

# Utilizing Schlossberg's Transition Theory for Student Success: A Case Study of Underrepresented Transfer Students in a Predominantly White Teacher Education Program

*David A. Byrd, Ph.D.*

The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

## ABSTRACT

*The researcher of this study examined the experiences of three African American and four Hispanic community college transfers studying in a predominantly White institution (PWI) teacher education program. Extant literature has demonstrated that there is an increasing shortage of public school teachers of color. To address this pervasive crisis, universities must recruit, retain, and graduate larger numbers of underrepresented students from America's community colleges to fill the gap. Findings from this case study suggest that the University in this study should improve the marketing of academic support resources and provide narrowly tailored services to meet the needs of underrepresented transfer students. Additionally, a proposed amendment to Schlossberg's Transition Theory is suggested to better represent the assets and liabilities utilized by these populations in this particular PWI.*

## Introduction

America faces a critical shortage of teachers of color (Tenore, Dunn, Laughter, & Milner, 2010). Diverse teachers have a dramatic impact in increasing the cultural competence of our classrooms and serve as a role model for our increasingly diverse school children (National Education Agency, 2004). With our schools becoming increasingly diverse, the question must be raised, who is teaching our children and what can be done to diversify our teaching force? The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2013) found that in the 2011-2012 academic year, 81.9% of all teachers were White, 6.8% were Black, and 7.8% were Hispanic. The data are shockingly clear that teachers rarely look like the students they instruct. This study sought to find a possible solution to this catastrophe.

The teacher production pipeline contains many leaks. Colleges of education can struggle to find qualified students and can lose students due to attrition once they are in the pre-service training program. Additionally, students can either fail to gain certification after graduation, or, more often, these graduates will leave the profession rather early in their career. Research has demonstrated that there is a shrinking pool of qualified underrepresented students applying for admission into four-year universities and are more commonly found in America's community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Of note to this study is the research that indicates these populations can suffer transfer shock once they matriculate to the university setting and this can cause increased attrition (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

The study was designed to address the lack of research regarding the success of transfer pre-service teachers of color who matriculate to a predominantly White university. Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) provides a mechanism to study underrepresented community college students as they matriculate into and through a four-year university environment. It is through this theoretical framework that student perceptions of their own transitions into, through, and out of the university environment were analyzed.

## Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

- How do underrepresented transfer populations attending a predominantly White pre-service teacher training program perceive their educational environment and what are their perceptions of the services provided by the university to ensure their academic success?
- What are the criteria that must be in place for students of color to succeed in a predominantly White pre-service teacher training program?

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## Review of Literature

Today's K-12 schools are becoming increasingly more diverse and underrepresented students can often receive outstanding mentorship and learning from teachers from similar backgrounds. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2007), one-third of America's student population in public schools in 2005 was a racial or ethnic minority. Hispanics accounted for 14% while 12% of students were African American. NCES predicted that by the year 2020, the minority population in schools will increase to 39% of the total population. Shockingly, Lewis, Bonner, Byrd, and James (2008) reported, "the research literature reports that African American males comprise approximately 2% of those enrolled in the 1,300 teacher preparation programs across the country (American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education [AACTE]), and 1% of the United States K-12 teaching force" (p. 225).

To address the shortage of teachers of color, community colleges may serve as the solution to increasing teacher production – especially for diverse populations – if the matriculation and graduation rates of two-year transfers can be improved. The exponential growth of community college enrollment in America was well chronicled by Cohen and Braver (2008). The authors proposed several causes for this dramatic increase in enrollment: there has been an increase in college-aged populations, there is more financial aid available for minority and economically disadvantaged students, and there are more students wanting to work and enroll part-time than years past. Regardless of the cause, the fact remains that over 50% of all students who completed a bachelor's degree in 2014-15 previously attended a two-year campus (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015). To adequately serve these students, institutions must work collaboratively to enhance the transferability of courses (Monaghan & Attewell, 2015) while understanding these students will take longer to complete the baccalaureate degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015).

Although diverse, two-year campus transfers tend to originate from diverse backgrounds with different levels of preparation compared to their four-year peers (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001). To lump all transfer students from community colleges into one category would be misguided for universities, however, work must be done to address common obstacles faced by this unique subpopulation. Although these students matriculate from a diverse background, the authors suggested that institutions must continue to innovatively develop retention strategies and intentional programs to serve their unique needs (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001).

