wendall had a similar reaction to that question. When asked to rate his social transition, he gave himself a five. Five was the highest possible score and when

asked for a reason as to why he thought his transition was so successful, he responded,

I don't quite honestly want to make friends here. I'm not the sorority or fraternity type of person. I'm here, I'm thousands of dollars in debt because of it, and I want to get done, and I don't care about meeting fraternity or sorority type people.

Aaron became involved with a fraternity when he first arrived on campus, and while he claimed to have spent less time working on his studies, he did have a successful transition socially.

Justin has been involved in student organizations beyond fraternity / sorority life. However, he was a member of a fraternity at EIU but said that he would be leaving, and did not go into further discussion as for reasons why. "I'm really involved with Residence Hall Association and Hall Council. I also want to possibly get involved with Student Government in the future."

### **Common Themes Found Between Academically Successful Students and Students on Academic Warning**

#### ***Living On-Campus***

Students who lived on campus had a better social transition and some reported that it helped them academically. Living on campus not only connects students with a peer network to relate to but also offers programming, involvement, and a safe environment to learn. "I like living on campus and getting to know different people," said Justin when talking about his experience living in residence halls. Louis, who initially wanted to live in an apartment, said, "I'm so glad that I live on campus. The closer you are to classes, the more likely you are to go. It's fun being social and meeting people, too." Brianna had an extremely positive experience living on



campus in Ford Hall, a smaller residence hall located near Booth Library, and enjoyed the opportunity to “meet friends and participate in programming put on by resident assistants and Hall Council.”

As Jessica spoke about regrets she had not living in a residence hall,

I chose to live in University Court because I thought older students did not live on campus. I only met my roommates and had a hard time making friends. I had to count on my work study position to meet people with similar interests.

### ***Campus Involvement***

Getting involved on campus created opportunities for students to meet other students with similar interests. Kim, who has not gotten involved on campus, talked about her experience not being a part of any organizations and said, “I wish that I would have gotten involved in some things. Right now, I only know my roommate, and that has hurt me quite a bit as far as finding friends and people to identify with.”

Louis talked about his involvements and getting involved with Student Senate and Panther Nation but also said,

I got involved with the Newman Center when I first got here, too. I know that’s not necessarily for everyone, but it’s an option that a lot of people would really benefit from. Another different group that I am a part of is the Knights of Columbus.

Justin spoke about being involved with residence hall groups and said, “I love being a part of the Residence Hall Association and Hall Council. Both groups have really assisted me in meeting people and making new friends.”

### ***Asking for Help and Searching for Answers Independently***

As important as it is for student affairs staff members to facilitate students acquiring appropriate information and resources, there needs to be a level of personal

responsibility on the part of students to ensure their positive transition. Most students who were interviewed discussed doing research on their own and being prepared as much as possible, and how their individual initiative helped them in their transfer. Many times, the help is there, but the students must make the attempt to find it. “It wasn’t until I contacted Transfer Relations myself that I got help,” said Justin. “You have to make sure that you are getting all of the right information. Between Admissions, Financial Aid, and all of the departments involved, things can fall through the cracks. You have to do your own homework too.” Louis said similar things when it came to finding information for himself.

There is some stuff that the school is responsible for but we are adults and we have to do some things on our own. It is okay to ask for help along the way but there is effort that we need to put in too.

Brianna talked about reaching out to campus programming and taking advantage of opportunities offered to new students.

You need to make yourself go to the Prowl events. I went to a workshop for transfer students and that really helped me learn important things. A lot of students think that they won’t get anything out of the programs offered but I disagree.

### ***Making Social Connections***

Most of the students who were interviewed discussed the importance of meeting people and socializing and how that helped them upon their arrival and throughout their educational experience at EIU. “I know academics are important, but it is important to get out and mingle, too,” said Charles when discussing his social transition. “Everyone is pretty nice around here and it is easy to make friends,” he continued. Ed also enjoyed getting to know other students upon his arrival. “It was

easy to meet people and expand your social crowd. Meeting people and making friends was not a huge part of my community college experience so it was fun to do at EIU.” Jessica talked about her experience and how she wished that she would have gotten to know more people when she first arrived on campus.

