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Bursting the “Marquette Bubble”: How to Improve Transfer Student Experiences

In today’s tougher economic times many college-age students are looking for ways to save money on their education, and for this reason community colleges often look like a viable alternative. Many people choose this college path, which subsequently leads to students either graduating or transferring to a four-year university. While many people associate community college students with transfer students, they are not the only students transferring. In fact, transferring is becoming a fact of undergraduate life for many; more than 40 percent of students attend more than one institution during their college career (Adelman, 2005). This means that almost half of all college students experience a mid-college transition, which can be said for many students at Marquette University. In fact, transfer student numbers are slowly increasing, according to the past years’ statistics in the Common Data Set that the university compiles every year. For this reason, it’s important to consider the needs of this growing demographic both locally and nationally. I have chosen to look into this problem at Marquette University, which is the site of my undergraduate research.

I began this consideration with reflecting on my own experiences as a transfer student to Marquette. As a transfer student, I became very aware of how tight-knit the Marquette community is and how different some of its policies and practices are from my previous university. Furthermore, I found it to be a very different culture from the previous university I attended, which has been challenging and has affected my acclimation into the university. During my first few semesters, I felt very outside of the Marquette community and oftentimes

felt alone and frustrated with my situation. I had many questions and additional concerns that made functioning in mainstream university life difficult, such as questions about credit transfers, class standing, uncertainty about policies, difficulty finding information for events, and general difficulty meeting people. I feel that Marquette did not provide adequate support and guidance through the transfer process and first few months, which I feel has certainly affected my whole “Marquette experience.” With hundreds of other transfer students at Marquette, surely I wasn’t the only one who had struggles and felt disconnected from the Marquette community. I used this question and concern as my motivation for looking into this problem at Marquette. With a recognizable number of transfer students on campus and the number of transfer students across the nation rising, I think it’s very important that Marquette takes a closer look at the practices and programs they have for transfer students.

As one effort to move toward understanding transfer student experiences and improving them, I focused my research on asking what the transfer experience is like for students at Marquette. I also wanted to focus on what students feel would improve their experiences, particularly focusing on the social aspect of transferring and acclimating into a new university. In general, my goal was to better understand the needs of transfer students and what Marquette can do to help facilitate transfer student acclimation, and propose a number of possibilities ranging from short-term to long-term solutions.

The goal of this paper is to discuss some of the previous research done on transfer student experiences and apply some of those findings to the current situation at Marquette University. There is a rich body of literature on transfer student transitions which articulates some of the struggles and additional concerns they face as new students to any university (e.g. Davies and Dickmann, 1998; Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson, 2000; Davies and Kratky, 2000; Laanan, 2001;

Woosley and Johnson, 2006; Handel, 2007; Townsend, 2008; Fee, Prolman & Thomas, 2009; Handel, 2010; Mayhew, Vanderlinden, and Kim, 2010; Ishitani and McKittrick, 2010). This has helped me to ground my own experiences, primary findings, and conclusions in scholarship that supports my claim.

In order to understand how I came to these findings and conclusions, I will outline the methods employed. I took a mixed-method approach that allowed me to gather qualitative data through a variety of methods such as interviews, email correspondence, and scholarly literature searches. I will then explain my results and analysis, and describe the coding themes I used to code the interviews and email correspondence. These codes relate directly to my results, and are in a sense my findings, which will be discussed more in depth in a later section. I then analyze all of my findings, both secondary and primary, to make a claim and proposal for addressing the needs of transfer students at Marquette University. I propose a plan that is to be implemented gradually in order to provide these students with the appropriate scaffolding in their transition. Some of these possible stages include including transfer students on orientation staff, creating a social group for transfer students, and in the future creating a living community option for transfer students.

Literature Review

After conducting research into preexisting scholarly literature, I found a number of articles focusing on transfer students and their transition into four-year universities. While this search was by no means exhaustive, it did point to a number of different trends and issues that transfer students are currently facing. Many of these articles came from journals such as the *US Department of Education, New Directions for Higher Education*, and the *College Student Journal*, as well as from other authors published in a variety of other scholarly journals. Most of

these articles come from the last ten years or so, which demonstrates the growing concerns and trends of transfer students. Most of these approaches looked into the transfer student experience as a whole; this included the transition from the sending institution to the receiving institution, and focused primarily on community college transfer students. While much of this research was informative, I wanted to focus primarily on the social integration of all transfer students into four-year universities. Surprisingly, there was little research on this specific aspect of the transferring experience. This furthered my motivation to add to this body of literature by using the general literature out there to inform the discussion on the social element of transferring.

One of the main findings that came from this literature review was the documented phenomenon of transfer shock. This was discussed in many articles and was first discussed in 1965 by John R. Hills, which Townsend discusses in her article, “Feeling like a Freshman Again: The Transfer Student Transition” (2008). Transfer shock is known as the dip in the GPA of transfer students in their first semester or two at their new university. Townsend discusses some of the possible aspects of four-year universities that may contribute to this, such as institution size, faculty attitudes, and academic expectations. While not all transfer students experience this and most who do recover after the first year, it certainly has an impact on student perceptions and attitudes towards their receiving institutions.