Throughout the past half-century, research has been conducted on transfer shock to find the greatest influences on transfer performance. For example, mostly quantitative studies have looked at students' major, (Cejda, Kaylor, & Rewey, 1998), their race/ethnicity (Berger & Malaney, 2003) and their socioeconomic status (Melguizo & Dowd, 2009). Cuseo (1998) examined much of the research on transfer shock and the transition community college students undergo after matriculating to the four-year

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university environment. He examined the works of Astin (1975), Richardson and Bender (1987), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and discovered that transfer students were reported to suffer transfer shock and “have an attrition rate that is 10-15% higher than native students” (Cuseo, 1998, p. 8). He also highlighted Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991) findings that African American male transfers are more inhibited from obtaining a bachelor’s degree after transfer to a four-year university.

Laanan (2001) provided a concise overview of research related to the transition of community college transfers after they gained admission to four-year colleges and universities. He specifically reviewed the research of Tinto (1975), Bean and Metzner (1985), Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington (1986), Bennett and Okinaka (1990), Hurtado (1992), and Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) to resolve that “transfer students are likely to experience a complex adjustment process – academically, socially, and psychologically – because of the environmental differences between two- and four-year institutions” (Laanan, 2001, p. 11). It was these academic, social, and psychological transitions that this study sought to investigate from the students’ points of view.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study investigated the transition process as viewed through Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981; 1987; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Through this theoretical framework, “an examination of what constitutes a transition, the different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 214) can be deduced.

In its simplest form, transition theory is a model that allows researchers to better understand the process individuals undergo as they move from reaction to an event (transition) to incorporating the event into their life (adaptation). Schlossberg indicated that transition can come in three different forms; anticipated predictable changes, unanticipated non-predicted or scheduled changes, and non-event transitions that are expected but never occur (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Life transitions can have profound effects on how one perceives their situation in life and different people will experience the transitions in different ways. Schlossberg’s model also provided a way of appraising the individual’s coping resources which are categorized by the Four S’s – Situation, Support, Self, and Strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The Four S Variables can be utilized to answer the questions of what is happening, to whom it is happening, what help is available, and how does the person cope. Each S determines the resources and deficits students will experience that will impact their perception of the transition.

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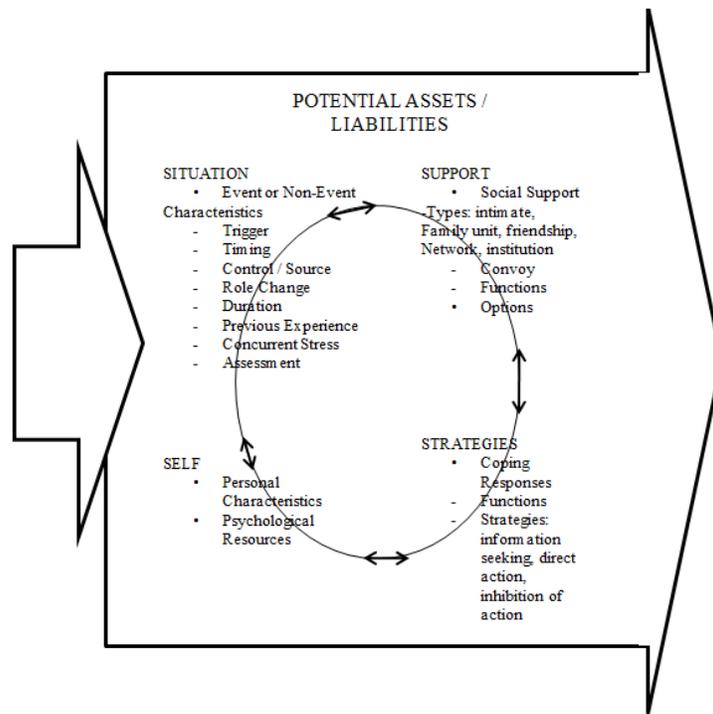


Figure 1. Schlossberg's Coping Resources – The Four S's, (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 48)

Each of the phases (moving in, moving through, and moving out) of the transition process for college students demand separate responses from higher education administrators and faculty. This theoretical framework provided the opportunity to shape the research protocol around the three phases of transition and the Four S's of support (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