If I would have known more people and got out and met them, I would have been more likely to go to activities that the school put on for students. Because I did not have anyone to go with, I never attended them.

### ***Charleston Community***

Many of the students discussed how they felt welcomed to the wider Charleston community and how community services played a role in that connection. As Louis said,

In some places, the town does not like the university but I think that Charleston really welcomes the students. Community Service probably plays a big role in that as I know that we do a ton of service for Charleston.

Wendall, a transfer student who had negative experiences with a large part of his transition, had positive comments when it came to being involved in the community. “The community service event during Prowl helped me get out in the community and see what it is like to live here.”

### ***Being Treated Like a Freshman***

Some of the students felt that they were treated like freshmen and felt that their previous college experiences were not considered as they transitioned into EIU. Wendall spoke about his experience with his academic advisor and said, “My advisor acted like I didn’t know what I was doing. I was like you don’t need to hold my hand, I know. I picked all of my classes, now just let me schedule them.”

Eric also felt that he was being “babied” upon his arrival to EIU. He discussed his experience with Transfer Student Orientation and said, “I felt like a kid. They told us all about getting involved on campus, living in dorms, and doing AlcoholEDU. I am 22 years old, I don’t need that stuff.”

#### Summary

Chapter IV described emerging themes based on 10 student interviews; five with students who remained in good academic standing and five who were placed on academic warning. Common themes within the two groups were addressed and quotations from student interviews were provided.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

## Discussion

This qualitative interview study examined the experiences of ten transfer students. The ten transfer students were split into two participant groups, those who remained in good academic standing and those who were placed on academic warning and had to complete EIU 2919: Strategies for Academic Success. Common themes emerging from the interviews with the students in good academic standing were family pressure, preparation from initial institutions, class sizes, academic advising, student and faculty relationships, the use of student services, campus involvement, and on-campus living. Themes emerging from interviews with students who were placed on Academic Warning were related to preparation from initial institutions, balance, self-discipline, academic advisors, willingness to ask for help, on-campus housing, and campus involvement. The following is a summary of the emerging themes.

Both student groups had similar themes. With certain themes such as community college preparation and campus involvement, both were mentioned but several of the students in the opposite group had different views and opinions on these topics. Students who succeeded academically upon their arrival at EIU reported positive feedback from community college course work and discussed how they felt it better prepared them for the rigors of academic study at a four-year institution. “I don’t think I was ready for a big college yet. Spending time at a community college helped me prepare myself for a larger campus,” said Louis. Students who were

placed on Academic Warning felt that they were ill prepared coming to a four-year institution and wished that they received more assistance with writing and understanding what to expect from their future course work. Many of the students placed on Academic Warning did so due to their difficulties with writing intensive coursework. They appeared to suffer from transfer shock (Townsend, 1995). There needs to be a strong understanding of the curriculum from the previous institution in order for faculty members to ensure a good academic transition for their students. Better articulation between institutions could assist in reducing the Transfer Shock phenomenon (McClure, 2008).

Students who remained in good academic standing spoke about campus involvement and how helpful it was for them when establishing groups of peers and to help them feel part of the EIU student community. Studies have shown that students who are more involved outside of their classroom have an easier time transitioning into their new environment socially (Laanan, 2007). Academically successful students discussed their involvement in different athletic teams, different fraternity / sorority organizations, hall government, religious organizations, honorary organizations, and doing community service in the city of Charleston. "Getting involved on campus with athletics and my fraternity really helped me meet people," said Charles, when discussing his involvement on campus.

Two students who were placed on Academic Warning also discussed campus involvement with strongly different opinions than the other students. Wendall and Kim both had unfavorable opinions of social fraternities / sororities and felt that was their only option for student involvement. Kim voiced a desire to be involved but a

lack of knowledge about available organizations, and Wendall explained his lack of aspiration to create a peer network while completing his degree.

I don't quite honestly want to make friends here. I'm not the sorority or fraternity type of person. I'm here, I'm thousands of dollars in debt because of it and I want to get done and I don't care about meeting fraternity or sorority type people.

