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Transitional Needs of First Year Graduate Students with Housing Assistantships

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Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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Transitional Needs of First Year Graduate Students with Housing Assistantships

(TITLE)

BY

Dixie L. Sullenger

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Science College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

May, 2003
(YEAR)

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE SIGHTED ABOVE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify transitional needs of first year graduate students who have housing assistantships. Previous research in this area identified academic adjustment, student support services, assistantship experiences, and graduate student socialization as important variables to examine. A qualitative study was conducted using a focus group interview of four participants to examine these variables. Using the constant comparative method of data analysis, the four transitional areas listed above were confirmed as the primary challenges to a successful transition from undergraduate to graduate school for first year graduate students with housing assistantships. The results also suggest that housing GA's have needs unique to their setting. These results are followed by a general discussion and recommendation to prescribe steps to assist graduate students entering a housing graduate assistantship and plan meaningful orientation programs that enable students not only to survive the rigors of graduate school, but also thrive inside and outside their academic world.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all first year graduate students who have housing assistantships in the hopes that this research will aid in facilitating their transition into graduate education.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their encouragement and support. Chairman of the committee was Dr. Richard Roberts, who spent a great deal of time working, supporting, and encouraging me. Thank you for the countless hours of reading and editing that the committee members spent with this thesis for which I am very grateful. To the other committee members, Dr. Charles Eberly, who inspires and encourages me, Dr. James Wallace whom challenges and pushes me, thank you.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Graduate student enrollment is on the increase and now represents nearly one out of every four students attending universities (Polson, 1999; Shea & Bosser, 2002). Likewise, masters degrees awarded to women increased 53% between 1960 and 1991, and approximately one out of every five graduate students is of a racial or ethnic minority background (Polson, 1999). Knowing the population of graduate students is about a fourth of the total university population and that diversity among graduate students has increased since 1960, universities may need to pay more attention to the psychological development and growth of graduate students. Specifically, students entering graduate school could need transitional preparation into graduate degree or post-baccalaureate programs, especially students who are working in residence life live-in housing assistantships.

A graduate assistantship (GA) for the department of housing at an institution of higher learning is unlike most other GA positions. Due to the "time requirements, the commitment, the nature of responsibilities, the 24 hour component, the requirement of being there more often, the live-in responsibility, and responsibility for the lives of other students, nobody else has that responsibility" (James Wallace, personal communication, February 25, 2003). Perhaps an explanation of my own journey toward this particular assistantship in housing will help provide background for my research interest in this area.

As a graduate student in a new environment I faced new challenges and unfamiliar experiences. I experienced displacement from my family, friends, and all that
was familiar by moving miles from home to a new state, and a new institution. I felt loneliness because I was living alone, working long hours, and attending school in classes that were designed to be cohorts. I only had contact with people who were colleagues in work or classmates. Along with feelings of loneliness and displacement I began to feel the strains of time commitment and unclear directions from professors as well as only being focused on one specific academic area, which was difficult for me to handle.

Besides the academic pressures and pressures of adapting socially, the new expectations of my graduate assistantship brought about overwhelming feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about the level and quality of success I could enjoy as a graduate student. I suspect that there are reasons for this anxiety and that many other graduate students in housing face the same challenges or experiences of displacement, loneliness, and transition anxiety.

As an undergraduate, I discovered who I was, the goals I wanted to attain as an adult, my likes and dislikes, my values, attitude, and what educational path I wanted to take in my professional life. Although this may not be typical for all undergraduate students, I made an easy transition into my undergraduate college environment from high school and was fully supported by the academic and social services that the college offered. Services such as academic advising, orientation programs, freshman 101 classes, freshman interest groups, more than 60 student organizations to join, fraternities and sororities, and student success initiatives were offered to help me assimilate into my new environment and role as an undergraduate student. I joined a sorority and built meaningful relationships that helped me through good and bad times. These women became my support system as well as close friends. My active involvement in the
campus fraternity/sorority system offered opportunities to meet many other students and faculty as well as grow into a confident student leader. I was actively involved in Homecoming, student senate, and many other organizations; I became a well-known student on my campus supported by the faculty in my academic department and professional staff in the area of fraternity/sorority life, residence life, and student activities. I found my place, made many friends, and felt comfortable in my collegiate environment. I had wonderful experiences and loved every trial and victory of my undergraduate college career. I developed into a strong campus leader and a confident woman.

Graduate school was a different experience for me. The experiences of loneliness, lack of academic and social support, performance, and evaluation anxieties were just a few of the issues causing me to doubt myself. Despite interpersonal and academic success during my undergraduate years, I was unprepared for the transition to graduate school. As a graduate assistant I was a university employee and not considered a student in the same sense as I was as an undergraduate. When I was an undergraduate the only job that I had to be concerned with was being a student which included attending classes, passing exams, and graduating with a degree. As a graduate student with an assistantship, I was expected to work a full-time job in which I coordinated the administration of a residence hall and influenced the lives and living environment of students who pay my way through graduate school. At the same time that I worked for the university, I was also a full-time student taking graduate classes. I was enrolled in twelve graduate credit hours per semester but the University administration and my supervisors no longer thought of and supported me as a student, they thought of me as an
employee. Many times during my graduate school experience, my assistantship, as an
associate resident director, has been given priority over my academic work. I was
required to work at least 25 hours a week for my assistantship, but I found that I worked
several additional hours than what was required. These new feelings of anxiety were
stressful as I transitioned into graduate school. I had expected to be successful and enjoy
obtaining an education, but with these new anxieties I found it hard to focus. The
adjustment anxiety affected my success, which had an impact on my university and the
people who were a part of my life. For this reason a study of other graduate assistants in
my situation was of interest to me.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify transitional needs of first year graduate
students who have housing graduate assistantships. Although many transitional issues
arise during the first year, I focused my inquiry on four areas. The first area of focus was
the academic adjustment that students encountered as they assimilated into a new
intensified graduate program at a higher level of education. Second, I explored what
types of support services were offered to graduate students as they attended the
university. The third focus area I examined was assistantship perceptions, specifically the
perceptions that graduate students have about their new and upcoming assistantship,
living in the residence halls, and working for a university supervisor. Finally, I focused
on graduate student socialization, that is, how graduate students adapted to the new
environment and became comfortable living, working, and playing while in school.

