

THE TRANSFER SEMINAR: MEASURED IMPACTS ON TRANSFER
STUDENT OUTCOMES

by

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ABSTRACT

ANDREA LEIGH SWINTAL. The transfer seminar: Measured impacts on transfer student outcomes. (Under the direction of DR. MARK D'AMICO)

The volume of transfer students across college and university campuses in the United States continues to rise; however, institutions continue to struggle with identifying and applying best practices that encourage these students to earn their baccalaureate degree at rates comparable to their non-transferring peers. Prior research suggests many students experience transfer shock upon entering their new institution and that their performance outcomes may vary depending on their academic and social integration experiences (Cejda et al., 1998; Diaz, 1992; Eels, 1927; Hills, 1965; Ishitani, 2008; Knoell & Medsker, 1965; Laanan, 2001; Martorana & Williams, 1954; Nickens, 1972). To overcome these challenges, Tinto (1988, 1993) articulated the importance of integration, a key objective of the course studied in this research, as a means to more seamlessly assimilate into the new community resulting in a stronger institutional commitment, improved performance, and increased levels of retention. Further, Schlossberg (2011) built upon this concept utilizing the 4 S model to articulate the significance of support and strategies that individuals use to cope with and mitigate the challenges associated with periods of transition. Taken together, the transfer seminar course studied is seen as an interventional support and strategy aimed at improving the academic and social integration experience to potentially produce increased levels of success for transfer students.

The primary purpose of the current study was to measure the impact that a transfer seminar course had on individuals that participated in the course during their first

semester of enrollment at the receiving institution, a large, public four-year state institution in the Southeastern United States. This quasi-experimental, quantitative study analyzed the impact of participation in a non-required transfer seminar course during the first semester of matriculation, post-transfer, and compared the grade point averages (GPA) and rates of persistence at the end of the first semester and first year with a matched sample of non-course participants to evaluate course impact. A total of 824 students, including 412 students in each of the treatment and control groups from Fall 2013 through Fall 2018 were evaluated utilizing descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

The findings of the study revealed that the course participants exhibited a statistically significant difference in their GPA at the end of the first semester, but the difference in GPAs at the end of the first year had diminished and was non-statistically significant. The results further support that at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first year, rates of persistence were non-statistically significant for participants in comparison to non-participants. The conclusions presented suggest that the course provides only a short term positive gain for participants and may be most beneficial in assisting students transitioning into the new academic community. Additional research is needed to identify resources, supports, strategies, and interventions that encourage greater levels of success over the long term period of matriculation through to graduation.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Transfer students are a distinct and significant population across many four-year institutions. Among the six million students who first enrolled in college during fall 2008, 37.2% transferred to a different institution at least once (Shapiro et al., 2015). Among these students, 45% transferred colleges on more than one occasion (Shapiro et al., 2015). While the transfer of students between institutions can be an exciting time of growth and advancement, this period can also be an overwhelming time of extensive confusion as students are presented with voluminous amounts of information to interpret and apply in hopes of making the best of their new experiences and achieving their academic goals.

Upon matriculation to a new institution, many transfer students endure a number of challenges while in pursuit of their academic goals. These challenges are commonly related to new environments, increased academic rigor, and unfamiliarity with available resources (Diaz, 1992; Flaga, 2006; Hills, 1965; Kuh, 2003; Laanan, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). One of the most common and well-researched issues that transfer students face is the phenomenon of transfer shock, or academic and social adjustment concerns that lead to a drop in academic performance followed by minimal recovery and challenges in achieving academic success (Hills, 1965). Ishitani (2008) suggests that many transfer students recover from this brief troubling experience, but they are not limited to this challenge alone. Many transfer students also face challenges related to lack of articulation agreements resulting in credit loss (Flaga, 2006), the exorbitant cost of university attendance (Hatton et al., 2009), and full integration into the new learning environment (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2009).

Among the challenges encountered throughout higher education, the number one student challenge to success continues to be increasing the number of transfer students who successfully achieve college graduation (Mintz, 2019). Jenkins and Fink (2015) reported that 80% of students indicate intentions of earning a bachelor's degree; however, only 17% of students earn a bachelor's degree within six years of transferring. To increase this number of graduates, it is critical that institutions foster an environment supportive and conducive of transfer student success and mitigate or eliminate the barriers preventing students from achieving maximum academic potential. One approach that a small number of universities have piloted is the implementation of transfer seminar courses, or small-class environments, facilitated by faculty or professional staff. This approach provides students with the opportunity for intentional engagement with their peers and members of the campus community in addition to required utilization of campus resources meant to bolster student success. The core of the present research study was an investigation of one university's interventional approach (a transfer seminar course), with this population of students upon their arrival to the baccalaureate institution while investigating the academic outcomes to determine if there is a relationship between program participation, improved grade point average, and retention rates for transfer students. The established objectives for this course include:

1. To foster a safe, positive, and supportive environment that helps transfer students develop a sense of belonging to the campus community.
2. To familiarize students with the institution's campus resources.
3. To help students develop study skills and strategies essential for academic success.
4. To create a context in which students clarify their personal values and career goals.

5. To develop critical thinking, written, and oral communication skills.
6. To foster an understanding of and sensitivity to differences in race, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability, as reflected in our University community and the world at large.

One area of concern in the existing research is the limited number of studies on transfer seminar courses. Of the courses which do exist, many have been designed as a small class environment led by either a faculty member or professional staff member at the institution, and emphasize topics including educational philosophies, learning strategies, motivation, resiliency, resource utilization, and self-advocacy (Adams & Curtis, 2014; Grites & Farina, 2012; Lee et al., 2012). The objective behind these courses is to provide the training and support necessary for students to bolster and refine their skills needed to succeed academically and to become active participants in their new educational environment. Implementation of such a program (similar to freshman seminar courses), has been recommended, however, little research exists to support the success of these programs (Grites & Farina, 2012). Of the research that does exist, many of the studies reflect the outcomes for students at one particular institution, which may differ drastically from other school programs, structures, and offerings. Utilizing the freshman seminar framework, it would appear that a course of this type would assist transfer students to acclimate more easily to the institution, hone the skills necessary to be successful in the new environment, foster the development of earlier positive interactions between students, their peers and professors, and promote higher levels of engagement through requisite course activities. As Schlossberg's (1981) model suggested, utilizing appropriate coping strategies, as required to successfully achieve

course objectives, aides students in building relationships and acclimating to a new setting which Tinto's (1975) theory suggests is critical to transition and incorporation. Further research into the utilization of this style of course, as an interventional means to improve the performance of transfer students, is necessary to better understand the impacts, if any, which the course may have on transfer student success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to measure the impact that a transfer seminar course had on transfer students who participated in the course during their first semester of enrollment at the receiving institution. The impact was measured by looking at student outcomes, based on grade point average and persistence at the end of the first semester, and again at the end of the first year post-transfer. The information collected was intended to provide insight into the efficacy of this type of intervention as a means to better assist students in their transition between institutions of higher education.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of a matched sample of students, (defined by age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution) who enrolled and those who did not enroll in a transfer seminar course, during their first semester of enrollment at a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeastern United States?
2. Is there a significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester or at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