Most of the students in good academic standing discussed pressures coming from their family to complete their degree and to succeed throughout their educational career. These students discussed their parent's level of education as more of their parents graduated from an institution of higher education than among the students on academic warning. As Charles said,

My mom has her Master's, so she always pushes me to make it to my classes and work hard. It helps keep me on track. My dad doesn't have any degrees past high school, so I feel less pressure from him.

Several of the students who had difficulty academically were first generation college students.

None of the students interviewed seemed to have any specific assistance from their initial institution focusing on the transfer process. Many of the students did not feel supported from their community colleges and felt that community college staff members were ill prepared to assist transfer students. According to the students interviewed, advisors at the community college level and other four-year institutions seemed to be unaware of tools and resources that EIU has available, or information on steps that students needed to take to have a successful transfer. It takes attention from institutional administrators, faculty members, counselors, and advisors to aid in a comfortable adjustment process. This means that these important members of the

university community need to be aware of the difficulties that transfer students face (Milligan et al., 2000).

When these students arrived at EIU, some were content with their experience with their different advisors and some were not. “I did a lot of research on my own to get ready to go to EIU,” said Justin. Wendall had a very unfavorable communication with his advisor and felt that there was not enough of a personal connection between the two, as the advisor did not remember personal information about him upon his second visit. Other students experienced confusion with what credits would carry over from their initial institution and what classes would count towards their degrees. Jessica was unaware of summer classes that she could take to make her time at EIU shorter and Kim was put in classes that delayed her academic progress. “I wish I had a better advisor. None of the credits that I took helped me once I got here,” she said when discussing her advising experience at her initial institution. Studies have shown the opposite of what students were experiencing at EIU in terms of academic versus social transitions. Research shows that when students transfer to a new institution, more attention is focused on which credits will transfer and not as much on the social transition (Barr, & Sandeen, 2009).

Several of the students who did well academically had positive relationships with faculty members. They knew where their faculty members offices were located, had engaged in personal conversation, and one student was even beginning undergraduate research with one of her faculty members. They discussed small class sizes and how that creates better relationships between faculty and students. Students said that they felt supported and motivated by their faculty members. “The smaller



class sizes made me feel more wanted and it helped with faculty members actually knowing who I was,” said Eric.

Three out of the five students who were placed on Academic Warning rated themselves very high on their social transition. These students all joined a fraternity in their first semester at EIU and admitted putting more time towards their organization than their course work. They seemed to have difficulty finding a level of balance between their fraternity and their schoolwork. “I spent too much time with my new friends and less time studying. I wanted to get involved in Greek life, and I had a lot of fun, but I should have done my school work first,” said Christopher when talking about his experience balancing a fraternity and academics. These students also disclosed a challenge when it came to leaving home and not living with their parents any more. Some of these students were on their own for the first time in their lives and found it difficult to motivate themselves to go to class, complete their coursework, and study for examinations.

These students reported use of campus student services facilities differed by whether or not students were academically successful. Students utilized Career Services often because they were looking to enter the job market sooner than other incoming students. Wendall, who was placed on Academic Warning, was disappointed that he was never told how to use student services on campus. He knew that they were there, but was unaware of how to go about accessing the different available resources. “They tell you about the Counseling Center and all of the student help centers but no one tells you how to go about doing it.”

Jessica discussed her experience coming from her Transfer Orientation day as she felt that important information such as Financial Aid and Health Services was not talked about in as much depth as it deserved and that it seemed like the other things were “dumbed down”. “I felt like everyone was annoyed and didn’t want to be there. They rushed through the important stuff and dumbed down the easy stuff,” she said. Jessica was disappointed with her Transfer Orientation. She felt there was no time to get to know other students, which led her to feeling alienated when she started her education at EIU.

Getting students involved outside of the classroom immediately helps students connect to the institutional community (Johnson & Woosley, 2006). Programs offered at the beginning of the school year encourage students to get involved. Students in the current study discussed the Prowl program and had many different things to say about it. Students felt that it made them feel part of the student body through activities such as Jumpstart 2 G.I.V.E. (a community service day for new students) and the New Student Picture at the stadium. Wendall felt that it was helpful for his transition into the community to contribute his services to an off-campus agency during Jumpstart 2 G.I.V.E.