I suspect that many students who enter Graduate School with housing
assistantships experience similar feelings as I did upon entering graduate school.
Hopefully my findings suggest recommendations to students who are going through the transition from undergraduate to graduate programs, and offer advice to faculty and staff on how to assist new graduate students with housing assistantships. I also offer recommendations for graduate school staff about effective orientation ideas for their new graduate students.

While in graduate school, students not only have to cope with academic demands placed on them by professors and the requirements of their graduate program, but they must also recognize the subtle nuances of values and attitudes reflected by faculty and peers in their academic programs suggesting appropriate professional and personal behavior (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). At the same time graduate students are also susceptible to the attitudes and values reflected in their graduate assistantships. This ability to read the culture and climate of their program and ostensibly their job, play a big role in the transition of a successful graduate student. Thus, recognizing values, attitudes, and subtle nuances is something that I explored further to help students assimilate into a new academic program of greater specificity, as well as assuming a more demanding workload.

Academic and career transition is a new challenge anticipated by many entering graduate students (Saginak, 1998), but they are not fully prepared for the extent to which their lives will change with this next academic level of study. Students hear stories about how the transition from undergraduate to graduate school is easier because there is a specific academic focus; therefore, the course of study, atmosphere and requirements are easier to comprehend. Secondly, students are also told that there is more time to focus on graduate studies. Unfortunately students may be unprepared for full-time employment or
assistantships that have heavy workloads. These stories of greater focus, academic work and time for reflection can be very inhibiting for new graduate students and cause many to have feelings of transitional anxiety.

**Research Questions**

Through this study of graduate students with housing assistantships I would like to explore the following research questions.

1. What does the new graduate student experience during the transition from undergraduate to graduate school?

2. What are the needs of graduate students who hold an assistantship in Residence Life?

3. What can graduate schools do to provide a more successful orientation?

4. How can housing assistantships better meet the socialization needs of graduate students who hold them?

**Significance of the Study**

Little research has been done to explore the transition of graduate students with housing assistantships into graduate school. As was mentioned earlier, graduate students that are awarded housing assistantships are unique in the graduate assistantship arena. The significance of this study is found in providing research for institutions that have graduate students with housing assistantships.

**Limitations of the study**

The limitations of this study include things such as shared culture and experiences between the researcher and the subjects. According to Morrow and Smith (2000) "because of the shared culture and experience, both investigators and participants may fall prey to shared assumptions and taken-for-granted meanings, leading the researcher to
fail to go into sufficient depth to understand participant meanings or to allow events in their field to go unnoticed or unquestioned because of their familiarity” (p. 209). Another limitation is the narrow focus of the study based on limiting the study to graduate students with housing assistantships. Results cannot easily be generalized beyond this campus, the culture of this campus, and the specific students who participated in this study.

Definitions of Terms

1. **Academic Adjustment**: successfully assimilating into a graduate program.

2. **Assistantship perceptions**: the ideas and thoughts a student has about their new graduate assistantship and its attendant responsibilities.

3. **Assistantship**: a job that a graduate student has to help financially support them through graduate school. There are several areas in which a student can find an assistantship such as research, teaching, or student services.

4. **Graduate student socialization**: learning the values and ideas that the established academic society has so that the student can successfully function in their new environment.

5. **Student Support Services**: the out-of-class services provided for students such as Financial Aid, Health Services, Student Recreation Centers, Admissions, Business Services, Career Services, and others provided by the institution.

6. **Traditional Student**: a student that is 18 to 23 years of age who has come into graduate school within a year of graduating with an undergraduate bachelor’s degree.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature explored four areas in which transition challenges to graduate students were found. These areas included academic adjustment, student support services, assistantship perceptions, and graduate student socialization. Students will be referred to as ‘traditional’ in this review unless the particular article distinguishes them by using a different term.

Transition is a natural part of any new change in a person’s life. Graduate students will experience transition in many ways. Schlossberg (1989) defined a transition as any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. When students continue their education after receiving a baccalaureate degree, there are steps to be admitted to a graduate program followed by transition into the program. Schlossberg referred to these students as ‘traditional’ that is, students who leave their undergraduate institution and immediately pursue their master’s degree. This group of traditional students interests me since the masters program effectively becomes the student’s life. So the transition into graduate education is much different than those of adult students, who are likely to commute, hold a job, attend school part time, and have family responsibilities (Lundburg, 2001).

Academic Adjustment

First year, full time graduate students experience unforeseen transitions into new academic programs. The academic scenery of graduate school is a completely new and different environment for most students. They must adjust to new professors with higher expectations, greater academic coursework requirements, and a concentrated curriculum.
These demands can negatively affect a student in transition from the undergraduate to graduate status.

Beeler (1991) proposed four stages of graduate student academic adjustment that described transitions and feelings a graduate student goes through to adjust to the academic environment. The first stage is “Unconscious Incompetence” (p. 164), representing the concept that full-time, first-year graduate students have a limited idea about what is to happen to them either in or outside the classroom. Inwardly, the students harbor feelings of academically under-preparedness to successfully handle advanced-level work.

The second stage, “Conscious Incompetence” (p. 166), entails acceptance by those in graduate study that they may not have the necessary academic background required to perform with distinction. Those in the second stage are aware of their deficits in some course topics, but are unwilling to challenge their professors; thus, there is a lack of classroom participation.

The third stage is “Unconscious Competence” (p. 166), the idea that those in full-time, first-year graduate study have emerging academic competence but are largely unaware of it. This stage involves a gradual shift to competence in academics, which is appreciated by professors.

The fourth stage, “Conscious Competence” (p. 167), is characterized by students beginning to openly display confidence in being able to perform with quality and feeling competent in approaching future tasks. According to Beeler (1991), it is crucial for graduate students to go through these four stages in order to assimilate successfully into the academic program of their choice. Occasionally professors have performance
requirements that increase the difficulty of entry into Beeler’s stages due to expectations of quality work that is more than students are initially prepared to produce. Many students move to a new campus for their graduate work and may not be as academically well prepared as demands at the new campus require. These students often become aggravated, professors become frustrated, and student transition is therefore more difficult if not unsuccessful.