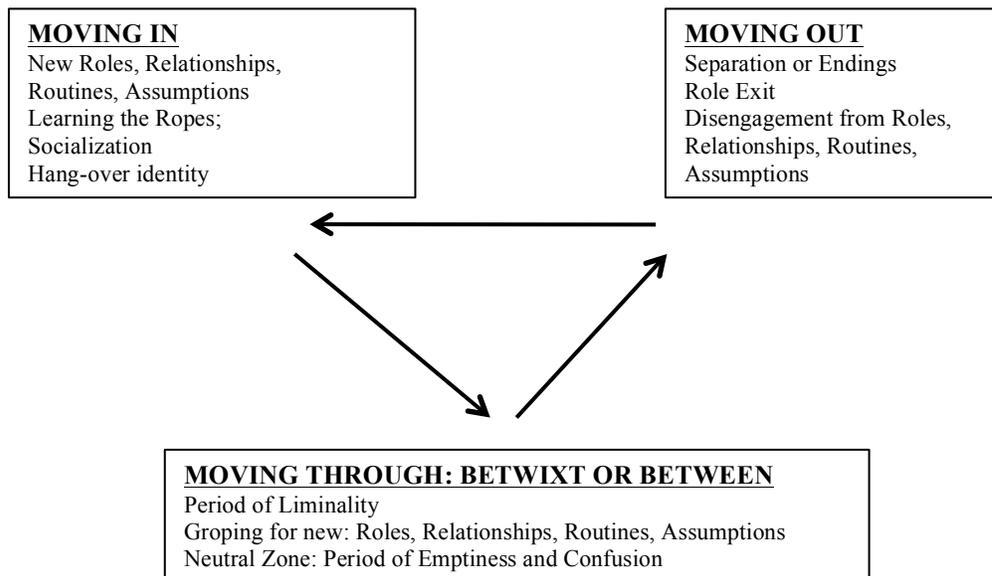


Figure 2. Schlossberg's Integrative Model of the Transition Process, (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 44)

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## **Methods**

This study utilized qualitative research methods for data collection and analysis allowing for the social reconstruction of the participant's views of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The research strategies employed for this study creates a thick description of students of color who had transferred into a predominantly White teacher education program. Phenomenology (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005) was utilized to comprehend the experiences of seven community college transfers who had matriculated into a predominantly White pre-service teacher education program. The phenomenon investigated was the students' relationship with the university to gain an appreciation for how that relationship has helped or hindered the students' transition into, through, and out of the university environment – in other words, did the relationship with the institution assist the students as they adapted to their new environment?

### **Study Design**

Embedded single-case study design (Yin, 2009) helped develop a thick description that detailed the past experiences of the students who had matriculated into a pre-service teacher education program. The case study approach facilitated the emergence of students' perceptions of the phenomenon within their environment through participant-observation. Within the context of PWI teacher education programs, multiple units of analysis – the participants of the study – were chosen within a single case – identified in this study with the pseudonym Southwest University. The study was not designed to be representative of all institutions and the responsibility of determining the transferability of the findings is left solely to the reader.

### **Site of Study and Participant Population**

Southwest University is a large research university in the American Southwest that possesses a robust predominantly White pre-service teacher education program with an underrepresented Hispanic and African American subpopulation and served as a representative case as defined by Yin (2009). The institution enrolled a total student population of approximately 48,000 – 81% of whom identify as White at the time of the study. Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify the institution and the students to select for the study. The selection criteria for the participants and the University were based on predetermined criteria: student participants (see Table 1) were in good academic standing (minimum of a 2.75 GPA on a 4.0 scale), identified as African American or Hispanic, and were in their senior year of a teacher education curriculum. These criteria were provided to gatekeepers at the University as they were asked to pre-identify eligible students to be interviewed.

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**Table 1**  
**Participant Biographical Background Summary**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Major</b>
Amy	Hispanic	22	Female	Early Childhood
Cindy	Hispanic	21	Female	Early Childhood
Hope	African American	29	Female	Early Childhood
Julie	African American	22	Female	Middle Grades Mathematics/Science
Lulu	Hispanic	24	Female	Bilingual Education
Mario	Hispanic	22	Male	Bilingual Education
Rae	African American	33	Female	Special Education

Academic level of the students was important to have a better fit into the theoretical framework. Students were needed who were nearing the graduation stage so they could reflect on their experiences of the moving out stage as well as the moving in and moving through stages. Additionally, students who were not academically qualified to pursue teacher certification due to academics likely would not be available due to probation and dismissal policies of the university. Information about the students was gathered from the students' advisors and professors and institutional records made available to the researcher. All but one participant were female and gender of the research participants is a limitation to this study. The pseudonyms and characteristics of the participants are listed in Table 1.