3. Is there a significant difference in rate of persistence from the first to second semester or the first to second year, post-transfer, for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

Research Question One did not require a hypothesis because of the descriptive nature of the question. Research Questions Two and Three did require a hypothesis as they explored the relationship, if any, between one independent and one dependent variable. A null hypothesis would suggest that there is not a statistically significant relationship between the two variables being examined, while the alternative hypothesis suggests that a statistically significant relationship does exist between the independent and dependent variables (Mertens, 2015). The researcher hypothesized that a positive relationship and significant difference would exist between the independent and dependent variables such that:

H₁1: There will be a statistically significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who complete the transfer seminar course in comparison to a matched sample of students who do not complete the transfer seminar course.

H₁2: There will be a statistically significant difference in semester one to semester two and year one to year two persistence rates for students who complete the transfer seminar course in comparison to a matched sample of students who do not complete the transfer seminar course.

Conceptual Framework

Numerous theorists have examined college student outcomes and factors which may influence the extent to which a student performs. Each theorist has fostered their

own theoretical underpinnings outlining the requisite elements or practices to improve student outcomes. While many theories exhibit particular distinction in identifying strategies to increase the likelihood of success, the current study will focus on two theories, Tinto's student integration model (Tinto, 1975, 1988, 1993), and Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984, 2011), to provide perspective on transition and integration.

Tinto's Theories of Student Integration and Institutional Departure

Tinto's (1975) theory of student integration provided a foundational framework that later gave way to the theory of institutional departure (1993). This study utilized Tinto's theory by connecting the academic and social elements of integration that impact academic outcomes (Figure 1). This theory of student integration is closely associated with the transfer student experience as it meticulously explores the programs, resources, and supports that a college or university can provide to enhance the integration experience and improve student performance. Utilizing this model, the transfer seminar was viewed as an institutional program, with requisite course objectives, that intentionally required both academic and social engagements as students transitioned into their new environment.

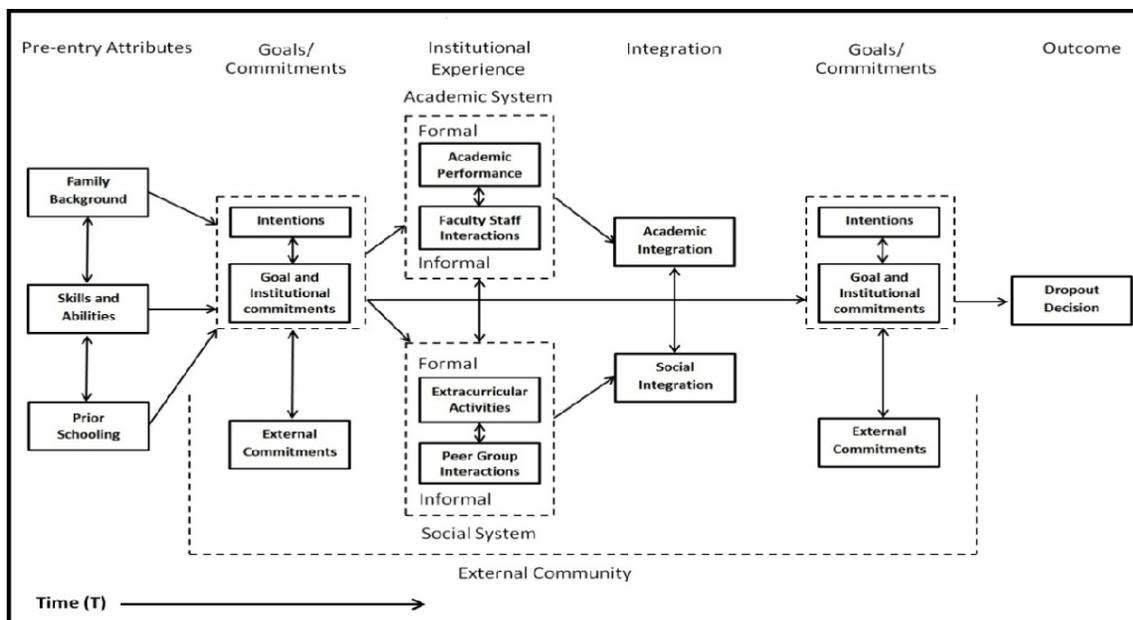


Figure 1. Tinto's (1993) Institutional Departure Model (p. 114).

Since Tinto's initially presented model of student integration in 1975, significant research has been done that broadened the concept of integration and gave way to the institutional departure model that suggested the poorer the experience that a student has, as they integrate into the new academic system, the less likely it was that the student would make an institutional commitment and be retained at the new college or university (Tinto, 1993). In utilizing the model of institutional departure, the assimilation into the new environment is considered to take place throughout three critical stages: separation, transition, and integration (Tinto, 1988). Separation emphasizes the movement away from the old environment and into a new college or university (Tinto, 1988). Transition is briefly explained as the period between which the student has left the old environment but is not yet a fully accepted member of the new community (Tinto, 1988). Finally, incorporation is when the student is acceptance into the community and this is reflective of full integration (Tinto, 1988). Tinto's (1988, 1993) research suggests that student

departure likely exists as a result of disconnects in the stages of separation and transition, and as a result, those stages are the focal point of higher education research presenting the question of “what can be done to address rising levels of attrition and barriers to academic success?”

Though Tinto’s research provides a foundation for the current study and briefly articulates the importance of transition, it does not provide the full scope of the transitional process that is essential to the present study.

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

To expand upon Tinto’s (1988, 1993) study, Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory expounds upon the concept of change and resource utilization as critical elements of successful integration into a new environment. Schlossberg utilized a model commonly referred to as the 4 S Model (Figure 2) that explores the factors of situation, self, support, and strategy and how an individual utilizes these components to navigate and cope with transitions throughout their lives.