Another realm of academic adjustment is in quality academic advisement. Without advisement the student may be lost in the program and is not made aware of all the requirements and procedures to progress. Advisement also allows the student to explore questions and thoughts in a non-judgmental way, through conversation with advisors and professors. Quality academic advisement has resulted in greater persistence among graduate students (Polson, 1999). Faculty advisors that play mentoring roles in the lives of their graduate students also have a positive impact on degree completion (Baird, 1995). Yet many faculty advisors find little time or lack skills for advising, as many transitional needs among first year students are caused by high expectations of professors (Beeler, 1991). Therefore, many graduate students do not receive quality advisement and struggle alone in their pursuit of a degree.

Baird (1976) compared the expectations of students before entering their chosen fields with their perceptions of the reality after one year of study. Baird’s study found that over one third of the sample said that their expectations of what graduate or professional school would be like were not fulfilled, and that approximately 40 percent said they would strongly consider changing to another program if they could do so without losing ground. This finding suggests that better advisement, more accurate
information about their field of study from professional organizations and about
individual programs from the department or institution would aid in the academic
transition.

Owen (1999) completed an assessment instrument used in determining the
reliability and validity of self-directed learning readiness among graduate students. Self-
directed learning is a learning theory that encompasses a range of characteristics. These
characteristics involve skills, techniques, procedures, locating resources, planning
strategies, evaluating outcomes, and critical awareness. As demographic trends in
graduate programs change, there is a need to evaluate the instructional instruments used
in academic programs. Owen used this assessment to define two opposite ends of the
spectrum of self-directed learning in which the aforementioned characteristics are placed.
Techniques and skills on one end and critical awareness on the other end divide the two
ends of the spectrum. His goal was to point out a new direction of instruction for faculty
that will enhance a program and offer satisfaction for the student in their learning
process. Owen sought to determine if using self-directed learning was reliable and valid
to use among graduate students. His results implied that if graduate students entering a
program are determined to be self-directed learners, this should enable professionals to
plan orientation programs that are unique and more satisfying for graduate students.

Climate and fit are two characteristics that are appropriate to study in this
research. A desirable climate and fit is an environment that the student feels meets
his/her achievement goals and career interests (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Fit begins with
the graduate school application process. Many students are drawn to a university’s
overall reputation rather than to the character or reputation of the actual department to
which they are applying. When the graduate student arrives at the university, they may not have adequately informed themselves about the achievements and intellectual commitments of faculty members with whom they might work and study. Likewise, when there is a disconnect between what a program advertises (or not) and what it delivers, it may take time for students to compensate for the lack of support and resources to complete their degree. If a desirable climate and fit are not offered to the graduate student, successful transition into graduate study is more difficult.

**Student Support Services**

Faculty and staff mentoring and graduate-student-specific support organizations can be an important part of the transition into graduate school (Granados & Lopez, 1999; Johnson, 1996). Some of the experiences that graduate students are involved in directly relate to the services that the university offers to the graduate student body. For example, according to Robinson (1999), one student was having a difficult time transitioning into a graduate program because there were little or nor support and networking opportunities for minority students. It was not until she met with the Associate Dean of the Graduate School that adequate services were provided. Likewise, any students who have enjoyed support services as undergraduates may be shocked to discover that these same services, so important in their undergraduate success, are woefully lacking at the graduate level.

Grant-Valone and Ensher (2000) found that the level of support offered through peer mentoring did not seem to reduce stress levels of graduate students in a private graduate school psychology department. They also found that mentoring programs fail to help in providing enough support for the reduction in students’ stress levels. The authors
suggested that more than just mentoring may be necessary to help with the transition into graduate school and the academic program.

Winston (1976) found that entering students had significantly unrealistic expectations that did not match those of continuing students or faculty. Based on these expectations, Winston anticipated that students would go through anticipatory socialization expectations of socializing in a new academic environment. Taub and Komives (1998) defined anticipatory socialization as “the formation of expectations and attitudes and decision-making by students about the program and institution before they physically enter the new environment and start classes (p. 394).” Taub and Komives suggested that graduate schools and departments should be planning orientation programs that provide opportunity for assessment of self, the professional field and institutional fit. The literature researched for this review does not identify institutions taking the time to create orientation programs for graduate students that are helping them transition into their programs. The idea of a graduate student orientation is to welcome the students to a comfortable learning environment, meet their adjustment needs, and offer them a competent view of the graduate school consistent with the University’s mission. Providing orientation programs can be a valuable part of the acculturation process for students (Polsen, 1999). The involvement of faculty and staff in orientation programs helps to retain students until they have earned their degree and received a competent education. When graduate students apply for admission to a graduate program they are most likely unsure of the extent that a department will support, mentor, and advise them. An orientation program will help guide students through the anxieties of getting to know the graduate school and department.
Other services discussed but not utilized by many programs in graduate school are transition sessions. These are defined as an ongoing program that responds to the need for continuing support of graduate students and their changing developmental issues (Davis & Forney, 2002). These transition sessions are based on Schlossberg's (1989) definition of transition: emphasizing dealing with moving in, moving through, and moving out. One hundred and nineteen surveys were analyzed for data regarding these transition sessions and the results indicated that they were helpful. The survey respondents were graduate students enrolled in a college student affairs program, many of whom have housing assistantships. The sessions instilled a sense of universality, provided a safe forum for open and honest dialogue, allowed space for focus and reflection, and gave students a chance to clarify expectations and receive feedback. Davis and Forney found that these transition sessions invoked themes of open communication, increased group cohesion, and increased understanding, all of which would promote better transition to graduate school.

Assistantship Perceptions

When students enter graduate school, they typically are full-time or part-time employees of some company or they may have an on-campus graduate assistantship(s). Expectations of a new assistantship are part of the anxiety that graduate students face; things such as workloads, attitudes, environments, supervisors, and tasks assigned can all be characteristics of student expectations of a typical graduate assistantship (Brown-Wright, Dubick, & Newman, 1997). Expectations and concerns about balance in assistantships and academic workloads are what a graduate student obsesses about when preparing for graduate school. Work performance expectations contribute to the overall
experience of the graduate performance and many students may have a hard time coping with them.

Role expectations can be a key determinant in the success of an assistantship experience (Schlossberg, 1989). Knowing the role that a graduate student assumes as a graduate assistant is important to the transition into graduate school. Clear expectations help guide the graduate student during their assistantship experience. In addition, many times assistantships apply directly to the degree in which a student is seeking, so they serve as practical apprenticeship experiences. This is often the case with assistantships in residence life which calls for extra hours of work, more responsibility based on the live-in positions, and care for the safety of residents in their home. Therefore, assistantship expectations and supervisor expectations in housing are critical for those students planning a career in this area. In other words, the expectations that supervisors provide for their graduate students, as well as the expectations the graduate school and the academic department have are important in giving the student an idea of what they will be doing while they are working for the university and beyond.