### **Data Analysis**

Documents pertinent to the students' transfer experience (e.g., catalog, degree plans, and college publications) were analyzed to provide a thicker description of student experiences. Additionally, data collected through participant journals, interviews, and student backgrounds were triangulated after collection. The interview data contributed the student's description of their past experiences as they adapted to the University environment. Finally, student journals provided their ability to reflect on their experiences after the initial interview to contribute their narrative as they move out of the University environment. These prompts for the journals included weekly prompts that originated from the participant responses to the informal conversational interview questions and sought information where additional data was required or further explanations regarding the themes that emerged. Standardized open-ended interview questions were created to ensure they fit within the theoretical framework and

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reflected the theories found to be relevant during the review of literature. Following the formal interviews, informal conversational interviews were conducted to continue data collection. Standardized ethnographic interviews were conducted because it allowed the questions to be more personal and allowed the questions to be tailored to the immediate surroundings and context in which the participant finds his or her self (Patton, 2002).

Triangulated data provided the opportunity for constant comparison of the findings to help develop my findings into a theory. The use of emergent design provided the flexibility to change the design of the study as the researcher identifies new perspectives of the participants that should be researched further. This study was designed to allow the data to inform and answer the posed research questions. This study utilized the constant comparative method of analysis as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) because it provided the opportunity for themes to develop as incidents are compared and contrasted and connections – be they attributes, cause-effect, or special – can be made between and across the reported incidents. Data were collected and analyzed using standard qualitative analysis techniques and findings were organized into a conceptually clustered matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to demonstrate student experiences navigating through the transition process.

## **Findings**

Analysis of the data collected led to the emergence of five key themes. The themes and corresponding sub-themes from this study that were particularly instructive for this manuscript are included in Table 2.

### **Intimate Support Structures**

Each student clearly demonstrated the different forms of support they utilized while studying in the community college environment. Often, these support mechanisms on which they relied did not change after they matriculated to the university environment. Similar to the intimate support structures mentioned by Schlossberg et al. (1995), the students typically indicated that their support came from three sources which are discussed as sub-themes (friends, family, and faith) and each were perceived to have profound effect on their engagement and persistence. For nontraditional students with children, the family could serve as an influence on their undergraduate experience. These students also felt the pressure of succeeding so they could serve as an example for their children and demonstrate that college was accessible and attainable – a message that was not always conveyed to them as they were growing up. Interesting to note is that intimate support structures served a dual purpose of being a support mechanism, but simultaneously increased the pressures students felt to not disappoint friends and family:

- It was definitely the friendships [that helped with the transition to Southwest University]. People had always told me, “you’re gonna make it, you can do it,” because when I was in high school, I made good grades, I did pretty well. That

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- kinda added a little pressure too, but it was still kind of . . . I know people knew that I was gonna be able to make it – that was actually a help.
- And so it's like I wanna break that generational [cycle]. ... Yes, and so I don't know, it's like I need my children to see that going to college is attainable. It's not something that you just see or read about on television.

**Table 2**  
**Emergent Themes and Subthemes**

		<b>Themes</b>				
		The Role of Intimate Support Structures	The Role of Institutionalized Support Structures	The Situational Factors Faced by Students	The Perception of the Transition	The Strategies Students Utilized to be Successful
<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<i>The Role of Friends</i>		<i>The Reluctance to Utilize Institutional Support</i>	<i>The Perceptions of the Educational Environment</i>	<i>The Role of Faculty and Staff Advisors</i>	<i>Student Response to Setbacks</i>
	<i>The Role of Family</i>			<i>The Experience within the Pre-service Teacher Education Program</i>	<i>Recommendations for Institutional Strategies to Assist Students in Transition</i>	<i>The Importance of Pursuing Manageable Goals</i>
	<i>The Role of Faith</i>			<i>Challenges Associated with Upper-division Mathematics</i>		

The search for a faith community served as both a connection to support resources and as a source of inspiration for some students. Students held the perception that prayer and a higher power played an intricate role in guiding them through the University and ultimately to a career field. The role of faith as both a spiritual guide and a connection to support resources was a common theme for the students who were interviewed:

- I don't know, God's mercy really [is the reason for my success]. If it wasn't for God, I wouldn't be in this school, that's for sure. Because of that and just my

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mindset, it's just to persevere. If I didn't have faith, I don't know where I'd be right now.