The Transition Framework

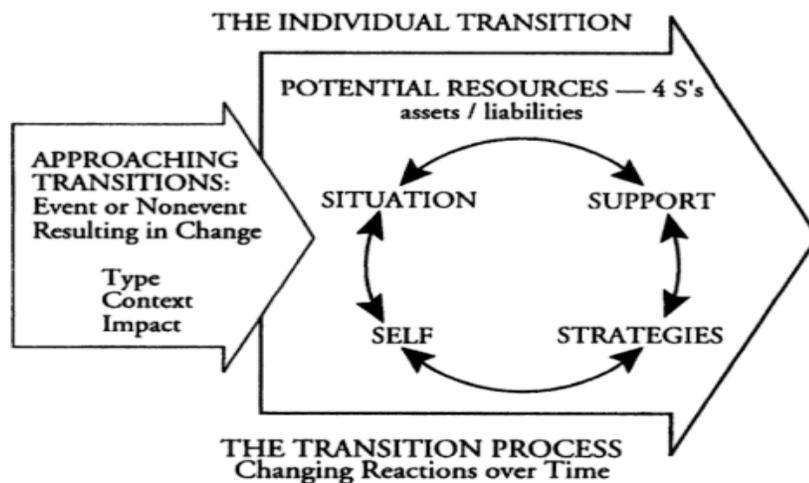


Figure 2. Four S factor model (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p.33)

Schlossberg's theory is influential in understanding the concepts of self, changes, and strategies to support optimal outcomes in periods of transition. The current study integrated the transfer seminar course as an interventional support and strategy aimed at increasing academic and social integration into the new environment thereby resulting in increased levels of academic success for students who participate in this course.

Figure 3 outlines the hypothesized conceptual framework which was utilized in this study. This figure outlines the objectives to be achieved in the course, and it is through required activities to achieve those objectives that students are utilizing elements of both Tinto's (1975) and Schlossberg's (1995) theories. The figure suggests that through participation in the transfer seminar course, a student is provided with intentional and required opportunities to utilize Schlossberg's elements of self, support and strategies through Tinto's stages of transition and integration, and, it is hypothesized that as a result of these required course actions, seminar participants would experience higher post-transfer GPA and persistence rates.

Course Objectives	Applicable Element of Tinto's Theories of Student Integration and Institutional Departure	Applicable Element of Schlossberg's Transition Theory
To foster a safe, positive, and supportive environment that helps transfer students develop a sense of belonging to the campus community.	Transition	Self, Support
To familiarize students with the institution's campus resources	Transition	Support
To help students develop study skills and strategies essential for academic success.	Transition, Incorporation	Strategies
To create a context in which students clarify their personal values and career goals.	Transition, Incorporation	Self

To develop critical thinking, written, and oral communication skills.	Transition, Incorporation	Strategies
To foster an understanding of and sensitivity to differences in race, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability, as reflected in our University community and the world at large.	Transition, Incorporation	Self

Anticipated Outcome:

By participating in the transfer seminar course, a student is provided with intentional opportunities to utilize Schlossberg’s elements of self, support, and strategies through Tinto’s stages of transition and incorporation, and, it is hypothesized that as a result, course participants will experience higher GPA and persistence rates.

Figure 3. Conceptual framework diagram.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, quasi-experimental research design, defined as studying “the effects of the treatment on intact groups rather than being able to randomly assign participants to the experimental or control group” (Mertens, 2015, p. 144). The quantitative methodology was appropriately fitted for this study as it allowed the researcher to obtain numerical data that was utilized to test the theories of Tinto (1975, 1988, 1993) and Schlossberg (1981, 1984, 2011) and to utilize those findings to establish facts and potentially demonstrate relationships between the independent and dependent variables of the study (Mertens, 2015). The quasi-experimental approach is most commonly used in research when it is either not feasible, or unethical, to randomly assign participants to groups (Gribbons & Herman, 1997). The present study specifically examined the relationship between one independent variable, participation or non-participation in a transfer seminar course and two dependent variables defined as cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year and semester one to semester two and year one to year two persistence rates,

when controlling for student characteristics including age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution.

Because participation in the course was voluntary, and students opted in rather than opt out, the quasi-experimental design was an appropriate methodology because randomization of participants was not attainable in this study.

The current study was conducted at a large, public institution in an urban setting of the Southeast United States. Institutional data presented from 2018 suggested that the university had an enrollment of more than 29,700 students of which 24,387 were undergraduate students. The campus boasted an almost equal percentage of men and women (51% men, 49% women) and a diverse student population including 42% of students identifying as minority races and 58% of students identifying as Caucasian.

The participants in the study consisted of incoming transfer students who took the transfer seminar course between the Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 semesters. In addition, a representative sample of non-transfer seminar participants who first matriculated at the institution between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 was studied for comparison measures.

Data for the study was provided by the organization's Office of Institutional Research after obtaining requisite Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. There was no contact made with participants throughout the study, and all potentially identifying information including names and student numbers was removed prior to acceptance of the data examined. The data requested included student characteristics (age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution, Fall semester of enrollment, cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year post-transfer, and semester one to

semester two and year one to year two persistence rates) for six cohorts of students from Fall 2013 to Fall 2018 who participated in the transfer seminar course, representing the experimental group. Because participation in the course was voluntary, a second set of data was requested for a control group that matched the students on age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution, but did not include participation in the transfer seminar course.

When analyzing the data the researcher utilized propensity score matching. This method was necessary because randomization was not achievable, and the outcomes studied were analyzed after the intervention took place. This research technique was used to generate a sample that took into consideration the confounding variables, age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution, to create a control group similar to the treatment group, based on observed characteristics, for comparison (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). The primary difference between the two groups then stemmed mostly from the impacts, if any, of the treatment effect. The goal of this technique was to minimize the differences between groups so that comparisons could be made on the dependent variables, grade point average and persistence, and that the measured differences were attributable to the independent variable (transfer seminar course (non) participation), rather than extraneous variables that had the potential to influence both the independent and dependent variables. The overarching goal was to minimize the potential impact of selection bias stemming from natural differences occurring between individuals who chose to participate in a transfer seminar course in comparison to those who chose to not participate in the transfer seminar course. The advantage to utilizing this method in

comparison to a simple regression analysis was that this approach allowed for comparison of similar individuals whereas traditional regression analysis examines all individuals in treatment and control groups which may skew the outcomes (Melguizo et al., 2011).

The present study evaluated the research questions (Table 1) utilizing descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, independent samples *t*-tests, and chi square analysis.

Table 1

Summary of Research Questions and Data Analysis Procedures

Research Question	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Data Analysis Method
1. What are the characteristics of a matched sample of students, defined by age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution who enrolled and those who did not enroll in a transfer seminar course during their first semester of enrollment at a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeastern United States?	Age, Race, Gender, Transfer Type, Pre-Transfer GPA, Number of Credits Transferred Into the Receiving Institution	None	Descriptive Statistics, Frequency Analysis
2. Is there a significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester or at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?	Participation in the transfer seminar course between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 semester	Cumulative GPA at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first-year post-transfer	Independent Samples <i>t</i> -Tests
3. Is there a significant difference in rate of persistence from the first to second semester or the first to second year, post-transfer, for students	Participation in the transfer seminar course between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 semester	Rate of persistence from semester one to semester two and year	Chi Square Analysis

who participate versus students
who do not participate in a
transfer seminar course?

one to year two,
post-transfer

The specific outcomes that were evaluated among the experimental and control groups were cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year post-transfer, and semester one to semester two and year one to year two persistence rates post-transfer.