Brown-Wright, et al., (1997) suggested that training is essential in helping graduate assistants transition more successfully into their jobs. Proper training will lead to successful transition through reduced anxiety and role clarification. Not knowing roles, and being under-trained creates ambiguity that has an anxiety-producing effect on a student. According to Brown-Wright’s (1997) study, some of the major concerns that graduate assistants have are unreasonable workloads, stereotypical roles, poor work environments, assignment of supervisor, and tasks assigned. But, through good training about the specifics of the assistantship, these anxieties can be dealt with as they occur.
By spending time working through the unknown avenues of the job, a student can
become prepared to fulfill the needs of the job.

Professional identity becomes a part of the assistantship experience. Depending
on the structure of the assistantship experience, a student's sense of him or herself
professionally can be nurtured or hampered. Lundburg (2001) studied the assistantship
experience and professional identity formation of master's degree students and found that
successful socialization into a profession ultimately leads to a sense of professional
identity. He also found that the key variables that fostered successful socialization were
relationships with peers and faculty, classroom experiences, and assistantships. Although
Lundberg identified these factors, he did not discuss the students independently
identifying the factors for themselves or whether students were getting the resources
needed to identify and transition successfully.

Graduate Student Socialization

Socialization is the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and
dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society, acquiring
new information and being transformed to accept values, norms, and rules of survival in
the society in which the person is now a part (Clark & Palattella, 1997; Hartnett & Katz,
1976; Katz, 1976; Lozoff, 1976; Lundberg, 2001; Myers, 1998; Newcomb & Wilson,
1966; Paul & Kelleher, 1995; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Myers (1998) explored components of the assimilation stages of graduate
teaching assistantship socialization. He found that peer relationships provided a
foundation for socialization. In graduate school students find that personal peer groups
shrink, specifically for students who have continued straight from undergraduate school
to graduate school. More specifically, those students that have transferred from one institution into a new one find the experience quite challenging. The literature supports that peer groups are important, but it goes into little detail about what the importance is, and how to maintain strong peer groups. Clark and Palattella (1997) recognized that the trick to transition and surviving graduate school was “to maintain concentrated attention upon academic work as well as the sanity-saving attitude that there is a world beyond the seminar room and library stacks “(p. 7). What do graduate programs and graduate schools do to help students through the transition process?

Paul and Kelleher (1995) found in a study about precollege concerns “the transition from high school to college is a ‘double-edged’ experience for many late adolescents, who not only face many challenges and opportunities for growth but also loss of familiarity and fear of the unknown” (p. 513). Graduate students are facing similar situations in their transition to graduate school. At the same time during the undergraduate years students are offered several opportunities to get involved in college life and develop their identity as a student that helps in making the transition easier. However graduate students are not similarly encouraged and there are fewer opportunities for campus involvement. Having fewer opportunities to be involved can make the transition more difficult. Graduate students must seek out opportunities on their own.

In order for successful socialization in new environments to occur, students must learn not only to cope with the academic demands but to recognize values, attitudes, and subtle nuances reflected by faculty and peers in their academic programs (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). What must students do to achieve personal adjustment, work and
academic success? Students are coping with a new set of expectations from professors and supervisors, and they are expected to cope with socialization into a new milieu without active support from university personnel. These new challenges can make it difficult for the student to be successful.

Socializing in the case of a graduate student involves relationships with peers and faculty, classroom experience and assistantships. These agents are a part of all graduate students' lives (Lundberg, 2001). Socialization is an important factor in graduate school that can affect the success of a graduate student and their journey to a degree.

Summary

Graduate students at colleges and universities are actively involved as they work to complete their degree. The students serve in assistantships, attend classes, deal with faculty members on a daily basis, and simultaneously fight the pressures of being a student and an employee of the university. Each student that enters into graduate school is unique and their situation is different, but they each share the common characteristic of being a student in a new academic environment, with new responsibilities.

The literature suggests that there are things being done such as orientation programs and transition sessions to insure the success of graduate students (Clark & Palattella, 1997; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Lundberg, 2001; Smart, 1988; Smith, 1984). However, there is little research to suggest that these programs are being emphasized at institutions specifically for students with housing assistantships. The aforementioned studies are about programs at singular institutions. In the assistantship there are concerns of heavy workloads, long hours, and lack of support for the graduate student’s education from their supervisors in relation to their assistantships (Brown-Wright, Dubick, &
Isadore, 1997). Faculty perceptions of new graduate students, academic advising, and assimilation stages have been studied (Beeler, 1991, Saunders, 1993) and support services such as career counseling have been identified (Davis & Forney, 2002; Granados & Lopez, 1999; Taub & Komives, 1998). Unfortunately none of these research activities appear to address how students learn to exist successfully as graduate students with housing assistantships in the university environment.

There is little research on graduate students and their transitional issues because of the responsibilities they have within housing. Housing assistantships are unique in that they require longer hours since the students who possess the assistantships live in the buildings in which they work. Fewer services are geared toward the graduate student population because possibly graduate students have been in college already and are looking for something else. Less preparation of orientation programs and workshops for the transition of students into graduate school are planned because students are not in their first year of college and they have some background in college previous to graduate school. Therefore based on the research it is appropriate to conduct a study to further research about graduate student transition.

This study on graduate student transitional needs explores what the graduate student is experiencing during the transition from undergraduate to graduate school. Identified will be the needs of graduate students who hold an assistantship in Residence Life along with recommendations of what should be done to prepare undergraduate students that intend on being awarded housing assistantships, what graduate schools can do for a more successful orientation, and how housing assistantships can better meet the needs of graduate students who hold them.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study was designed to identify transition needs of first year graduate students who have residence life graduate assistantships. The purpose is to focus on four areas of graduate student life where transition occurs and to discover the nature of student needs. The four areas examined are academic adjustment, what types of support services are offered to graduate students, assistantship perceptions, and graduate student socialization. There has been little research focusing on graduate students who have assistantships in housing, so I have conducted a qualitative study to explore these areas of transition for graduate students. The importance of doing a qualitative study is that by engaging the subjects in this research, strategies can be provided that can address questions that may not be answered by quantitative methods alone, specifically the investigation of complex human phenomena and the meanings given by people to their experiences (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Particularly the focus is to explain participant meaning through “words, descriptions, theoretical or conceptual frameworks, pictures, and diagrams rather than formal models and statistics” (p. 200). This study described transitional needs through the use of words and descriptions. The research questions that guided this research were:

1. What does the new graduate student experience during the transition from undergraduate to graduate school?
2. What are the needs of graduate students who hold an assistantship in Residence Life?
3. What can graduate schools do to provide a more successful orientation?
4. How can housing assistantships better meet the socialization needs of graduate students who hold them?