Woosley and Johnson (2006) wrote an article that relates closest to my area of study, which compared transfer students’ and non-transfer students’ involvement in co-curricular activities. Both participant groups lived in the residence halls, but their involvement still varied significantly. This relates directly to the social integration aspect of my research, and Woosley and Johnson sum up previous work in this field very nicely:

They have suggested that transfer students experience social problems associated with making friends, maintaining self-confidence, and identifying opportunities for involvement (Britt & Hirt, 1999, Bouer & Bauer, 1994). Ose (1997) found that transfer students had a sense of being outsiders. Similarly, Kodama (2002) found transfer students had fewer sources of campus support and were more likely than other student populations to be marginalized.

This is very similar to many of other findings, which further justifies the need for research in this area. I found many of these same sentiments being expressed by my study participants in other studies more recently, which proves that this problem has not gone away. In these articles, I also found a number of suggestions and possible solutions that transfer students and researchers offered in order to improve transfer student experiences. I incorporated many of these findings into my own proposal, and used them as further evidence and support for my own findings. In general, it was my goal to build on this body of literature and try to understand the Marquette transfer student experience through the lens of this preexisting research.

Methods

Research Design

Because of the complex nature of the issue being researched, I chose a mixed-method approach which included a reflection on my experience, interviews with four current transfer students, an email correspondence with a student who transferred in and out of Marquette, and scholarly research on transfer student adjustment. This multi-dimensional approach allowed me to gain data through a variety of methods as described below, and analyze it in order to discern some of the common themes that emerged regarding transfer student experiences.

Data Collection

I began my data collection by reflecting on my own experiences of transferring to Marquette through the narrative inquiry assignment. This reflection served as a “self-interview” and it was through my writing that I was able to start forming questions and themes that I would tailor my research to. I began with looking at my past university experience, my motivation for transferring, and then my initial orientation and semester at Marquette. I found that the area that could most benefit from research was improving orientation and transfer student support. From this I decided to do some open-ended interviews on what transfer students struggle with when first becoming a student at Marquette and where the university can assist these students.

For this reason, the main form of data collection used for this research was interviews. I conducted four face-to-face interviews with Marquette transfer students, each interview ranging from twenty minutes to an hour. Three of these interviewees were female, as well as one male. All four interviewees transferred from community college; however they were at different points in their academic careers. The sampling of interviewees came from acquaintances I’ve met through classes at Marquette, as well as one interviewee who was referenced by another. These interviewees came from different majors, class standings, and transfer situations which proved useful in gaining insight into the different stages and experiences of transfer students. For this reason, I focused my interviews on questions about their experiences with academics, social integration and orientation. (See Appendix A)

My email correspondence with a student who transferred in and out also proved beneficial, because it pointed me to some reasons that led this particular transfer student to leave the university. The correspondence was rather short due to the constraints of email, so it only included six questions from the interview question list. However, it still provided me with

further evidence that Marquette's support system for transfer students is lacking and that for some this may be motivation to leave the school all together.

I also used a number of scholarly articles to supplement my primary data. Most of this literature dealt with common concerns or difficulties that transfer students face, as well as information on enrollment and demographics of transfer students. Some of the key words that I searched were *transfer students*, *transfer student acclimation*, *transfer student social*, *transfer student transition*, and *transfer student support*. This information was beneficial for describing the current transfer student situation at a larger scale and the context in which students transfer, and helped more clearly identify the population being researched.

Participants Description

Danielle was my first interviewee for this research and provided a very beneficial starting point.¹ Danielle has a junior class standing and completed her Associate's Degree at a community college prior to attending Marquette. She transferred in the fall of 2011, directly from getting this degree. Danielle is also a commuter and a single mother, which was discussed throughout her interview as an additional challenge to transferring.

Danielle was also able to provide me with the name of another transfer student who I was able to interview. Luke was a sophomore transfer in the fall of 2011, so his experiences have been relatively fresh as he is still learning and integrating into the community. Luke transferred from a community college in Illinois after his first year and has retained his sophomore standing at Marquette.

Lisa was the second transfer student I interviewed and also came from a community college. However, her situation is slightly different because she had taken a few years off

¹ Danielle's audio of the interview was lost due to technical difficulties; the data used from this interview is from a summary of notes written two days after the initial interview.

between getting her Associate's Degree and starting at Marquette in order to travel abroad. Lisa also considers herself a non-traditional student because of this break as well as the fact that she is a few years older than the typical college senior. Lisa transferred in the fall of 2010, so she has now been at Marquette for two years. This interview was interesting because it provided data on a transfer student's experience after the first initial semester.