Significance of the Study

It has been well documented that students who participate in freshman seminar courses more easily acclimate to the new environment, engage in out of class activities with peers and faculty, and persist at higher levels than those who do not participate in these programs (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006). Unfortunately, however, few research studies exist that measure the impact of similarly structured programs on transfer students. Of the studies that have been conducted on a transfer style seminar, research has demonstrated positive impacts for students in the areas of institutional adjustment, improved study habits, greater awareness of campus resources, better understanding of academic responsibilities, and increased confidence in the ability to communicate and cultivate relationships with faculty, staff, and peers at the new campus (Adams & Curtis, 2014; Grites & Farina, 2012; Lee et al., 2012).

During the Fall 2008 semester, the public university in the Southeastern United States, at which the study was conducted, began offering its first transfer seminar course similar to that of a freshman seminar course; however, it was not until the Spring 2013 semester that the course began being offered on a routine basis. This study measured the

impacts that a transfer seminar course had on student outcomes, as well as adds to the growing base of knowledge surrounding transfer seminars. Many of the previous studies have examined this intervention, qualitatively, from the perspective of transition experiences; however, the current study specifically examined the quantitative impacts of participation including student outcomes in the areas of cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year post-transfer, and rate of persistence from the first to second semester and first to second year post-transfer.

The current study addressed the gap in the literature with respect to the quantitative outcomes of participation in a transfer seminar course during the first semester of matriculation at a four-year, large, public university. Moreover, the study adds to the existing literature on how a transfer seminar program can be implemented at other colleges on the university campus, in addition to baccalaureate institutions throughout the nation to further support their transfer student populations.

Definition of Terms

Academic Outcomes: the cumulative grade point average and rate of persistence at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year post-transfer.

Age: the number of years that a student has been alive; this value will be taken at the time of initial matriculation to the receiving institution.

Gender: a student's understanding of, and identification with, a binary classification.

For the purpose of this study, gender will be divided into the categories of men and women to reflect the available options from which a student may select when submitting an application for admission to the institution.

Persistence Rate: the percentage of students who, for the next academic period, maintain a status of continued enrollment at the institution (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018).

Pre-Transfer GPA: the grade point average earned at the sending institution prior to matriculating at the receiving institution.

Race: a grouping of individuals who share common and distinctive culture, traits, and backgrounds. For the purpose of this study, race will be divided into the categories of African American, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, and Other to reflect the available options from which a student may select when submitting an application for admission to the institution.

Receiving Institution: the institution to which a student and their credits transfer (Simone, 2014).

Retention Rate: continued enrollment (or degree completion) within the same higher education institution from fall of the student's first to second year (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018).

Sending Institution: the institution from which a student and their credits transfer (Simone, 2014).

Transfer: "Any change in a student's initial enrollment institution irrespective of the timing, direction or location of the move, and regardless of whether any credits were transferred from one institution to another" (Shapiro et al., 2018, p.4).

Transfer Seminar Course: a 16-week curriculum course designed to acclimate and support transfer students in their transition to the receiving institution, while

fostering the skills necessary for students to achieve academic, social, and personal success.

Transfer Shock: a temporary drop in grade point average performance upon transfer (Hills, 1965).

Transfer Student: individuals who have completed any postsecondary work at another institution prior to enrolling at their current institution (Stewart & Martinello, 2012).

Transfer Type: the way in which a student is classified, by the Undergraduate Admissions Office, according to the classification of their sending institution. The possible values of this variable will include Transfer from Four-Year Institution and Transfer from Two-Year Institution.

Transition: “Any event or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routine, assumptions, and roles” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33).

Organization of the Study

Chapter I presents the statement of the problem, research questions which were investigated, and outlines the general framework and research methodology which were utilized throughout the current study.

Chapter II provides a review of the literature on transfer student populations, how the practice of transfer has evolved over time, barriers and facilitators of transfer student success, and application of Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure and Schlossberg’s Transition theory to transfer students and transitional programming.

Chapter III outlines the methodology utilized in the study and includes discussion surrounding the context of the study, the population and sample, research design, data collection processes, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter IV presents the findings from this quantitative study. This section also presents each research question and summarizes the findings via statistical analysis procedures.

Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings in addition to recommendations for further research and practice.

Summary

As the volume of transfer students continues to rise across the United States, the academic and social integration of students into their new college or university environment is a critical component of institutional commitment and student success (Tinto, 1988, 1993). Researchers have suggested that the responsibility for transfer student success is a collaborative effort between students and administrators and that intentional programs and initiatives should be implemented to empower students to transfer and succeed (Jackson & Laanan, 2015; Jain et al., 2011). Transfer seminar courses, similar to first-year seminar courses, with unique content to meet the needs of transfer students, is one interventional approach perceived to positively impact student outcomes (Grites, 2013; Jamelske, 2008). This study utilized a quantitative research methodology to examine the differences, if any, between students who completed a transfer seminar course during their first semester of matriculation at a large, public institution in the Southeastern United States, and a matched sample of students who did not complete the transfer seminar course during their first semester of matriculation at the

same institution. The results from this study provide institutional leaders with measurable impacts of course participation and provide one potential strategy to increase academic and social integration leading to higher levels of student success.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will provide a brief overview of transfer students and their mobility patterns beginning in the early 20th century and progressing into the 21st century up to the present day. This thematic area will be followed by discussions surrounding transfer shock, transfer student engagement, and the significance of a transfer receptive culture followed by theoretical frameworks that explain and support this phenomenon. Finally, the chapter will conclude by examining student transition programs and the measured impacts of the nominal number of studies that currently exist exploring this practice. The following table displays how the literature related to the key themes will be presented:

Table 2
Identified Themes and Subthemes in the Literature

Theme	Subtheme	Citation
Brief Historical View of Transfer Students		Cejda et al., 1998; Cohen et al., 2014; Drury, 2003; Handel, 2013; Ishitani, 2008; Joliet Junior College, 2019; Miller, 2013; Monaghan & Attewell, 2014; Shapiro et al., 2018; Shapiro et al., 2015; United States President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947; US Government Accountability Office, 2017
Today's Transfer Student		Shapiro et al., 2018
	Vertical transfer	Archambault, 2014; Borst et al., 2012; Fann, 2013; Handel, 2013; Lumina Foundation, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Taylor & Jain, 2017
	Lateral transfer	Archambault, 2014; Bahr, 2009; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2018; Taylor & Jain, 2017
	Reverse transfer	Archambault, 2014; Townsend & Dever, 1999; Shapiro et al., 2018
	Swirling	Archambault, 2014; Frederickson, 1998; Handel, 2013; McCormick, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2018