Setting

The study took place in a conference room at a medium size Midwestern university. The subjects were seated around a conference room table, and the conversation was audiotaped for later transcription and analysis. The participants were all masters graduate students with housing assistantships from the same medium sized Midwestern university.

Subjects

In order to reflect graduate students with housing assistantships, I approached all available students that met the study criteria. The criteria for the participants was that the student be a first year graduate student between the ages of 18 to 23 who has come into graduate school within a year of graduating with an undergraduate bachelor’s degree, and who had been awarded a housing assistantship. This resulted in identifying the entire criterion group of six people. All agreed to participate in the study. At the time of the focus group only four participants showed up resulting in a narrower group than anticipated. The remaining four participants all came from the same program – college student affairs. I decided to continue the research with the understanding that my group was not as representative as I would like.

The four participants who were present at the interview were all first year graduate students who had assistantships with the housing department. Each of the students was between the age of 21 and 24 years old. There were three female participants and one male. Three of the students transferred to the university from an
outside institution after graduating with a bachelor's degree. One of the students was a native student of the institution who had received a bachelor's degree.

Instrument

This study was conducting using a focus group format. The focus group was made up of four first year graduate students who have housing assistantships. The focus group lasted about an hour and a half and was semi-structured around 23 questions that were determined in advance (Appendix A). Other questions arose as the focus group progressed. The focus group was taped and transcribed by the researcher. The participants were encouraged to be open with their feelings and thoughts. The focus group was conducted in a private conference room, where confidentiality could be assured. The focus group took place in December 2002, toward the end of the participants first semester of graduate school.

Collecting the data

Participants were selected based on criteria established for this study. Four of the six invited students attended the focus group. After a decision to continue the focus group, the participants were told that the information shared would only be heard and read by the researcher and the thesis advisor. A colleague of the researcher was also present to assist in taping the focus group. The participants signed informed consent letters (see appendix B) and were thanked for their participation. The interviewer began with a short introduction about how the focus group would be conducted. At the close of the focus group the participants were reminded that the information they provided would be confidential. Finally, the researcher explained what the data would be used for. The
participants were thanked again and left the conference room. The data were transcribed and the original audiotapes destroyed.

Treatment of the Data

The data collected from the focus group were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis. Data were examined to discover similarities and differences dealing with the transitional needs of graduate students who have housing assistantships. Quotes that related to the questions were selected without attribution in order to develop themes. The themes were analyzed in relation to the research questions listed in the literature review. In chapter IV, Results, the data were organized by the four research questions.
Chapter IV

RESULTS

This section reports the results of the focus group interview concerning the following four areas in which graduate students have transitional needs, academic adjustment, student support services, assistantship perceptions and experiences, and socialization of graduate students. Using the constant comparative method (Manning, 1999), the data were analyzed resulting in the several themes concerning transitional needs of graduate students. The transcription of the spoken words of the focus group was examined to identify themes about transition needs of the participants. The following is a discussion of the themes organized according to the research questions posed for this thesis.

Research Question #1: What does the graduate student experience during the transition from undergraduate to graduate school?

The primary themes that were identified by the focus group participants dealing with the transition from undergraduate to graduate school were the struggle with a new approach to learning, a new approach to time management, and a new approach to student support services. Each theme is expanded in the discussion below.

New approach to learning

Several of the participants stated that the perceived lack of structure within the classroom was a new experience, different from the more teacher/lecture-dominated focus of their undergraduate experience. The participants felt that when they came to graduate school they would be met with structure and challenges from professors. What
these participants found was a more constructivist approach to teaching. Constructivists believe in a more student-centered approach, where each individual assimilates personal experiences and prior academic learning into the creation of new knowledge (Henson & Eller, 1999). From students' perspective, this approach to knowledge creation appears to have no apparent structure and much of the responsibility for learning rests with the student, a responsibility they had not experienced in their undergraduate education. One respondent said: "I think for a first semester in grad school our teachers gave us way too much independence." A second respondent made a statement about the expectations that the professors have for the students. "The professors want you to kind of take your own lead on the homework assignments."

These responses support the idea that students need more information on the impact of the change in pedagogy from undergraduate to graduate school. The respondents experienced this transition as a perceived lack of structure within the classroom experience and perceived lack of details on how to complete assignments. This ambiguity led to difficulty in how to motivate them to conceptualize and complete the required class work. I think this negative experience had to do with the increased commitment of time to each class combined with fewer guidelines from instructors. As one participant put it: "I realized that it was more of my goal to find out what I needed to do."

New approach to time management

The second theme that addressed the first research question was a need for increased emphasis on time management. The respondents reported surprise and shock at how much time was committed to their graduate assistantship and schoolwork. Some
used words such as "24/7" and that any time not spent in the assistantship was spent in class assignments. The participants discussed how much they worked in their assistantships and the courses they were taking: "I feel like I am always at work because I'm constantly under scrutiny even on my day off, or when I decide I want to go out I feel like I'm still at work, 'Oh, am I going to see my residents here'. So I am never not at work." The four respondents agreed that the time commitment required for this particular combination of housing assistantship and academic performance expectations required better transitional preparation.

New approach to student support services

It was this researcher's contention that there was a lack of support services offered to students once they entered graduate education. In other words, services such as financial aid, health services, career planning, and sports opportunities were not readily available to graduate students. However, these focus group members were aware that services were available; they simply did not utilize them. As one respondent stated: "I know they are there, either I haven't needed them or I feel like I haven't had the time - for example, the rec. I've wanted to go there but I haven't yet so I think it's more a time issue." Another respondent expressed the concern that because she is in housing and has a position of authority among the students, some services would disclose too much of her personal life and perhaps compromise her authority at work. It would appear from these responses that graduate students in housing face similar problems as other employed workers. Namely, they need time to access needed student services as well as clear boundaries maintained between them and the undergraduate students they supervise.
Research Question #2. What are the needs of graduate students who hold an assistantship in Residence Life?