Jesenia was my fourth and final interview for this project. She transferred in the fall of 2011 after graduating from a community college in Illinois and is now enrolled at the junior class standing. She identified herself as racial minority and she stated that the lack of diversity on campus is one of the many issues she has faced since transferring to Marquette. Because she is only in her second semester at Marquette, she was able to talk about her recent transfer and current experiences which offered an ongoing example of transfer student struggles.

Another source I used was an email correspondence with Chelsea, a previous transfer to Marquette who transferred back to her first university. Chelsea transferred in the spring of 2010 and left after the 2011 spring semester. Chelsea was a sophomore transferring from the University of Nebraska Lincoln, a four-year university. I had met Chelsea during our first semester and we found ourselves bonding over our similar experiences. The email correspondence with her allowed me to gain a brief insight into her struggles at Marquette as a transfer student as well as suggestions she would have for Marquette to improve transfer student experiences.

Data Analysis

As previously stated, my self-reflection through the narrative inquiry revealed some of the focus areas of my interviews and also served as a starting point for identifying themes. It was through my narrative inquiry that I decided to focus on transfer students' initial experiences

and began to identify some themes in my own experiences. Some of these themes included the lack of communication of general information to students, the lack of orientation programs tailored to the specific needs of transfer students, the absence of social and academic support, and subsequently the emotions of outsider-ness, confusion, and frustration with Marquette and the transition.

Danielle's interview included a number of comments on the emotions that factored into her transfer experience, many of which were synonymous with emotions that I had felt. This allowed me to analyze what types of feelings students have while going through this process and begin to reaffirm that my experience was not an isolated incident. It also helped me start to formulate some basic vocabulary that transfer students attribute to transferring, which helped me code further interviews. It was after I noticed her use of so many negative emotions that I chose to ask the question, "How would you rank your Marquette experience thus far on a scale of 1-10?" in her interview as well as the next three. This question served as a way to sum up experiences and emotions into a quantifiable number that can easily be understood by audiences.

Lisa's interview was the first written transcript I was able to code and revealed a few other major points as well as reaffirmed some of the already-existing themes. Her interview provided a number of smaller themes, but the main ones drawn from her interview were the Marquette experience and pride, social adjustment and support, orientation, and negative emotions attributed to the transferring process. After reviewing the themes I had pulled from my own experience, notes on Danielle's interview, and this interview I decided to narrow my focus to the social acclimation and lack of support that transfer students experience in their initial semester(s) at Marquette. Therefore, the main themes that were chosen and researched were the Marquette experience, lack of orientation programs/structure tailored to meet the needs of

transfer students, and lack of social support after orientation. These themes were also used to code Luke's and Jesenia's interviews. These themes became the central findings of my research, which are represented in a chart included in Appendix C.

Results and Analysis

From my personal reflection, the four interviews, and the email correspondence I gained a better understanding of some of the aspects and challenges of transferring to Marquette. While the interviews were by no means exhaustive, they gave me a better insight into the transfer student population and the needs of this growing demographic at Marquette. My narrative inquiry served as a starting point for this project and helped me articulate and reflect on my experiences as a transfer student. Because I struggled so much with getting engaged and acclimated into the university, I decided to make this the focus of my research, and pulled a few main points from my reflection. First of all, Marquette doesn't offer much in terms of transfer-specific orientation programs, there is no support system in place after your first initial days at Marquette, and there is a lack of communication of campus events and ways to get involved. These issues were all reflected in the interviews I conducted, as well as a few others that are described in the following breakdown. The coding themes I used were *transfer students as non-traditional/minority students*, *students coming from community colleges*, *attendance at orientation*, *lack of communication of campus events*, *living on or off campus*, *difficulty joining the Marquette community*, and *their Marquette experiences as a whole*. In general, I was able to get a glimpse into who transfer students are at Marquette, and how that has affected their experiences as a whole.

The non-traditional or minority students

An interesting trend that came about was that three of the four current students I interviewed identified themselves as being either non-traditional or a minority student. I found it very interesting that two of these students identified themselves as being non-traditional in one way or another, which has affected their experiences. For example, Danielle is a commuter and a single mother, which limits her time and involvement on campus. Lisa is older than the traditional student, and has taken a few years in between community college and Marquette to go abroad. She said that this has made her feel outside the norm, because she has noticed that Marquette does not have much diversity in terms of age and where people are in terms of their lives. This made me consider what types of students transfer to Marquette and how their non-traditional statuses affect their experiences. Lisa had a very interesting experience during orientation that she shared with me:

...when I signed up for one of these activities, I got a phone call later in the day checking to make sure I was actually a student and not just someone's sister. They were questioning my age, and wondering why I was there. I was like
EXTREMELY embarrassed. I don't really like to tell too many people that I'm not the traditional student, that I am a few years older than your typical undergrad.

Clearly her role as a non-traditional student has set her apart from her peers from the very beginning, and has certainly affected her experiences. It is incidents like this that create unspoken assumptions about who typical Marquette students are and the value of non-traditional students, which in turn affects their experiences throughout their Marquette careers.