Transfer Shock		Cejda et al., 1998; Diaz, 1992; Eels, 1927; Grites, 2013; Hills, 1965; Ishitani, 2008; Knoell & Medsker, 1965; Laanan, 2001; Laanan, 2004; Martorana & Williams, 1954; Nickens, 1972; Townsend & Wilson, 2006
Transfer Student Engagement/Integration		Ishitani & McKittrick, 2012; Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 2009; Lester et al., 2013; McCormick et al., 2009; Miller, 2013; Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto 1988; Tinto, 1993
Transfer Receptive Culture		Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Jackson & Laanan, 2015; Jain et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2011; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004
Theoretical Frameworks	Tinto's Theory of Student Departure	Jain et al., 2011; Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1988
	Schlossberg's Transition Theory	Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Evans et al., 1998; Goodman et al., 2006; Jain et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 2011; Townsend & Barefoot, 2008
Student Transition Programs	First Year Experience Courses	2012-2013 National Survey, n.d.; Johnson, 1987; Mamrick, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006; Tinto, 1993; Townsend & Barefoot, 2008
	Transfer Student Seminars	Adams & Curtis, 2014; Flaga, 2006; Grites, 2013; Grites & Farina, 2012; Jamelske, 2008; Lee et al., 2012; St. Mary's College of Maryland, n.d.; University of Central Florida, n.d.

Brief Historical View of Transfer Students

The transfer of students between institutions is a practice dating back to the early 1900s with the founding of the nation's first community college (Joliet Junior College), in 1901 (Joliet Junior College, 2019). Built on the foundations of the increasing need to

train workers for the expanding industrial workforce, the continued development of the nation's adolescent population, and the growing desire for access to higher education; the community college grew (Cohen et al., 2014). It was not, however, until 1892 that the junior and senior college concept was actualized (by William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago), that that transfer mission began to take shape (Drury, 2003). Despite the push by educational and governmental leaders for a stronger emphasis on community colleges as a means to terminal education as outlined in the Truman Commission Report of 1947, first time students continued to indicate transfer as their primary educational objective (Handel, 2013; United States Commission on Higher Education, 1947).

Transfer student populations have continually grown exponentially in numbers across college and university campuses in the United States. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center's most recent Transfer and Mobility report suggests that 38% of the 2.8 million first time college students in the Fall 2011 cohort attended at least two institutions during their undergraduate career (Shapiro et al., 2018). This rate reflects a 0.8% increase as compared to the previously followed 2008 cohort and reflects the growing importance of transfer students across the postsecondary educational environment (Shapiro et al., 2018). Further, among students who transfer between institutions, an estimated 45% of them transfer institutions more than once accounting for a total of more than 2.4 million student transitions (Shapiro et al., 2015). While research supports that transferring is becoming a prominent and critical practice towards the attainment of educational credentials, there are a number of challenges, including transfer shock, credit loss, and financial barriers, which students encounter throughout this

process which must be addressed in order to employ strategies to engage students, ease the transferring barriers, and empower their educational success (Cejda et al., 1998; Ishitani, 2008; Miller, 2013; Monaghan & Attewell, 2014; US Government Accountability Office, 2017). A number of research studies have observed, evaluated, and recommended the utilization of transitional programs aimed at supporting the transition of transfer students, similar to first year experience programs; however, there are a limited number of studies which have evaluated the impacts and outcomes of such programs.

Today's Transfer Student

Students have been transferring between institutions for more than one century; however, in that time, the dynamic of transfer patterns has greatly shifted. Today, the transfer of students between institutions looks much different and includes movement in a number of directions- vertical, lateral, and reverse, and also includes the concept of swirling. Traditionally, much of the early literature focused on the movement of community college students to baccalaureate universities (Grites, 2013). While this population is important in the higher education landscape, Shapiro et al. (2018) observed that a larger number of students began their studies at a baccalaureate institution and transferred schools (38.5%) than the “traditional” community college to baccalaureate institution vertical transfer pattern (37.1%). Transfer students and their enrollment patterns are becoming increasingly diverse and complex, and as a result, administrators play a critical role in the actualization of programming to empower and encourage this population to succeed.

Vertical Transfer

Handel (2013) posits that between 50% and 80% of all first-time community college students aspire to transfer to a senior institution and earn a bachelor's degree. This finding is supported by Fann (2013) who stated that 81% of first-time community college students desire to earn a bachelor's degree. Though vertical transfer (the upward movement of students from the community college to the senior institution), is considered the traditional and most well-known method of transfer, it is not the most common mobility pattern of students between schools (Borst et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2018; Taylor & Jain, 2017). The 2018 National Student Clearinghouse Transfer and Mobility report tracked a Fall 2011 cohort of first-time college students and found that 41.4% of students who began their postsecondary education in a community college transferred to a public baccalaureate institution (Shapiro et al., 2018). Taylor and Jain (2017) support that an even smaller number, 29% of students make the vertical transition from a community college to baccalaureate institution.

Archambault (2014) asserts that the most common reasons for this mobility pattern are academically and financially motivated. Some students utilize the community college as a springboard to the senior institution in order to save money, to increase their academic readiness for the rigors of a senior institution, and to explore their academic and career interests before taking on the increased financial obligations associated with a baccalaureate institution (Archambault, 2014). Because of the national push to increase college-credential-holding citizens, coupled with the rising costs of college education, and the strong desire of students to complete a bachelor's degree, community colleges are expected to play a significant role in the achievement of this goal, and, as a result, this

population of students is expected to continue rising across college and university campuses (Fann, 2013; Handel, 2013; Lumina Foundation, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Lateral Transfer

The second common transfer mobility pattern is that of lateral or horizontal transfer; defined as the movement to another institution of the same sector (Bahr, 2009; Goldrick-Rab & Pfeffer, 2009). This can include movement from one community college to another or from one senior institution to another. Goldrick-Rabb and Pfeffer (2009) suggest that 19.5% of students who start at a senior institution make at least one lateral transfer during the collegiate experience. While Shapiro et al. (2018) supports that this projection may actually be higher with 39.2% of community college students making at least one lateral transfer to another community college and 33.5% of students who begin their studies at a baccalaureate granting institution making at least one lateral transfer to another institution of the same type, Taylor and Jain's (2017) findings are more closely aligned with Goldrick-Rab and Pfeffer's (2009) findings indicating that 19% of community college students and 26% of senior institution students will transfer to a similar institution. When examining the rationale for this type of movement amongst students, Archambault (2014) states that "a new institution might offer different academic programs or a more affordable financial profile, or it might be closer to home" (p. 216); therefore, leading scholars to understand that the primary motives for this mobility pattern are academically, financially, or geographically rationalized.