Two themes were derived through the focus group dealing with the needs of graduate students who hold an assistantship in residence life. The first theme was full and transparent disclosure concerning living accommodations within the residence hall environment, and the second theme dealt with more meaningful supervision and mentoring from full-time professional residence life staff members.

Full and transparent disclosure concerning living accommodations

When a graduate student is awarded a housing assistantship, they are provided free housing, a stipend, and tuition waivers. Although housing is part of the compensation for the assistantship, there are still issues of boundaries between the graduate assistant’s living situation and the residents of the building as well as maintaining a satisfactory balance between work and home. The respondents were frustrated with how difficult it was to find out anything in detail about the specifics of their living accommodations prior to their arrival on campus. Once on campus, they were also frustrated with establishing the boundaries of their own personal living space and that of their residents. One respondent said, “When I was trying to find out about living accommodations people were really shady. They were like, ‘Oh it’s a suite.’” The respondents complained about living on the floor with the residents they supervised; some have to share the bathroom facilities even to the point of sharing the shower. Personal boundaries are difficult to establish because of these living arrangements. Respondents felt like they were always at work, and could never separate their personal life from their professional responsibilities. One respondent made the statement that his life is under constant scrutiny by freshman
who find it difficult to see him as anything other than a fellow student who lives on the floor with them. This makes carrying out GA duties more difficult. The respondents felt that they would have been better prepared to create appropriate boundaries between the students and themselves if they had been warned about the pending problems associated with sharing the same shower with the students for whom they are responsible as well as proper training to make this living arrangement work. One respondent said, “They need to be more honest with us, like when we come here to do our interview, they show us these little apartments, like this is where you will be living, and this is what a GA does, and this is your office.” According to the participants, they are so overwhelmed with information when they come for the campus interview that an informed choice is difficult to make. Thus, when they arrive on campus to begin their assistantship and discover that reality is much different, the transition to graduate school becomes stressful and at times overwhelming.

Meaningful supervision and mentorship

A second theme found in the adjustment to the housing assistantship was the supervision and mentoring that a new graduate assistant receives from his/her supervisor. The student supervisor’s personality and administrative style is directly related to how well the graduate student adjusts to his/her job. As one respondent stated “I really felt like he helped me understand my role, understand my job, and become more confident in what I’m doing as an ARD.” Specifically, this respondent mentioned learning how to be an effective administrator, the importance of following procedures, and clear expectations for the job. The adjustment into the new position was made easier for this respondent because there was a feeling that the supervisor also modeled what he taught. When
supervision is meaningful, clear, and modeled, the supervisee gains confidence needed to set proper boundaries, establish peer consultation, and effectively address and meet the many challenges of this position.

Likewise, poor supervision can undermine the GA's confidence and effectiveness in doing their job. One respondent had a bad experience with her supervisor and stated: “He’s told me over and over again throughout the semester that he doesn’t want to step on my toes, he doesn’t want to get involved too much because it’s my building, and I understand that, I respect that, and I want that, I want it to be that I run the building but like I keep saying I kind of wish that when I do ask him for help or when he knows that I’m struggling, then he’d just kind of be there for me.” An unsupportive supervisor can impede the GA’s successful transition into the job and the graduate school experience.

Since a housing assistantship requires longer hours than other graduate assistantships, and includes responsibility for the care of student’s lives, support from the supervisor is extremely important in the graduate student’s overall adjustment.

Research Question #3. What can graduate schools do to provide a more successful orientation?

One particular theme that emerged during the focus group interview was that orientation programs provide graduate students an opportunity to meet new people.

Ability to meet new people

The graduate school dean at the respondents' university typically holds a brief orientation for all entering graduate assistants during which he outlines the duties and expectations held for GA’s on the campus. Unfortunately, housing GA's are unable to attend this orientation program because it conflicts with the Housing Department's own
training sessions. The focus group participants felt that because they were not allowed to attend the orientation program, they were unable to meet other new graduate students in fields outside their specialty. This feeling of separation impeded their transition into a new academic setting. When people move to a new place or embark on a life-changing event, they typically anticipate meeting new people. The formal orientation program is one way that students can engage in socializing that may lead to new friendships and better adjustment to a new environment. The respondents felt like they were prevented from meeting other graduate students and were only exposed to other graduate students working in housing. As one respondent said “We didn’t go to the one [orientation] the other graduate students go to because we were in training. So I don’t know what theirs was like, but I do know that we were separated.” A second respondent said “I think it would have been nice to go out and meet other people and I guess I never thought about there being a big graduate school orientation for everyone else, because we are so separate.” The respondents expressed the general idea that this forced separation created unwanted anxiety and a missed opportunity to meet and socialize with graduate students outside housing.

Research Question #4. How can housing assistantships better meet the socialization needs of graduate students who hold them?

Three themes were found in the data that addressed the last research question. The three themes were balance between personal, academic, and professional life, creating meaningful relationships, and addressing acclimation into the new academic environment.
Striking balance

The participants expressed frustration as they discussed their difficulty in maintaining an adequate balance between the many demands they encountered and their personal needs as they started graduate school. Of particular concern was their ability to juggle the demands between their personal, academic, and professional lives. One of the major contributing factors of imbalance among these participants was the perceived lack of time to socialize due to overwhelming work and class expectations. This lack of time led to one respondent's increased level of stress: “I think I wish I could find more time because I would be less stressed if I just had time to do what I wanted.” In another the struggle to balance priorities increased feelings of depression: “Like it’s hard for me to distinguish my time and work time, so it has had a dramatic affect on me. Seriously, at points it has put me in very depressive states where I just don’t want to be here anymore.” Thus, a balance between work, study and leisure for these participants is simply not a matter for intellectual discussion, but has serious ramifications on their mental, emotional, and physical health.