Because these students may have a greater potential for alienation due to their non-traditional circumstances, it is important to acknowledge that they also bring different

experiences and needs to their university careers. As students who are at different points in their lives, it is important for any university to reach out and make the transition and adjustment as painless as possible. Students such as Danielle may have added difficulty because of her other family commitments, commuting time requirements, and generally less time spent on campus. Therefore, her involvement and subsequent satisfaction with the social aspect of Marquette is extremely lacking. For students such as Lisa, it may be difficult to find other students her age, with similar interests, or people who can relate to her experiences in general. At Marquette, the culture is created and focused primarily on traditional students, which can be an added challenge for those who transfer and do not belong to this demographic. These students come from different educational and life paths, and it is necessary to consider this and be sensitive to the needs of all students, not just typical 4-year Marquette students.

Jesenia was the third interviewee and identified herself as a racial minority student. She explained how this also created additional challenges for integrating into the community, because when she chose Marquette she was under the impression that there would be more diversity. She described:

I heard that there was a lot of diversity and the area was beautiful.....but when I got here it was kind of like, it wasn't what the pamphlet said. You know what I mean? It wasn't the diversity and everything they made it sound like, and it wasn't easy to come and transfer here. It was really hard.

For Jesenia, her racial minority status was an additional challenge that she did not anticipate when she transferred to Marquette. In general, both non-traditional and other minority students face challenges at a predominantly traditional undergraduate university like Marquette, and transferring into an organization such as this only heightens these struggles. It is important to

note that not all transfer students are minorities or non-traditional students in the typical sense. However, the fact that you have pre-Marquette college experience makes you nontraditional at Marquette. Even if you aren't a minority in terms of age, race, or parental status, the transfer student status makes you a minority at a four-year university such as Marquette.

From A Community College

All four of the interviews I conducted were with students who transferred from community colleges, which was not intentional in my sampling but became a theme for understanding the lens through which these transfer students viewed Marquette. I found the experiences that the four students related to me about their community colleges to be very interesting. Lisa pointed out in her interview that she was really hoping to get that sense of pride, community, and belonging when she transferred from Marquette because that wasn't the atmosphere she had at her community college. She further explained how at her previous college most people came and went and led full lives outside the school. When she arrived at Marquette, she was excited to have that typical college experience at a four-year campus. Jesenia expressed the same sentiments about her previous university and her hopes for Marquette; however, both her and Lisa's expectations fell short. From this point I gathered a sense of willingness and expectancy from these students who wanted to engage in the university, but had a difficult time navigating their way into the culture.

Orientation: Beneficial or Not

Orientation was yet another theme that emerged from the discussion of social transition and integration into the Marquette community. Of the students I interviewed and had email correspondence with, Lisa, Luke, and Chelsea were the three who attended orientation. Danielle also said that she attended a commuter orientation, but did not stay for the transfer student

programs. Those who did attend, such as Luke, pointed out that there wasn't much in terms of transfer-specific programs, and that in general the experience wasn't beneficial at all in terms of socializing and getting acclimated into the university. He mentioned that for those with outgoing personalities, the orientation programs such as the cookout would have probably been helpful. However, for those who aren't extroverted it was difficult and awkward. Lisa expressed the same sentiment about the cookout, and said that it seemed not well-thought-out and therefore not a good socializing experience. She recounted this experience:

The only distinct activity they had for transfer students was a barbeque. And that was like you didn't really know where it was, it was hard to find, and then when you got there, there wasn't anyone there to facilitate, so you were just thrown all together..... we all were just looking around at each other, trying to figure out what we were supposed to do and if there was anyone actually in charge of us for the transfer students.

Clearly, the lack of support even in this program proved detrimental to the program's effectiveness. Considering that this was the only broadly recognized event for transfer students, it was very disappointing to Lisa that it did not serve its purpose. Instead, a highly structured event which was facilitated by leaders and provided opportunities for introductions, ice breakers, and structured interactions would have been much more beneficial. Even simple things like providing nametags, organizing students in groups based on class standing or major might have relieved the anxiety of meeting many new people.

Another aspect of orientation that came up was the fact that the programs for transfer students weren't clearly indicated on the orientation schedule. Jesenia noted that one of the factors that deterred her from attending orientation was the fact that she wasn't sure which events

and programs were meant for her and which were meant for first-year students. Lisa also experienced this confusion. As she reflected on orientation, she wasn't sure if she had even attended things that were meant for transfers or if she had just gone to events for first-year programs. This lack of communication and apparent absence of transfer-specific programs resulted in neutral to negative opinions on orientation and its effectiveness.