Living on campus seemed to be a major theme for academically successful students. Students that lived on campus really enjoyed the experience and liked being close to the academic buildings as well as being a part of a residential community. Living on campus also assisted students in connecting with faculty members through learning communities. “Connecting with faculty members in the residence hall

setting may assist students in the integration into their academic activities and learning experiences” (Arboleda et al., 2003, p.17).

Students who lived off-campus or in University Court had a difficult time finding a group of supportive peers. Jessica, a resident of University Court, decided not to live on campus as she felt that only underclass students lived on campus. She was unaware of Stevenson Hall and the upperclass amenities that it offered to transfer students. She regretted not living on campus as she did not have the same opportunities as other students to make friends and meet a variety of people. Kim also lived off campus her first year with a friend from home. She did not meet anyone but her roommate and had a very negative experience since she experienced a conflict with her roommate.

There seems to be a struggle with transfer students and what they perceive they need, the timing of their perception, and the resources offered to them. Transfer students who were interviewed discussed a need for social interaction at Transfer Orientation programs, a follow up from faculty members pertaining to their grades, and more assistance in obtaining student services. It was this same group of transfer students that claimed that they felt as if they were treated like freshmen upon their entry to EIU. Finding a solid middle ground with these students is imperative in their successful transition.

### Recommendations

Based on the feedback received and literature reviewed, the following recommendations were formed.

1. Students who lived on campus seemed to have an easier social transition and found it easier to establish a supportive network of peers. However, when students began their application process, they viewed residential living as something for freshmen and sophomore students. Students who live on campus have the opportunity to get involved with Residence Hall Association, Hall Council, and National Residence Hall Honorary. They can receive benefits from living in a learning community and have the option to attend residence hall programming. Living on campus allows students quicker and easier access to academic buildings and other university facilities. Living on a residence hall floor gives students the opportunities to not only connect with a roommate but an entire floor or building of student residents. If students find peers to connect with as soon as they start their life at EIU, they may be more likely to engage in opening weekend activities and other campus programming events. On campus housing needs to be marketed more strongly to transfer students. Showing transfer students that on campus housing is for everyone and is a welcoming environment for them will encourage them to apply for housing in the residence halls. Transfer students can then utilize resources and programming that come from living on campus.
2. There should be a Transfer Student Organization implemented at EIU. Some transfer students did not understand how to get involved with student organizations and are under the impression that opportunities for them do not extend beyond fraternity and sorority affiliation. Having a Transfer Student Organization available for students may generate interest due to the fact that

students can connect with other students who may be in similar situations to themselves. By having a registered Transfer Student Organization, EIU officials could better understand what transfer students desire upon their transfer and members could be utilized in welcoming future transfer students either through roles with New Student Orientation or by having a part in Transfer Relations social programming.

3. There was a lack of a social piece to Transfer Orientation Day. Students received their advising appointments, participated in the Panther Fair, which was a place for students to get information about campus resources, listened to presentations from different departments around campus, attended college meetings with their colleges, and then had the rest of the afternoon to get registered for classes and get their Panther Card. At no point in the schedule did they have breakout sessions with other students or interactive icebreakers or games with student orientation leaders. Students should leave their Transfer Orientation Day excited to arrive at Eastern in August with a handful of contacts and students that they met. Social sessions were excluded from transfer student Orientation because transfer students have experienced college life before and have voiced that they do not like to be treated like freshmen students. However, this does not mean that there should be no social piece to the transfer student orientation process.
4. Communication between departments and institutions of higher education should be increased to ensure that the appropriate information is getting dispersed to transferring students. It was alarming the amount of students that

expressed feelings that their community college advisors could not equip them with suitable information and resources to assist them in their transition to their new institution. Admissions representatives visit community colleges to recruit students to EIU, but it seems that they need information from New Student Programs to give to students with clear instructions and expectations about what the student's next step upon admission to the university should be. Institutions in the state of Illinois seem to attract students from a common group of community colleges and four-year institutions. Making sure that these institutions have the correct information to give to their students is one key to a successful transition.