- Once I got into the Bible study here on campus and actually made it my church as well, definitely they helped out as well too with prayer. And they too were actually students here or had been students here. So they actually helped as well.

## **Institutional Support Structures**

Students interviewed typically demonstrated that they rarely utilized the academic support resources offered by the University. It is plausible that students failed to use these services because they were academically successfully – both at the community college and at the University - and did not deem them necessary. However, student narratives also indicated that students were not familiar with many of the services and were concerned about how they would be perceived if they took advantage of the institutional support:

- I don't think it [amount of services provided] is overwhelming. I like that there are so many resources available, but I do think it is intimidating and I feel self-conscious when I need to use them, so I don't use them.
- I think as far as the University academic resources, because it's definitely an intimidation factor where I feel dumb going in there, or that I think sometimes too, they say they can do all this stuff, but what if I go in there, and I really don't feel helped afterwards, and it was a waste of time?.

To summarize, student reluctance to utilize services can stem from a variety of sources, some students simply do not feel the services match their schedules well, while others have familial responsibilities which prevent their participation. As several students indicated, asking for help can be an overwhelming, humbling, and often intimidating task. For this study, a research question guiding inquiry was what additional services does the University need to provide for transfer students of color to be successful? From the analysis of the students' comments and journals, it is clear that the services are likely being provided, but are not being presented in an effective manner that facilitates their best usage.

## **Situational Factors**

A major factor in how students experience the University environment is shaped by situations they confront throughout the undergraduate years. The students of color interviewed expressed they entered the PWI with expectations that were often unmet. Students expected to encounter a hostile campus climate and pleasantly surprised at the friendly atmosphere they entered. However, the positionality of the researcher dictates that the participants may have felt resistant to share negative experiences.

The students also faced unique experiences that were shaped by being in a teacher education training program. Across the spectrum of the interviews, students pointed to several aspects of their teacher education program as challenging, but rewarding in its

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ability to prepare them for their career field. Although the students have an array of ultimate career destinations, they each felt the program was adequately preparing them for their future and cited the field-based component of the program as the key to their strong preparation.

- I've learned so much about education, and it's still something I wanna be a part of. And I mean the education professors, they're all amazing that I've had, and have just taught us how to apply the things in real life, and like had just different discussions to open our eyes.
- When people ask teachers what it is they do for a living, the majority of them will say, "Oh, I'm 'just' a teacher" but I don't think a doctor, lawyer, or even a professional football player would downplay their careers in saying that they are 'just' a doctor, lawyer, etc. Also, as I started student teaching last week, I began to think how while it should not, race does play a factor in how students respond to education and I don't want to just reach the students who share the same culture or ethnicity as I do, but I wonder how I could reach those who don't.
- You know, [I feel] nervous, but I feel confident that this semester and then some teaching will really prepare me for all that's gonna come. It won't prepare me for everything, but it will prepare me a lot for it.

After transfer into the program, students faced challenges involving the completion of upper-level mathematics courses which served as a major setback for most of those researched. Each of these situational factors provided a description of both the educational experience as a whole and served as challenges to which students learned to adapt and overcome. Perhaps most relevant to this article are the student's thoughts regarding the upper-level mathematics courses they faced after matriculation – often described as *weed-out courses*:

- For the most part, I have felt prepared to handle SU's curriculum, however, my biggest struggle has been and continues to be the mathematics courses required of early childhood education majors.
- Yeah, when I was in those [Mathematics] classes, I was like am I really going into the right, you know, should I change to language arts and social studies.

These comments are particularly salient because they demonstrate how failures in mathematics can shake the confidence of a students studying in a STEM education field. If confidence continues to be shaken and students feel they cannot grasp the concepts of upper-level mathematics and science, they may choose to change certification areas to a program that is less in demand. Addressing mathematics confidence is critical to keep underrepresented students in this high-need teaching field.