Finally, from my own reflection I realized another area of orientation that was severely lacking, namely the whole winter orientation program. I was the only one of the six transfer student experiences that I gathered that had transferred in the spring, which made my experience very different. For the winter orientation in spring 2010, there was a one day event that consisted of a number of panels with different campus organizations, a luncheon, and the opportunity to go to a Marquette basketball game. Outside of the basketball game, the whole orientation lasted roughly four hours, with only minimal time for meeting others. For this reason, my orientation wasn't effective at all in terms of providing me with opportunities to meet others and get acquainted with the university. William Christensen, another Marquette transfer student in the spring, did some research on improving this orientation. He found that there was a call for more interactive socializing opportunities and in general better communication about campus events and support, which are very relevant to this discussion. However, his focus was primarily on the winter orientation programs; therefore, I will leave this specific topic due to the fact that my experience is all I can offer from this study.

Living On or Off Campus and its Effects on Campus Involvement

Where these transfer students lived when they transferred to Marquette seemed to have large implications for how and when these students became acclimated into the university, if at all. One of the main issues that is tied directly to where students live is the access they have to

campus news, flyers, and events. Luke and I were the only two people in this survey to live in the residence halls upon transferring. My experience benefitted minimally from living in a dormitory, because I was at least around other students and was able to see the flyers hanging around the dorm that advertised ways to get involved. However, living amongst peers who already had set social networks was difficult to penetrate, and resulted in me making only one or two friends here and there. Even in the dorms, I was never fully integrated into my dorm community, much less the university community.

Luke described the issue of acclimation in terms of what he faced with living in the dorms. He expressed that certain buildings might be better for new students and it would help if they placed transfer students strategically in these areas. For example, “They put us in Straz, which is a great building and I like it, but it’s really quiet. So for the first couple months I barely met anybody. I think it was just slower there than if they would’ve put me in another dorm, like Schroeder.” Even if living in the dorms, it can be very difficult to meet people if there aren’t others there to facilitate meeting.

This point about where a student lives even on campus was an interesting finding because I had expected that a transfer student who lives in any dorm would have an easier time adjusting. To some extent this is true, but the benefits are minimal. For Chelsea, Jesenia, and Lisa, they had an even more difficult time meeting people and finding out information related to campus involvement. As students living in apartments, they received even less information about opportunities to get involved and they experienced a much more independent environment. Jesenia shared her thoughts on missing out on dorm life in her interview:

I missed out on 2 years of the experience that I’ll never get back, which is making all those friends, living in the dorms, just the typical college experience that most

freshmen and sophomores get. I mean, I never got to make that close bond with people, like I did at my community college.....It's just harder coming in as a transfer. And then living in the apartments, it's not like the dorm life. Like I see my friends where everyone leaves their door open and they had groups of friends. And in the apartment everyone is literally in their own rooms and no one talks to anybody. I don't know anyone on my floor, all I know is my roommate, and it's a different experience.

Lisa also stated, "I think also because I live off campus technically, that's a whole other aspect to it that makes it hard to be integrated into this, well, community...because you do miss out on a lot, you don't get to see all the flyers that people in the dorms see." She and Jesenia feel that this has absolutely affected their social integration into Marquette.

Finally Jesenia, Danielle, and Lisa all mentioned that information is difficult to locate and there seems to be a lack of centralization. Both Lisa and Danielle discussed how they had difficulty finding information through the website or the AMU posting sites, and that many times the connections to this information were obscure. Jesenia also pointed out the difficulty and questions she had about finding out who to talk to or how to get information within her first semester. She commented, "I didn't know how to sign up for organizations... I had no idea how to do that. And I just didn't know about any events on campus or how to find them. I didn't know who the people were or where they were that I needed to talk to for my classes; I didn't realize some of the difficulties that would be here." In general, there seems to be a lack in the communication of information to students who are off-campus, which is particularly challenging to transfer students because they haven't established the connections and learned about the resources as other students have.

Joining the Marquette Community

The issue of meeting people and getting integrated into the Marquette community was one of the most dominant underlying themes in the discussions I had with all of the participants. From my own reflection, I realized that this was probably the most challenging part of transferring to Marquette. I was able to meet and talk with people in class, but these acquaintance relationships rarely left the classroom. In fact, of the people I met in class that carried on to genuine friendships, the two closest friends I made were both transfer students that I met by chance. Otherwise, it seemed that people were friendly, but weren't interested in expanding their existing friend networks. Chelsea mentioned this clearly during one of our interview correspondences; she said, "I felt that it was easy to meet new people, but due to the fact that I was a transfer student, many people had a hard time "accepting" me into their circle of already made friends. I did feel as an outsider many times, but was able to meet a few nice people..."

In general, Danielle, Lisa, Jesenia, Luke, and Chelsea all expressed difficulty "penetrating the Marquette bubble" and becoming part of the community. For some, such as Lisa and Chelsea, they never felt like they did become truly part of Marquette. Luke discussed how it took the better part of his first semester to meet people and start to form relationships, and for Danielle and Jesenia, they are still working on engaging in more of the university. I also found that I didn't really feel a part of the Marquette community until about a year after I transferred. These initial sentiments of feeling outside the community have seemed to negatively impact these students' experiences as a whole. Much of the university experience comes from the social aspects, which seems to be lacking for these transfer students on Marquette's campus. Lisa will graduate from Marquette in May of this year and she stated, "...which makes me really

sad because I really did want to have the full experience and leave this place and still feel and want that connection. Whereas now, I feel like I'll tell people I went to this school, but I really don't think I'll have that [connection]." This statement is a testament to the lasting effects that missing out on social integration can have on any student, but particularly transfer students.