Reverse Transfer

An increasingly popular transfer mobility pattern is that of reverse transfer, or the movement from the baccalaureate institution downward to a community college (Archambault, 2014). This population of students can further be broken into two categories: undergraduate reverse transfer students (URTSs) and post baccalaureate reverse transfer students (PRTSs); the difference between these two populations being if the student holds a bachelor's degree at the time of their enrollment at the community college (Townsend & Dever, 1999). URTSs can also be further partitioned into students who reverse transfer and maintain enrollment at the community college through to degree completion, and temporary reverse transfers who may take courses during a summer or intersession and transfer credits back to the senior institution (Townsend & Dever, 1999).

Though this mobility pattern is commonly referred to as reverse because it goes against the traditional upward movement towards the completion of a bachelor's degree, the rates of the occurrence are escalating rapidly such that for the Fall 2011 beginning cohort, 54.9% of students who transferred from their baccalaureate institution did so to a public community college (Shapiro et al., 2018; Townsend & Dever, 1999). Among the reasons that students pursue this transfer pattern include a poor fit at the first institution, unaffordable tuition and fees, or for personal reasons such as proximity to given entities necessary to fulfill additional obligations (Archambault, 2014).

Swirling

Swirling is the final mobility trend amongst transfer students that has also become increasingly common. This pattern of student movement is defined as the movement between multiple institutions, not always of the same sector (McCormick, 2003). This

approach is sometimes viewed as disorganized or careless by administrators, however, from the student perspective is an intentional approach to build an academic profile and achieve their goals without maintaining a linear path (Archambault, 2014). A similarly identified pattern is that of double dipping which includes simultaneous enrollment at two or more institutions (McCormick, 2003). Frederickson (1998) emphasizes that this approach is typically utilized by students who are trying to fit their educational pursuits into an already chaotic lifestyle. Research has shown that eight percent of all students in higher education attended more than one college or university and more than half of these students moved between institutions of various types while working towards the completion of their academic goals (Handel, 2013). Shapiro et al. (2018) corroborated this finding indicating that 63.8% of senior institution students are non-summer swirlers, those who move to the community college only for the summer term and immediately return to their baccalaureate institution in the fall semester as compared to 36.2% who summer swirl only. McCormick (2003) identified that the primary reasons for student swirl include trial enrollment, special program enrollment, supplemental enrollment, rebounding enrollment, and independent enrollment.

Transfer Shock

The term transfer shock was first used by Hills (1965) to refer to the drop in academic performance upon entering the baccalaureate institution and the sometimes minimal recovery that resulted in challenges to achieving academic success. Hills (1965) further suggested that this phenomenon takes place as a result of academic and social adjustment concerns in the new environment. Transfer shock affects, to some degree, a large percentage of the transfer student population.

The earliest studies regarding transfer student performance dates back to the 1920s when junior college transfer students were studied at Stanford University (Eels, 1927). The result of this early study showed that the junior college transfer students performed better than their native counterparts at the completion of the first quarter at Stanford (Eels, 1927). Not all studies, however, demonstrated the same findings. In 1965, Knoell and Medsker studied 7,243 transfer students and discovered a first term grade point average drop of 0.3 points at the completion of the first semester in comparison to native peers at the senior institution. This study was later supported by Diaz (1992) who in a meta-study consisting of 62 studies that reported the extent of GPA change among transfer students, discovered that 79% of students experience transfer shock of up to 0.5 point drop or less and 67% of those students would recover academically within the first year.

Contrary to these findings, some researchers have indicated that the transfer experience may also either increase, or have no impact on, a student's academic performance. Nickens (1972) found that some transfer students experience an increase in GPA after transfer, while Martorana and Williams (1954) found that students who transfer experience no impact on academic performance. This is further supported by Ishitani (2008) who asserts that not all transfer students experience transfer shock, and in fact, a number of factors including number of earned credits or an earned credential may lessen the likelihood or severity of this experience (Cejda et al., 1998; Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Among the most recent literature is support for the fact that transfer students at baccalaureate institutions do indeed experience transfer shock but tend to recover

academically before the conclusion of their first year at the senior institution (Cejda et al., 1998; Diaz, 1992; Ishitani, 2008; Laanan, 2001). Laanan (2004) argues that this experience is to be reasonably expected as students navigate new environments, new peers and professors and new expectations, yet Grites (2013) also emphasizes the importance of transfer students making the necessary adjustments during their time of transition to manage and cope in the new environment in order to facilitate their ability to succeed.

Transfer Student Engagement

Numerous studies have been conducted and theories developed that articulate the significant relationship between student engagement and an increased likelihood of persistence and academic success (Kuh, 2003, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1988, 1993). Kuh (2009) defines engagement as “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college” (p. 683). While this practice is one critical element of student success, researchers have found that transfer students, in comparison to native students at the senior institution, are more likely to be less engaged (Ishitani & McKitrick, 2012; Lester et al., 2013; McCormick et al., 2009). One potential reason for the lower levels of engagement are that transfer students view academic and social engagement differently with a greater emphasis on connections with faculty, academic content, and addressing learning challenges (Lester et al., 2013). This ideal was also supported by Miller (2013) who also found that one of the greatest challenges experienced by transfer students was the lack of engagement or assimilation into the new environment which may stem from their additional responsibilities outside of academia and their time of entrance to the senior institution. Though it is widely

known that student engagement, especially in high impact practices, defined as “enriching educational experiences that can be life changing” (p.15) are vital to student persistence, and success, they do require a significant effort outside of the classroom, and as a result, the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research (2018) aligned with previous research findings demonstrating that transfer students, regardless of type, were less likely than traditional-aged, full-time students to engage in these experiences.

Transfer Receptive Culture

Eggleston and Laanan (2001) found that baccalaureate institutions are not doing their part to meet the unique needs of transfer students and that more must be done to support this population as their numbers continue to grow exponentially across the nation. This statement is further supported by Jain et al. (2016) who argue that campuses who do not collaborate produce deficiencies in their outreach, access, and retention practices for transfer students. The responsibility for transfer student success is a collaborative effort between students and administrators (Jackson & Laanan, 2015). Also critical to the success of this population is an understanding that efforts to include and acclimate transfer students to the senior institution must happen before they first arrive on campus (Jain et al., 2011). To support the facilitation of this ideal, Jain et al., (2011) established the concept of the transfer receptive culture and emphasized that these practices require the efforts of the entire campus community, not just a few voluntary participants. This cultural perspective is composed of two parts, (1) a transfer sending culture and (2) a transfer receiving culture, which taken together, encompasses five tenets and drives the focus on one’s ability to succeed *because*, not *despite*, the fact that they are transfer students (Jain et al., 2011).