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## Perception of the Transition

It became clear as students were interviewed that their perceptions of the transfer process were shaped by the process itself. For students who had difficulty in obtaining information to be successful, the transfer process was seen as a painful and intimidating ordeal. However, for those students who had the forethought to seek out resources at the University early, the comments regarding the transfer process are much more positive. The most salient point regarding pre-university advising was that students perceived the advising to be much more positive if it was provided through “special advising” such as Veterans Affairs (VA) or Disability Services. However, students who were advised through the orthodox academic advising format tended to be frustrated with the process and the services they received:

- It [VA Advising] was pretty good. I had a lady by the name of Rebecca over there, and she's gone now, but she was really good. I was able to get close to her to where I could talk to her one-on-one. And whatever I needed, if I went to her, she called Waco and coordinated.
- It's [community college advising] awful – it was ridiculous. I just remember going in, and they're like, 'Yeah, you're gonna do this, this, and that' and then I left like feeling I don't really know what I'm doing.
- As far as advising went, they didn't help at all. I went and saw an advisor and told them that I wanted to ultimately end up at Southwest University, and I was told to take the wrong classes. So then I found an advisor at SU, and then I talked to them ever since then.

A possible rival explanation for the perception of the negative advising is that community college advisors are placed in a difficult situation where they must advise students for many different majors at countless numbers of universities. This arduous task may be an explanation for the “bad” advice that is provided. These students also developed their negative perceptions of the advising experience rather early in their undergraduate careers and subsequently may not have articulated their goals or desires to the advisor. Regardless of the cause of the negative perception, it is clear that as students feel they are being given bad information, they are pursuing alternative methods to become informed of the transfer requirements, course selections, and other necessary information.

Participants also provided insightful comments that serve as recommendations for future students hoping to transfer to a large research university. The comments are best summarized as starting with the end destination in mind. These comments indicated that once they settled on their intended major and their transfer destination, they were able to construct a plan for transfer and make decisions that ultimately saved them money and time:

- It wasn't until I realized what I wanted to do at SU that I could figure out, okay, this is what I need to take before I can get to SU. It wasn't until I was advised by SU that I realized this is what I need to start focusing over here. It made more sense. Which [using community college advisors] is also kind of hard because in

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the beginning, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. And once you do that [inform advisors to which university you wish to transfer], you understand what class you need to take.

- My advice to a prospective student that has the ultimate goal of attending SU to become a certified teacher would be to keep that goal always in mind. Having a goal set in mind always helps for motivation. Things might get tough, but always think positive and that everything is possible.

When describing the transition from the community college to the University, many of the students described a sense of being lost. When comments were examined deeper, participants expressed they were often comfortable with the curriculum, the academic requirements, and the degree plans of the University. However, they mentioned they were often physically lost on campus and adjusting to the logistics and navigation from one building to the next was difficult. One student commented that it helped to "walk her schedule" before classes started to become more acclimated to the campus. Most participants felt more attention should have been paid by the university to assisting with campus navigation and that a campus tour should have been a part of their new student conference. It was clear after analyzing the interviews that the students were initially intimidated by the size of the University and expected more from the institution to ease their anxiety:

- I'm gonna go out on a limb and say that most transfer students are older anyway, so it's like I would like to see some clubs formed where, you know, perhaps there could be a club where there's mommies. Or since I'm not the typical college student, it's like there aren't any clubs that I'm just really interested in joining, you know, due to time constraints. And so it's like that's what sets me apart – it's like when I come to campus, I'm not interested in making friends or exchanging phone numbers. And only because I'm not ... it's like I can't plug into those people. I need to know where these people are. I know that there are other people like me on campus that you know.

### **Employed Strategies**

The primary strategies employed by the successful underrepresented transfers interviewed were to develop a sense of persistence where they would respond to setbacks with renewed grit and determination:

- I struggled my first semester, and then later on I picked up a little bit more and more and realized it takes more time and commitment to the material.
- You just have to keep trying.

Another strategy employed by underrepresented transfer students is breaking the process of pursuing the undergraduate degree into smaller manageable and attainable goals. A description of this approach in Spanish is, *poco a poco, se va lejos*. This phrase translates to *little by little, you go far*. This phrase is descriptive because it describes how students in the teacher education program approached their progress towards completion. Rather than becoming bogged down in the mire of the numerous upper-

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level courses of their professional phase and the requirements for certification, the successful students instead approached each course and each semester as a separate challenge that was their most immediate concern:

- Right, and I'm just so happy whenever I finish. Like last semester, I took 18 hours again, which was difficult. And I had to do like all my upper-level Spanish – that was 15 hours of upper-level Spanish and the statistics class. And I was just really happy that I got done with all that Spanish, because like I had to take these classes so that I can teach properly.
- [Disability Services taught me to] make out whatever they give us, the little course packet or whatever, what's gonna happen, or what's supposed to happen. They always change it, so I make out a little schedule of what I need to do on this day and that day.