The Marquette Experience as a Whole

For each of the four interviews, I asked each student to rank their Marquette social experience on a scale from one to ten. Surprisingly, the results were much lower than I had originally anticipated. The four responses to this question were: 3, 3, 4, and 2 on this scale. I also ranked my experience around a 5. Most participants explained their low rankings in terms of the other themes and issues previously discussed, such as social integration, lack of information, and difficulty meeting people and finding opportunities to do so. Jesenia ranked her experience at a two, and explained it as, "I guess when I walk around campus, I see everyone with their group of friends on the AMU lawn hanging out, playing Frisbee, or with people. And I can't do that, because I don't have people I know here. So it's kind of like it's not the best experience because I can't share it." Danielle ranked her experience at a three and directly related it to the challenges that being a non-traditional student brings; she explained this rank by saying, "Being a commuter AND a transfer student makes me feel quite excluded from all that is Marquette." In general, putting a quantitative number on the participants' experiences allowed me have a more concrete gage of how transfer students feel about how Marquette facilitates, or doesn't, transfer student acclimation.

From these themes, I have pulled a number of obstacles and challenges that are directly related to transferring; the lack of institutional support and scaffolding became very apparent with each interview. Interestingly enough, each of these transfer students expressed interest in

some form of support or improvement for future transfer students, and participants such as Danielle and Lisa went as far as to say they would be interested in helping create and run these improvements and support systems. The participants offered a variety of suggestions on what they think would improve transfer student experience, each based off their own struggles and challenges. This was an interesting element of my results, because it demonstrated these students' willingness and interest in being involved, making a difference, and helping other students at Marquette. This indicates that transfer students feel strongly enough about their negative experiences to want to do something about it, and the university should take these students up on their suggestions and help them move towards making a difference, which is what Marquette is all about.

Proposal for Change

Each of the interviewees identified a number of aspects of transferring that have directly impacted their social experience at Marquette, and each presented different suggestions for how to go about improving this. After reflecting on my own experience, the responses from my interviews and email correspondence, and some of the literature on transfer student adjustment I have come up with a number of possible solutions and a plan that could be implemented gradually. I have broken this proposal down into the time periods that I think these suggestions could be implemented in, in terms of logistics. While this is only a small sample of some of the possibilities, it is my hope that if the change is structured and implemented in an effective and timely manner, all parties involved will benefit from these changes.

Within One to Two Years

This plan for improving transfer students' social transitions in Marquette begins with the coming fall semester of 2012. One of the easiest things that Marquette could facilitate would be

to ask previous transfer students to send out welcome emails to new students. This could be just a brief email with an introduction, a few brief tips, and a general welcome to the Marquette community. This would help new transfer students connect with previous transfers and hopefully set up a connection for the new students. It would also be a warm welcome and reminder that there are other students out there who went through the same transition, and that there are people to talk to if necessary.

Another email option that could be created almost immediately would be to put together a website, bulletin, or email list that transfer students (or any students) could sign up for which would send out weekly emails about what campus events will be occurring, what organizations are on campus, or tips on how to get involved. This would be a simple way to get more information out to transfer students, which would facilitate their ability to get involved. Furthermore, I think having a website that serves as a centralized posting site of campus involvement and activities would be hugely beneficial for students. Many transfer students seem to have difficulty knowing where to go, how to navigate information, and how to get in touch with involvement opportunities, so this would provide a direct link to that type of information.

Within the next year, I would strongly suggest orientation staff hiring some transfer students specifically for running transfer student programs, or at least meeting with transfers. Transferring is a very unique experience, and gaining insight from students who have already gone through that process could prove invaluable to new transfer students. Allowing transfer students to talk with new transfers would allow them to share experiences, tips, struggles, and establish connections for down the road. This could alleviate some of the stress that transfer students feel about not knowing the nuances of the university upon arrival.

Furthermore, adding more transfer-specific programs to orientation was something that the participants in this study mentioned. Transfer students are not the same as freshman; they have proved that they can be successful in a college setting, but they do need guidance and help adjusting to their new university. For this reason, transfer students should have separate programs in orientation that can help them find the resources they need, meet others, and get general information on the university. Also, because these students come from very different college paths and different college cultures, it's important to value these differences and help them to connect with others who may be in the same boat. This means that meeting other transfer students would be very beneficial, because it would allow these students to get to know each other and talk about their experiences. This would allow transfer students to support each other and have contacts beyond orientation to help them through their initial semesters. Some of these activities may include a Milwaukee excursion just for transfer students, a more structured barbeque, and general team building exercises during orientation. In general, there seems to be a desire for more opportunities to meet people during orientation, specifically people who are in the same situation as themselves.