Another factor contributing to imbalance expressed by the participants was a belief that housing policies concerning their responsibilities seemed overly restrictive. All live-in employees are limited to only 6 weekends away from their building, and they must seek approval from supervisory staff at least 48 hours in advance of their absence. The participants talked about wanting to have more freedom to travel to their homes. This restriction has had negative affects on how the students deal with balance in their jobs and school. As one respondent stated: “Restrictions of our assistantships include that we have to request nights off. We only have so many times when we can be away....
Sometimes you just need to get away; sometimes you can’t be here. And you can't always find someone to help you out, when you need to just get away." The requirement that GAs cannot be away from their jobs unless it is approved or they can find a replacement leads to anxiety and frustration. As another respondent stated "So, like I can feel utterly trapped here and there is nobody that I care to be around, so it sucks." This sense of helplessness and entrapment makes transitioning into being successful in their assistantship problematic.

Creating meaningful relationships

Moving into any new job and/or educational setting means adjusting to a new environment and part of that adjustment includes establishing meaningful relationships that may mitigate the negative effects of adjusting to a new situation. In this study it was discovered that housing graduate assistants feel uniquely separated from other graduate students because of the demands of managing the housing responsibilities. One respondent talked about the lack of interaction with other graduate students: "Like we don’t get to interact with a lot of other people besides people who are in housing. We don’t get to interact with the other graduate students or just other people in general that are not in housing.” The graduate students all agreed that separation from other graduate students, whether forced or natural, interfered with their ability to meet and create meaningful relationships with others outside of housing.

Addressing acclimation

The final theme extracted from the data was acclimation issues that students new to the institution were confronting. Three of the four participants moved into a new institution to begin their graduate work. This move had several negative affects on the
students who were trying to assimilate into their new environment. Those participants who had to move to enter graduate school had difficulty with three specific issues: distance from family and friends, a change in institutional cultures, and the difference in size of campus and community in comparison to the environment surrounding their previous institution.

As stated earlier, supportive peer relationships are important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Moving to a new location can increase stress on maintaining previous relationships left behind. As one respondent stated, "I think that certain relationships that I have at home have suffered greatly because I'm here and I'm far away." The focus group indicated that this distance from a meaningful support group means "starting over again", it is "emotionally draining", and that as a result they were "ready to pack" and head home.

Another issue that respondents addressed was the change in institutional culture. One respondent noted that she struggled with getting used to a new university setting. The graduate student in the focus group who received her undergraduate degree from the same institution expressed no similar transitional concerns about institutional culture.

The final concern expressed by the group was over the size of the campus and community. One respondent stated that moving from a large urban area to a small rural town created a difficult personal adjustment. Expectations about how things might have been and how they are, mean learning not only how to begin graduate school and a new position, but how to be a member of a much smaller or different community.
SUMMARY

In conclusion there are several themes that were drawn from the focus group data that are connected to transitional issues and needs of first year graduate students with housing graduate assistantships. The themes included new approaches to learning, time management, and student support services, full and transparent disclosure concerning living accommodations, meaningful supervision and mentorship, the ability to meet new people, balancing work, academics, and personal relationships, creating meaningful relationships, and addressing acclimation. These themes have been identified by the focus-group members as transitional issues that they dealt with while entering into a new graduate school program, adjusting to a new job, and adapting into a new environment.
Chapter V
Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative focus group study was to discover transitional needs that first year graduate student’s with housing graduate assistantships encounter. This section addresses my conclusions from analyzing the focus group results on graduate student adjustment held with four first year housing graduate students on a middle-sized comprehensive state university campus.

Beeler (1991) found that students have high and unrealistic expectations about their graduate programs. In the first stage of Beeler’s model about academic adjustment, called "Unconscious Incompetence," the first year student has a limited idea of what will happen in and out of the classroom. The respondents made statements that were similar to Beeler’s concept; namely, most of them had a limited notion of what was about to transpire. The respondents said “a master’s degree was probably easier than your undergraduate work”, “they kind of hyped me up about graduate school”, “I wasn’t expecting to be reading out of textbooks, I was expecting to learn the practical expectations.” These respondents all made statements about the expectations that they had before they arrived at graduate school. And many of these expectations were not met. One said “I had higher expectations before I got here, they kind of lowered since I’ve been here, so I don’t expect too much.” According to these statements and the data, I found there was a match between Beelers’ statements about high expectations and the academic adjustment that the students would go through as first year students. The respondents thought they would be met with many academic challenges framed in a highly formalized classroom structure. One said “No one mentioned that structure just
completely disappeared in some places.” They were surprised to find that their professors were challenging them in a way that they did not expect. The professors expected the students to take personal charge of their education, and a student-centered constructivist instructional approach to learning was taken that was totally unfamiliar to the students. The change in instructional procedure was identified as a transitional issue for the students and they longed for clear, specific explanations of requirements for assignments and activities.

When I began this study I suspected that the student support services that the institution offers to graduate students were not sufficient in meeting the needs of the students. According to Johnson (1996) and Granados & Lopez (1999), graduate-student-specific support organizations can be an important part of the transition into graduate school. My study does not support the research previously written or my assumption that services were not sufficient. My research maintains that the student support services are sufficient, but other factors keep them from utilizing the services to the fullest extent. These factors are time constraints and fear of personal disclosure in an environment where residents may be privy to information.

Grant-Valone & Ensher (2000) suggested that more than mentoring is needed to help the transition into graduate school and the academic program. Likewise, my results also found that more is needed than mentoring. My research indicated that clear explanations of teaching styles, approaches to learning time management, new approaches to student support services, meaningful support from assistantship supervisors, role modeling the G.A. position, and acclimating to the new environment were critical factors in supporting successful transitions to graduate school. In addition,
my research also found housing GA's have unique needs, such as, the need for clear boundaries between the graduate students and the residents, clear explanations of living accommodations, and special support for students that are new to the institution.

Graduate students with housing assistantships are entering a new environment where their work life will blend with their personal life. They will live on floors with residents and work in the same building supervising the same residents. The students are new to the job and there are adjustments to be made and a lot of things to be learned.

Brown-Wright, Dubick, and Newman (1997) stated that graduate students have general concerns about things such as who will supervise them and what tasks will be assigned, increased workloads, and difficult working environments. Schlossberg (1989) said that role expectations can be a key determinant in the success of an assistantship experience. These are the expectations and roles that the student will have as they enter into an assistantship. My respondents also had these concerns. As one respondent said, “We have one supervisor who is a very to the letter kind of person on the rules, and on procedures, and if you ever have a question about what to do in a situation, he can give you a by the book answer.”