### **Discussion**

The analysis of these themes led to the following conclusions:

- Participants perceived there to be a lack of institutional support that prevents them from thriving in the program, but enough to allow them to merely survive. They feel the areas of mathematics tutoring and childcare that is provided can be improved, but this is caused more by poor marketing by the College of what is available than a lack of services.
- Although family is often seen as a support mechanism, the responsibilities faced by older nontraditional students with children can impede progress in coursework, and ultimately, the degree itself.
- The transition faced by students after transfer forces them to adopt new strategies for academic success that they may develop at varying rates and in numerous ways and these strategies ultimately influence the ways in which the student changes both personally and academically throughout their undergraduate career.

The interaction of the five themes (see Figure 3) and their impact on the transfer student's progression through the academic career led to the amending of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Within this model, there is a deviation from Schlossberg's Four S Model by separating the intimate support and the institutional support. Analysis demonstrated that institutional support has a very different impact in supporting students academically. Student relationships with faculty members and advisors were often cited as a major reason for student success in the program. Although intimate support mechanisms can serve as an asset to degree completion by boosting student morale and financial stability, family can also serve as a limitation due to the added responsibilities and commitments they demand. An example of this liability is the cost of childcare for single mothers studying in the program. While participants demonstrated they wanted to succeed to be an example for their children, they also indicated that the financial commitment of paying for daycare was a drain on limited financial resources.

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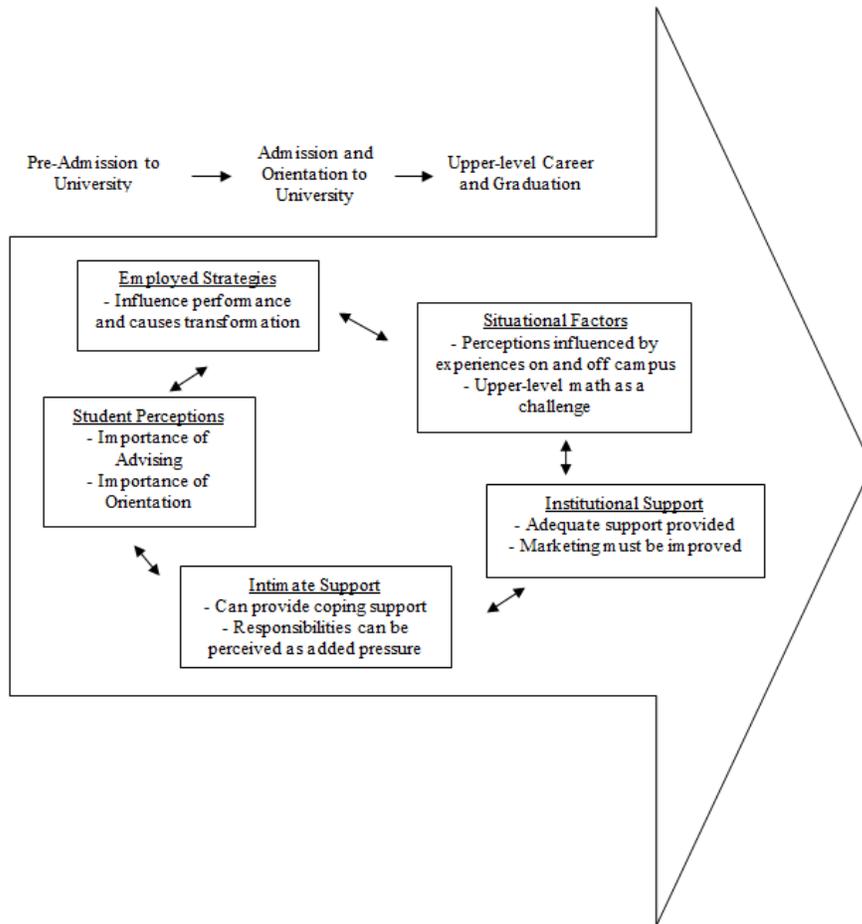


Figure 3. Amended Transition Model for Underrepresented Transfers

### Recommendations for Practice

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations for practice at Southwest University could be implemented to address some of the major obstacles expressed by students. These recommendations are presented in three stages: improving the preadmission process for transfers, improving the orientation to campus, and increasing graduation rates. These findings are summarized in Figure 4.