Within Two to Three Years

Marquette could take this letter sending idea and transfer student involvement in orientation to another level by creating a peer mentoring group of transfer students. Many participants from my study expressed interest in facilitating something like this now that they are past their initial semesters at Marquette. This would allow transfer students to connect and help each other through the transition, and would allow the experts on transferring, namely the transfer students, guide others through the process. This would basically be an extension of transfer student orientation, and would allow students to continue to build the connections they

made throughout the first semester(s) at Marquette. If not a peer mentoring group, some type of social organization for transfer students would be beneficial. A few of the participants from my study expressed that they would have joined a group like this had there been one. Luke suggested that even if the group functioned just to gather people to attend other campus events, it would be beneficial for those who don't know people yet or don't know about campus events. Jesenia also expressed interest in this and stated, "I think it would be very helpful, because no one can really understand what situation you're in unless they are in it with you. So if there was a transfer student group, I would've joined a long time ago; because that would've helped me make friends with people who are in the same predicament that I'm in." In general, this type of organization would allow transfer students to meet one another, organize events, and be the support that many transfers desperately seek.

Within Three to Five Years

A final step that Marquette could take to truly help transfer students would be to create a living arrangement system for transfer students. This could be an option for transfer students who are coming into Marquette and would like to live in the dorms. This could function as allowing transfer students to make a preference on whether they'd like to live with another transfer student, or even create a living community in one of the dormitories. This would give transfer students the option to live with other transfer students, which would again reinforce the support system in place and allow for more community building within the greater residence halls.

For students who'd like to live off campus, perhaps Marquette could set up a website or connection for transfer students to find other transfers who are looking for roommates. This would allow transfers to more easily find roommates, so they are not living alone, and also to

find people who are going through the same process. In general, if Marquette could increase and facilitate transfer students' living options, I think it would be very beneficial for meeting people who could support them.

Contributions

While transfer students aren't often seen as a very prominent group at Marquette University, there were 193 transfer students in the fall of 2011 according to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at Marquette University (2011). This is the highest number of transfer students Marquette has enrolled in the fall for the last five years, which indicates a growth in this population. Prior to the fall of 2011, there were on average 170 transfer students in the five fall semesters before. This number does not account for spring semester transfers, which would only increase the size of this population; therefore the issues and struggles that these students face deserve consideration now more than ever.

The purpose of my research is to inform the audience of some of the major issues that transfer students face in terms of getting acclimated to the university and provide some possible suggestions, improvements, and solutions. In order to understand why transfer student programs are essential, it is important to share with audiences the experiences that transfer students have when becoming a Marquette student. It has been my experience that many people have never given much thought to the transfer student population, and find some of the opinions and experiences of transfer students to be surprising. Awareness of the issue is the first step to bringing change, which my research attempts to do by recounting transfer student experiences and supplementing those findings with scholarly literature. It is my goal to share some of these experiences with an audience that can hear these experiences, needs, and suggestions and turn them into actions here at Marquette.

The other goal of this research is to outline some suggestions that would help improve transfer student experiences. Because transfer students come to Marquette with previous college experiences and expectations, they require different support and guidance than a first-year student or a four-year Marquette student. This could be created and implemented in a number of ways, ranging from very short-term solutions to more long-range plans. It is my hope that by providing some very attainable short-term goals for improvement followed by more complex long-range plans, Marquette will begin to take steps toward improving these students' experiences until all students can have the "Marquette experience" instead of the "transfer student experience."

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

When did you transfer to Marquette?

What year/semester were you?

Where did you transfer to Marquette from?

What was your previous college experience like?

Why did you decide to transfer?

Why Marquette?

Before enrolling, how much research did you do on schools?

Did you have any experiences/perceptions about Marquette before you came here? Explain.

After being accepted, did you attend orientation?

What did your orientation include (programs, activities, how long did it last)?

What was your experience with/thoughts of orientation? Was it a beneficial experience?

How did you begin to socialize at Marquette/when?

What concerns and lingering questions did you have when starting class, if any?

What was your social experience like during your first and second semesters?

How would you say your social experience has changed or stayed the same since you first transferred?

Where did you live/do you live since transferring? How has that impacted your transfer experience do you think?

How many other transfer students do you know?

Are you happy with your decision to transfer/would you do it all again?

On a scale of 1-10, how much do you feel a part of the Marquette community? Explain.

In general, do you think you had enough support and guidance through your transition to Marquette?

Any improvements/suggestions for making the transferring experience better for others?

<p>Coding</p> <p>From a community college</p> <p>Non-traditional student</p> <p>Feeling outside Marquette community</p> <p>Orientation and social activity</p> <p>Interesting points/emotions</p>

Appendix B

Interview Coding Excerpt

“How was your orientation experience?”