5. Students accumulated too many paper resources during their college application and admission process. It was easy to toss a paper to the side and forget that it ever existed while often not even reading the content. Too many of the students interviewed expressed that they did not know how to use student services or did not know all of the available services. Alcohol EDU is a program completed by every incoming student and it is done online. Institutions should create a multimedia presentation or video that students must watch prior to the completion of the Alcohol EDU program. In the video, there would be highlights of all of the student services available, how to access the resources, and student testimonials from EIU students who have had positive experiences with student services. The video would be something that could be accessed as many times as possible and could be linked through the EIU transfer website. If a student does not find it

necessary at their initial time of viewing, they can return later to review the content.

6. Institutional assessment is required for accreditation and it has become a huge part of transitional programming. Assessment is a very important and beneficial tool if the data collected are actually used to improve upon programs, resources, and literature offered to students. If the proper assessment tools are created and dispersed to transfer students, feedback can be presented that can improve their experiences and give student services a better understanding of what is needed for a successful transfer student transition. The key is that when these data are collected, they need to be analyzed properly, and program and department initiatives must be improved based on the presented feedback.
7. Community college preparation programs prepare transfer students for their transfer to a four-year institution. They have been used in the past and have proved to be effective in a majority of the cases. When asked about classes at their receiving institution, many students said that the writing intensive courses were the most difficult to manage. Community College faculty and four-year institutional faculty should work together to share curriculum to do two things. The first thing is for community college faculty to share what they teach and what their students are receiving in their course work. The second thing would be for four-year faculty members to see and understand where the learning curve may be separated from native students to ensure that community college students are receiving the attention that they need.

Another concern from transfer students was that they were not well versed in APA style writing when they arrived at EIU. The Writing Center does offer workshops on APA style so that students can learn the basics of the style.

8. In order to be successful with outreach to students requires professionals to be technologically savvy and up to speed with current trends. Social networking is a powerful tool among students and is one way that students can be connected no matter where they are located. Since a large amount of transfer students commute to EIU, social networking could be used to communicate with all students. This can be used to get important information to students in a timely fashion, to have transfer students engage in message boards or other means of communication among each other, or to just find useful information regarding their transfer. Social networking is affordable and easily accessible and would be a valuable tool even in the current economic state of institutions of higher education.

### Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed to further investigate the needs and desires of transfer students matriculating into Eastern Illinois University and what they perceived as the proper tools, resources, and assistance for a successful transition. Ten students who had experienced different successes, tribulations, and difficulties offered a large amount of feedback about how the Division of Student Affairs, Academic Advising, and faculty members can improve to ensure a positive transfer experience for future students. This study contributed to EIU and other four-year institutions as information can be



applied to any institution with a transfer student population. With the current rise in transfer populations across the nation, the results of the present study should prove valuable and timely.

The students interviewed in the study rated themselves on their academic, social, and community transition and discussed reasons why they felt they were successful or unsuccessful in those areas. Students offered a variety of feedback about their experiences that highlighted information from before their transfer at their previous institutions to current initiatives from EIU and how that contributed to their transitions in the three different categories.

The expectation of this study was to compile ideas of what students wanted in their transition and many ideas were presented throughout the study. A relationship between campus involvement and success was determined in a number of ways as some students did extremely well staying involved on campus while some still needed to find their own balance and self-discipline to put time toward extra curricular activities. Living on campus not only seemed to push students to get involved and work harder academically but was helping students with their social transition.

Family pressure and the ability to maintain a level of autonomy both were factors leading to a successful transition. Students who depended on student service staff members to seek them out were the ones having difficult times using on-campus resources. Programs from New Student Programs and Student Community Services played a principal role in making students feel

part of the Charleston community by leading community service events where students go out into the community to help others. However, the Transfer Orientation Program may need to be re-evaluated because students are not receiving the expected outcomes from the program.

Transfer students will always be an important student population in institutions of higher education. The programs and initiatives offered to them should be continuously assessed because the students and trends constantly change across time. As the number of transfer students increase throughout the nation from both community colleges and four-year institutions, Student Affairs professionals must have the proper tools to ensure a successful student transition from one institutional environment to the next.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The idea of a successful college transition for a student comes from three different components.