A transfer sending culture is described as one in which an institution both supports and prioritizes the transfer function (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). This aspect of the culture is housed on the community college side and encourages administrators to provide and support both technology and resource infrastructures as well as rigorous curriculums that prepares the student with the information and skills required to succeed at a senior institution (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). These practices encompass the first two tenets of the transfer receptive culture ideal, (1) “establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 58) and (2) “provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complimenting the community college mission of transfer” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 58). While these pretransfer concepts largely focus on the vertical transfer student, the post-transfer tenets and defined receptive culture are more inclusive to the transfer student population as a whole.

The transfer receptive culture drives the focus on the baccalaureate institution and the programs, initiatives, and supports they provide to empower students to transfer and succeed (Jain et al., 2011). This aspect of the culture manifests the true partnership required to support students in this critical period of transition. The post-transfer concepts build upon the ideals established prior to transferring and are intended to support the student in their endeavor at the senior institution. The final three tenets culminating the holistic view and expectations of a transfer receptive culture include, (1) “offer financial aid and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional/reentry transfer students where they are stimulated to achieve at high levels” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 58), (2)

“acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 58) and (3) “create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs and initiatives that can lead to further scholarship on transfer students” (Jain et al., 2011, p. 58). Viewed holistically, this cultural ideal supports the early acclimation and connections between the student and the new environment, which theorists have maintained as a critical component to student success.

Theoretical Frameworks

Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure

Tinto’s (1988) Stages of Student Departure help to explain why students leave their first institution of higher education and provides strategies for administrators at receiving institutions to employ when receiving these students. Tinto (1988) points out that much of the past research exploring this concept has been focused on the retention or departure of students between the first and second year and only implicitly assumes that the rationalized process persists over the duration of the student’s entire college career.

Tinto’s (1988) Stages of Student Departure are built largely on the framework of Arnold Van Gennep, a Dutch social anthropologist who researched the process of membership in societies with a heightened focus on the stability of communities and societies across time. Like Van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* that articulates the movement of individuals from childhood to adulthood through a series of three phases – separation, transition, and incorporation, Tinto’s Stages of Student Departure also utilizes these same phases and explores the process of persistence as students move between communities (Tinto, 1988). In a broader sense, the movement between communities, for transfer

students, may be symbolic of institutions. The first stage, separation, requires the disassociation from previous environments and communities in order to later assimilate to a new culture and practices (Tinto, 1988). The second stage, transition, encourages the interaction of individuals with their potential new communities; these engagements are not yet indicative of membership in the group (Tinto, 1988). Instead, individuals are learning about the norms and expectations required to obtain and fulfill membership in their new community. Finally, the third stage, incorporation, occurs when the individual understands and exhibits their new role in relationship to the new community (Tinto, 1988).

Tinto (1988) associates Van Gennep's stages to the process that students go through as they transition from high school to college; however, the same conceptual framework, built on a foundation of engagement, can be utilized with transfer students as well. The process of separation is stressful, and the magnitude by which a student is required to separate from past communities may impact their college experience (Tinto, 1988). A vertical transfer student, for example, may only be required to disassociate with previous classes, clubs, or organizations at their former institution, whereas a lateral transfer student may experience for the first time leaving their home and families, their local community, and their former institution.

After the student has disassociated from their previous institutional community, the transition stage begins to take place. Tinto (1988) suggests that this is not an immediate process and that while many students can cope with and address the stress during this time of change, a number of students are unable to do so and as a result, withdraw from the new institution. To increase the likelihood of students persisting at

their new institution and succeeding, institutions and administrators are encouraged to implement the programs and supports necessary to engage and involve students early, leading to their successful acclimation and commitment to the new environment (Jain et al., 2011; Kuh, 2003, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Once an individual has successfully navigated the phases of separation and transition, the final rite of passage is incorporation into the new community (Tinto, 1988). This phase is marked by the need for individuals to adopt norms and practices that are symbolic of understanding their new membership role in the group (Tinto, 1988). Due to the fact that this is a socially driven process, in a collegiate setting, one could expect students to establish relationships with faculty, staff and peers; however, if these relationships are not formed, the process is not complete, isolation may occur, and students may choose to depart from the institution.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg (1981) developed a framework under which all types of transitions can be evaluated and possible interventions employed to better understand an individual's network and perception of self as a result of changes experienced throughout the lifecycle. Schlossberg's theory attempts to validate that all people experience change but that there are a number of factors which influence an individual's ability to work through that process and the resulting outcomes (Schlossberg, 2011). Formatively, Schlossberg seeks to answer the question, "how can we understand and help adults as they face the inevitable but nonpredictable challenges of life" (1981, p. 3). This theory can be utilized to explain almost all of the transitions that are experienced throughout the lifespan,

including the changes that students must endure as they move between postsecondary institutions.

Schlossberg opens this theory by defining transitions as “an event or nonevent result[ing] in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (1981, p. 5). Schlossberg further proposes that this encompasses not only obvious changes but also subtle and unexpected events (Schlossberg, 1981). Moreover, the theory explains that transitions fall among one of three types: anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevent transitions and that an individual’s ability to adapt to the transition experience is also impacted by one of three factors: characteristics of the transition, characteristics of the environment, and characteristics of the individual (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011). Anticipated transitions are those events that are expected to happen, for example, a community college student deciding to transfer to a senior institution because their education goal is completion of a bachelor’s degree (Schlossberg, 2011). Contrarily, unexpected transitions are those events that are not planned for, and the resulting actions may be considered more reactive (Schlossberg, 2011). In the context of transfer students, this may be reflective of a student whose prior institution has shut down and they move to another institution with the same program, or more commonly, for example, a student who returns to attend school closer to home while also caring for a sick or elderly parent. Finally, Schlossberg defines nonevent transitions as events that can be expected to have a possibility of happening, but are never actualized (Schlossberg, 2011). Again, in the context of transfer students, this could be the belief that they will be admitted into a highly selective program at a top-tier school only to learn that their initial plan is no

longer a realistic option at this time because they have been denied admission. It is commonly said that one sees the world from where they sit, and as such, it is possible, and also quite likely, that each of these situations could be seen and experienced differently by different students.

Once an individual has accepted that transition occurred, Schlossberg suggest that the next phase is adaptation, or, “the process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (1981, p. 7). In part, the ability to adapt is dependent upon the individual’s perception and the true reality of the new experience (Schlossberg, 1981). In adapting to change, Schlossberg (1984) proposed a four-factor model (Figure 4), commonly known as the 4 S’s, which influence an individual’s ability to cope with the new situation or environment. These four factors are: situation, self, support, and strategy (Schlossberg, 2011).