“I was **excited, but frustrated** at the same time. So orientation was interesting, I felt out of place just being a transfer student, having no real clue of Marquette, not having enough time with the idea that I was going to this school, not knowing anyone you know was like a huge setback. And like, some good came of it though from orientation, some embarrassment also came out of the orientation. Just like, a number of the activities we were involved in like, we could sign up for different activities and so for one of the sheets you had to put your name, your age, and all of this stuff and so when I (laughs) when I signed up for one of these activities I got a phone call later in the day checking to make sure I was actually a student and not just someone’s sister. And that they were like questioning my age, and like all of this and wondering why I was there and I was like EXTREMELY embarrassed. I don’t really like to tell people too many people that I’m not the traditional student, that I am a few years older than your typical undergrad and so on and so forth. And for that person to give me a call and make me feel even more like, **self-conscious** about the fact that I’m not a traditional student. And the guy was like “oh I’m sorry, I just had to call because you know sometimes the siblings will sign up as well and their not allowed and blah blah blah” even though I’m pretty sure you had to put your ID number, and I did. And so needless to say that was not very fun. And then even when I went into the activity I was kind of already feeling like “GREAT, you had to call and make sure. Are you going to question me when I come on? Are you gonna pick me out because maybe you think I look older than the other students or whatever.” But luckily that didn’t happen. And I don’t think the person that called earlier was even there, because then I did question one of the people and said he asked me if I wasn’t allowed to go basically, and she didn’t even really care though about the situation. She’s like “oh, well we just had to make sure” and I was like “Thanks a lot.”

But anyway, that was one of the days of orientation and then, they kinda split. At one point it was **freshman and transfer students all combined and then the activities you did were together so as far as like being oriented to the Marquette community, it was a little harder for transfer students because our situation is a little different than those of freshman.** And the only distinct activity they had for transfer students was a barbeque. And that was like you **didn’t really know** where it was, it was kinda hard to find, and then when you got there, there was not anyone there to facilitate so you were kinda just thrown all together and if you didn’t wanna talk to anyone, well, that’s your loss because you had to kind of take the initiative to talk to other people even though there wasn’t really anyone there. So there was food and everything set up and we all kinda were just looking around at each other trying to figure out what we were supposed to do and if there was anyone actually in charge of us for the transfer students. There **was not really,**

like no one said anything, no one was telling us like a specific welcome, or kind of a “what to expect as a transfer student.” Nothing. And so that was...disappointing, really.

I was really looking forward to being cultivated into this community, especially because I had come from a community college where you don't have that and you don't have that sense of social activities and you don't have that school pride and so on and so forth. So I was really looking forward to that at Marquette. But it kind of.....I guess you could say the university or whatever, it seemed like...I don't know, failed may be kind of strong words but at the same time I was definitely disappointed because I was willing and eager to gain that school spirit, and yet you REALLY had to be the one to take initiative and you know, if you wanted it you had to go out and get it. And to a point I definitely agree, and definitely think that as a student and as a transfer student you do need to take that initiative, but at the same time a handout here and there would be nice, you know, like maybe separate emails to transfer students saying what to expect and how to get the most out of your Marquette experience or something along those lines. But umm...no that was lacking.

Appendix C

Coding and Results Chart

Participants/Themes	Danielle	Lisa	Luke	Jesenia	Chelsea	Savannah
Considers themselves a non-traditional student/minority	X	X		X		
Transferred from a community college	X	X	X	X		
Attended orientation		X	X		X	X
Trouble hearing about campus events	X	X		X	X	X
Lives off-campus	X	X		X	X	
Experienced difficulty meeting people/getting socially adjusted	X	X	X	X	X	X
Felt “outside” the Marquette community	X	X	X	X	X	X
On a scale of 1-10, ranked their social experience at Marquette...	3	3	4	2	—	5
Expressed interest in participating/starting a programs to benefit transfer students	X	X	X	X	—	X

Appendix D

Consent Form Template

Consent Form for English 3210 Research

As part of the writing-research process for English 3210, Advanced Composition: “Ethnography of the University,” students are conducting qualitative research and gathering data through interviews, surveys, observations, or other fieldwork. Student researchers are investigating questions related to campus and community life, and they will explain their projects (research questions and project goals) when asking for your participation in the research.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the student researcher (email to: _____) or to contact me through email (beth.godbee@marquette.edu) or phone (414-288-3468).

Thank you!

Dr. Beth Godbee

English Department, Marquette University

* * * * *

I, _____ (participant’s name), agree to participate in qualitative research for English 3210, conducted by _____ (researcher’s name). I understand that my name will not be used, unless I give express permission, and that I may choose a pseudonym. My participation in this study is completely voluntary. I may withdraw from participation at any time.

I understand that there are no anticipated risks as a result of my participation in this study. If I become uncomfortable at any point, I may choose not to answer a question or to end the interview. There are no direct benefits from participation.

Consent for Participation / Signature: _____

Preferred Pseudonym: _____

Date: _____