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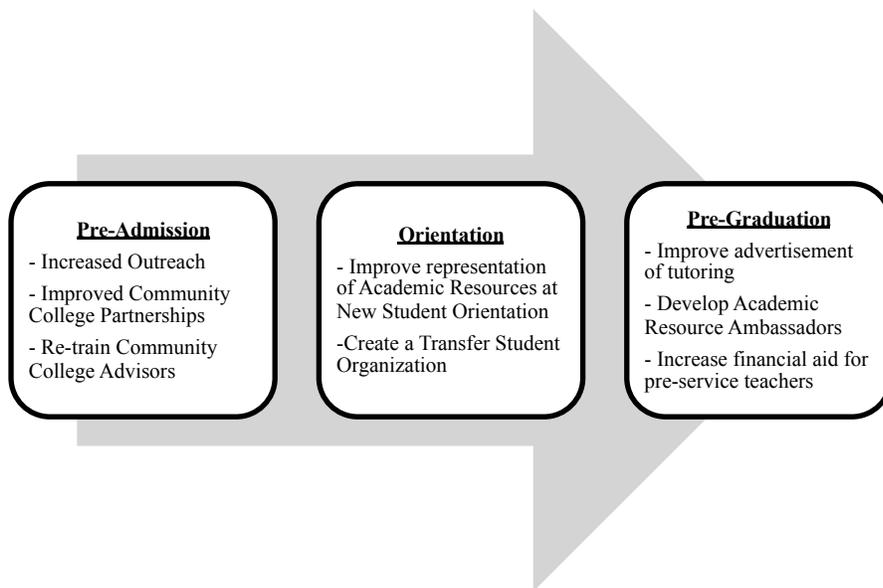


Figure 4. Recommendations for Improved Transfer Student Retention

Students demonstrated that they perceived the transfer advising they received from the community college as inadequate. As indicated previously, this perception is likely influenced by the timeline by which students select their academic major and ultimate transfer destination. Working with academic advisors when either of these goals is unclear will lead to inconsistent advice which may not help students achieve their ultimate career goal. However, increased outreach from the University and improving relationships with feeder community colleges that ultimately assist in the training of the advisors on the two-year campus can serve to benefit prospective transfer students.

Participants perceived that all the resources they needed to academically survive the program were being provided by the University, but they were being presented in such a way that was confusing and overwhelming and this prevented students from thriving. This information overload the students mention can be redefined as *information camouflage*. When considering how camouflage works, one color mixes in with a group of similar colors to help hide an object in the larger environmental context. In a sense, this is what institutions are doing to their undergraduate students – students are receiving multiple and sometimes mixed messages from various University offices through email and social media platforms. Students expressed that they are having difficulty deciphering which communications from the institution are helpful and important. The University must be careful that it does not inundate and overwhelm students with messages that cause confusion as students seek out institutional support.

The following recommendations are proffered to improve the transition process for two-year transfer students of color seeking matriculation to a university:

- Implement a college advising workshop for community college advisors to interact with professors, administrators, and advisors on the four-year campus that coincides with scheduled trainings during off-peak advising periods.

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- Develop an ambassador program in which academic support services can be represented at orientation programs by students who have received their benefit previously.
- Create a clearinghouse for marketing programs and communications with students. Email communications with students should be evaluated for their necessity and importance to minimize unnecessary information that only serves to clutter student inboxes and detract from the importance of other messages.

## **Conclusion**

America must remain vigilant in addressing the shortage of diverse teachers in K-12 education to ensure the success of our most vulnerable students. The recruitment and retention of diverse transfer students can serve as a solution to this critical problem. Although there is no monolithic experience for transfer students of color, emergent themes from this study suggest commonalities that contribute to our knowledge of the transfer experience for students in pre-service teacher education programs. The underrepresented transfer students who participated in this study indicated that they relied upon both institutional support mechanisms such as advisors and faculty, but were reluctant to utilize the formal academic resource services on campus. To improve student performance, the universities must address the student perceptions associated with seeking help through improved marketing and advertising of the provided programs. An ambassador group which allows students to relate to the experiences of those who have previously used the services could address the anxiety that was mentioned in the findings. Additionally, improved communication through an information clearinghouse that mitigates information camouflage may increase the likelihood of student engagement with academic resources.

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