1. Academic transition: Has the student transitioned academically into the university and remaining in good academic standing?
2. Social transition: Has the student connected with a group of peers, become involved in student organizations or other student activities?
3. Community transition: Does the student feel part of the EIU community or are they remaining attached to their previous institution?

Interview protocol:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very difficult and 5 being very successful, how would you rate your *academic* transition at EIU? If you perceived it difficult, what factors contributed to your difficult transition? If you perceived it successful, what factors contributed to your successful transition?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very difficult and 5 being very successful, how would you rate your *social* transition at EIU? If you perceived it difficult, what factors contributed to your difficult transition? If you perceived it successful, what factors contributed to your successful transition?

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very difficult and 5 being very successful, how would you rate your *community* transition at EIU? If you perceived it difficult, what factors contributed to your difficult transition? If you perceived it successful, what factors contributed to your successful transition?
  
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very difficult and 5 being very successful, how would you rate your overall transition at EIU? If you perceived it difficult, what factors contributed to your difficult transition? If you perceived it successful, what factors contributed to your successful transition?
  
5. Did anyone from your previous institution (advisor, program coordinator, faculty member) prepare you to transfer to EIU?
  
6. What resources or support have you gotten from your academic department or academic advisor at EIU as a Transfer student?
  - a. What resources would you have liked to receive from your academic department or academic advisor?
  
7. What resources or support have you gotten from other student service departments on campus (New Student Programs, Student Life Office, Financial Aid, Housing and Dining, Career Services, Student Success Center)?
  - a. What resources would you have liked to receive from student service departments on campus?

8. Have you sought out or found support from other campus services to help you in your transition? If so, which services have you contacted? If not, why did you not look for support from the available services?

9. In your time at EIU have you become involved in campus activities outside of the classroom? If so, what activities are you a part of? If not, why have you decided to not become part of campus activities?

10. Do you feel that you have found your niche as a student at EIU?

11. Do you feel that you have successfully transitioned to the campus culture of EIU or are you remaining attached to your previous institution?

a. If you feel that you have made a successful transition to the EIU campus culture, what factors or events helped you become a part of that community?

b. What resources, support, or encouragement have you gotten from offices on campus (Admissions, Academic Advising, New Student Programs, Student Life Office, Financial Aid)?

c. If you feel that you have not made a successful transition to the EIU campus culture, what factors could make it easier?



12. To what extent do you feel your ability to successfully or unsuccessfully find a place within the EIU community has contributed to your transition?

*Interview protocol was designed from previous studies completed at The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Purdue University, Northern Illinois University, and Georgia Tech University.*

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### **Consent to Participate in Research**

##### Assessing Transfer Student Needs at Eastern Illinois University

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Samantha Noblit, from the College Student Affairs Graduate Program at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the proposed research is to discover what transfer students perceive their needs to be and what Eastern Illinois University can do to make the transition more successful for this particular population of incoming students.

#### PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Answer 12 questions relating to the academic transition, social transition, and community transition of transfer students at Eastern Illinois University.

#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Confidentiality will be ensured by the transcribed interviews being made anonymous directly after collection. Recordings will be deleted after the interviews have been transcribed.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

Participating in this study will not only improve your experience as a transfer student but also improve the transition for future students at Eastern Illinois University.

#### INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

After participating in this interview, your name will be entered into a drawing where you can win a \$20.00 Wal-Mart gift card.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will be removed from transcribed interviews immediately following transcription. Interview transcriptions will be destroyed following data analysis.

#### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. IF you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

*Principal Investigator, Samantha Noblit*

#### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL 61920

Telephone: (217)581-8576

E-mail: [eiuirb@eiu.edu](mailto:eiuirb@eiu.edu)

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

*I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.*

(Printed name of participant)\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of participant)\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
DEMOGRAPHICS CARD

Sex:

Date of birth:

Hometown:

Ethnicity:

Transfer grade point average:

How many credits did you have at the time of your transfer?

Institution(s) that you transferred from:

What is the highest level of school your parents completed?

Why did you choose to transfer to EIU?

What activities were you involved in at your previous institution?

Are you a commuter student, on-campus resident, or Charleston resident?

Thank you for participating in this study!