What surprised me were the more specific concerns each respondent had about clear explanations of living accommodations and meaningful support from their supervisor. The housing graduates want clear explanations of where and how they will be living so that they can begin to mentally prepare to create boundaries between their work and personal life. Second, the relationship with the supervisor was very important to the success of the assistant. The supervisor was identified as the person who could ‘make or break’ the student.
Therefore, my data support that the area of most concern to the respondents in my study was not academic in nature. Rather, it was the stress of managing the housing assistantship. This researcher is convinced that better role induction before the graduate student begins his/her responsibilities would lead to a more successful transition and feelings of success. When the student is prepared for what roles they will have as a graduate student and assistant in housing, they will be able to make a more successful transition.

Most institutions engage their new students in some form of orientation. Polsen’s (1999) research showed that providing orientation programs can be a valuable part of the acculturation process for students. Taub and Komives (1998) stated “the goals of the orientation program are to provide opportunity for assessment of self, professional field, and institution for ‘fit’.” (p. 394). Students need to learn about the institution, the graduate program, the academic department, and the campus resources available to them. A successful orientation program for students can prepare them for the environment they are entering. The focus-group participants expressed disappointment that they were not able to attend the general GA orientation due to their simultaneous commitment to training in housing. They thought this imposed separation led to isolation and impeded their efforts to meet other new graduate students and become familiar with the general academic environment. The respondents said, “We didn’t go to the one that the other grad students go to because we were in training.” The results from my study do not show whether the general orientation would really meet their needs or if it too would appear inadequate for successful transition.
Recommendations

Based on the data presented thus far, I would proffer the following recommendations for those who wish to establish procedures for making the transition for housing students more meaningful.

For Academic Departments and Professors

1. Each department should have an orientation to their specific discipline including teaching philosophies, expectations for academic success, departmental resources, and meeting other departmental graduate students.

2. Professors who teach courses during the student's first semester could take the time to address their own unique approach to teaching and the general differences between undergraduate and graduate expectations.

For Student Affairs Professionals

1. Graduate Schools should recognize the significance of their orientation programs and encourage all departments to require their graduate assistants to attend the all school orientation program.

2. Housing departments need to provide full disclosure about the various living accommodations for all graduate assistants.

3. Housing departments should prepare full-time professional staff to be effective supervisors for the graduate assistants in their assistantship and their academic program.
4. Housing departments should train and prepare graduate students to establish proper professional boundaries with the residence hall students.

5. Housing GA's must be informed about the critical importance of learning time management techniques and developing effective ways of balancing their academic, professional, and personal lives.

For Researchers

1. Further research is needed to determine what variables impede or enhance the GA's ability to balance effectively their various professional and personal obligations.

2. Research should also examine a more diverse population of GA's, especially those outside housing, to see which variables of concern are shared and which are unique to housing.

Limitations

This study was done at a single institution in the Midwest. Therefore generalizations to other populations cannot be made solely based on this study. Only four participants attended the focus group, all from the same academic program, thus creating the limitation of only having the perspective of students from one academic program. The researcher may be too close to the participants to fully understand both "participants meaning" and the relevant institutional culture (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was done to identify transitional issues and needs within four areas of a first year graduate student's life. The areas examined were academic adjustment, student support services, assistantship perceptions, and graduate student
socialization. Several themes emerged that suggest additional training and preparation is needed to assist students, especially those in housing, in making a successful transition into graduate school. The themes included new approaches to learning, time management, and student support services, full and transparent disclosure concerning living accommodations, meaningful supervision and mentorship, the ability to meet new people, balancing work, academics, and personal relationships, creating meaningful relationships, and addressing acclimation. These themes have been identified by the focus-group members as transitional issues that they dealt with while entering into a new graduate school program, adjusting to a new job, and adapting into a new environment.

Clark and Patella (1997) recognized that the trick to surviving graduate school was to maintain concentrated attention to academic work as well as the idea that there is a world beyond the seminar room and library stacks. The results of this study support this notion and should encourage those in responsibility to prescribe steps to assist graduate students entering a housing graduate assistantship and plan meaningful orientation programs that enable students not only to survive the rigors of graduate school, but also thrive inside and outside their academic world.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. Can you tell me about the kinds of things you were involved in while you were an undergraduate student?

2. Tell me what you thought about yourself while you were an undergraduate student?

3. What were the perceptions or expectations you had about EIU while you were preparing to begin your graduate program?

4. About professors?

5. Academic workload?

6. Ok, so it has been about two or three weeks, and you are immersed in the program, what has changed from your original perceptions or expectations about your graduate program?

7. Let’s move into another area, tell me briefly about your role in your housing assistantship.

8. What do you think you needed to make your work as a GA in housing a smoother transition?

9. What role does your supervisor play in your transition? How does your supervisor support you in your job?

10. What would you like to have seen happen with your supervisor in those first few weeks?

11. When you were undergraduate students, what were some of the university student services that you utilized?

12. What student services do you utilize as a graduate student?

13. What services would you like to utilize, but that you do not feel are available to you?

14. What was your experience with graduate school orientation?

15. Going back to the beginning of this interview, I asked you about what you were like in your undergraduate institution. Let’s take a minute and reflect about that and think about what you did socially. What were your peer groups like?
16. Let's talk about socializing, hanging out with friends, going out, etc. Tell me about what you do for fun?

17. How has being in a housing assistantship had an affect on the socializing that you do?

18. How has this affected your transition?

19. If you attended this institution for undergraduate school, what differences have you noticed about your socializing patterns?

20. If you attended another university before you came here, what differences are there in your socializing patterns?

21. How would you advise the Housing Department in helping prepare you for
   a. Successful housing assistantships
   b. Social Adjustment

22. What advise would you give your Graduate Department regarding
   a. Academic Success

23. What advise would you give your Graduate School regarding
   a. Academic Success
   b. Graduate School Services
   c. Social Adjustment
Appendix B

Dear Participant,

This letter is to inform you of the study that you will be participating in. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign at the bottom.

This interview format is a focus group that will last approximately one hour and a half. It will be held on December 19, 2002, in the Counseling and Student Development Department. The data collected from this qualitative study is to aid in identifying transition needs of first year graduate students who have housing graduate assistantships.

Your experiences and remarks will be analyzed and may be used, but your names will not be identified.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Dixie Sullenger
Researcher

Signature __________________________