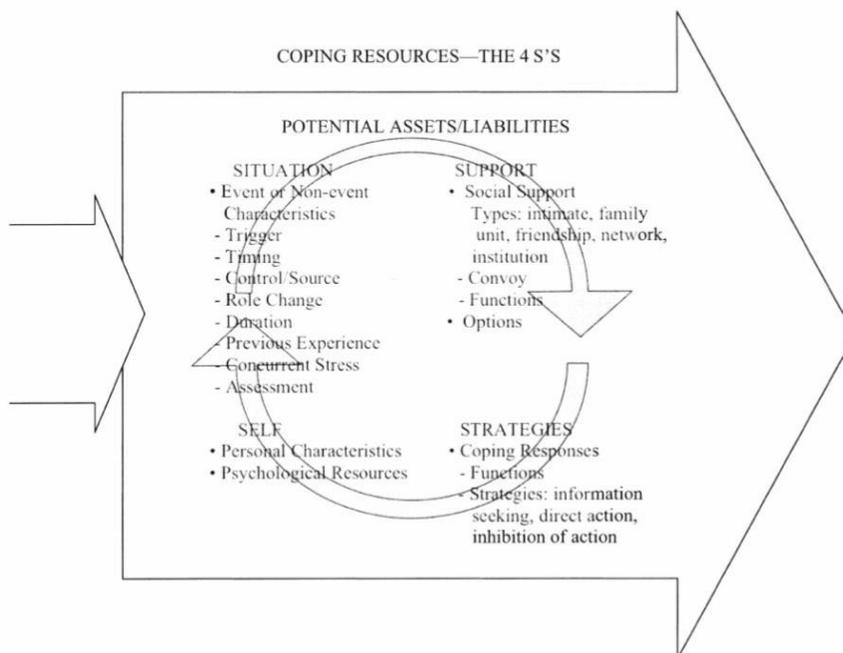


Figure 4. 4 S factor model (Goodman et al., 1995, p. 56).

Situation refers to the individual's conditions at the time of transition and explores the relationship between outcomes and triggers, timing of the transition, control, role change, duration of the transition, previous experience under similar conditions, concurrent stressors and assessment of responsibility for the transition (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 2011). Self encompasses an individual's inner beliefs about their ability to navigate a transitional experience (Schlossberg, 2011). Evans et al. (1998) articulate that these characteristics fall into two categories, (1) personal and demographic characteristics and (2) psychological resources. The categories work together to depict how an individual views their life and their ability to copy through times of change (Evans et al., 1998; Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 2011). Support is defined as the social networks inclusive of intimate partners, family, friends, institutions, and communities that aid and encourage an individual during transition (Goodman et al., 2006). The final influential S factor is strategies, and is further subdivided into three categories of strategies that, (1) alter the situation, (2) seek to identify and control the situation, and (3) help to cope with the aftermath of the transition's occurrence (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 2011). Evans et al. (1998) further articulates that the coping strategies fall into four categories: seeking information, taking, or preventing actions, and changes in behavioral patterns or expressions. Schlossberg (2011) argues, however, that to cope effectively, each of the factors should be considered interconnected and that the flexibilities, assets, and liabilities amongst them influences each other and the individual's overall ability to adapt in a period of transition and change.

In applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to transfer students, it is critical to understand the vastly unique traits of this population. Unlike native freshman, many transfer students bring life experiences with them that shapes their perceptions and abilities to navigate this transitional experience; however, because they are on a new campus, many students "feel like a freshman again" (Townsend & Barefoot, 2008, p.77) in their lack of understanding about their new institutions functionality and are faced with similar challenges of learning to navigate and succeed in a new environment (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Townsend & Barefoot, 2008).

Because of these differences that cannot be eliminated or controlled for, the most influential role that a college or university will play is that of support. In addition, researchers support the notion that baccalaureate institutions have an obligation to implement the programs and services necessary to teach strategies that empower these students to succeed (Jain et al., 2011).

Student Transition Programs

First Year Experience Courses

What happens in the first year of college typically lays the foundational impacts for future student success (Tinto, 1993). Though the needs of a transfer student are different from that of a native freshman at the university, researchers show that transfer students share the experience of being a freshman twice- once at the initial institution and a second time at the transfer institution, and that their high attrition rates may be associated with factors that similarly impact native students (Johnson, 1987; Townsend & Barefoot, 2008). One approach that more than 74% of baccalaureate institutions have employed is that of a freshman seminar course ("2012-2013 National Survey," n.d.). The

overarching goal of freshman seminar courses has been to develop college-level academic skills, to provide orientation to campus, and to mitigate the barriers or challenges of acclimating to the new environment (Mamrick, 2005).

Research on the impact of first-year seminar, or extended orientation courses, has shown promise with regards to increasing engagement and achievement of student success. Among students who participated in a first-year seminar course, participants were shown to participate more frequently in campus activities and to have a higher number of out of class interactions with faculty and staff on their campuses (Porter & Swing, 2006). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also found that students who participated in first-year seminar courses demonstrated higher levels of persistence at the university. These increased levels of achievement may be related to the concepts of student development theorists, whereby those students who exert greater levels of physical and psychological efforts during the transition process are likely to have a stronger institutional commitment linked to more positive outcomes and academic success.

Transfer Student Seminars

Though a limited number of documented research studies currently exist to demonstrate the efficacy of such programs on baccalaureate campuses, researchers have suggested the utilization of transfer transitional programs, similar to that of first-year seminars throughout the transition process (Grites, 2013; Jamelske, 2008).

Structure. Flaga (2006) suggests that the transition of students between the community college and baccalaureate institutions falls within the realm of five dimensions: Learning Resources, Connecting, Familiarity, Negotiating, and Integrating. Flaga (2006) also suggests the development of orientation seminar courses utilizing three

different models to assist in the navigation of the transition process. First, a pre-transfer orientation course may be taught on the community college campus with the emphasis being on early awareness of campus resources at the baccalaureate institution (Flaga, 2006). Second, as an alternative to teaching the course at the community college, this may be taught on the university campus with the goal of increasing both the awareness and utilization of resources, and also facilitating the processes of connecting with individuals at the baccalaureate institution and gaining familiarity with the campus earlier (Flaga, 2006). Finally, Flaga (2006) suggests the development of a post-transfer course to take place over the student's first semester at the baccalaureate institution aiming to facilitate the five-stage transition process in a smoother and more time efficient manner.

Grites (2013) further supports Flaga's notion of the importance of a transfer seminar course at the baccalaureate institution stating, "as the length and the appropriate timing of information and programs are critical to community college transfer student success, the academic course format provides the optimal delivery of such efforts" (p. 67). Grites and Farina (2012) emphasize the importance of faculty instructors being keenly aware and supportive of the difficult transitions that transfer students experience and that instructors be required to integrate transitional aspects (study skills, career planning, engagement in student life, introduction to student support services, etc.) into their presently offered courses. The strength of this approach is the pre-existence of curriculum and therefore no added financial burdens to the institution by way of faculty costs, curriculum/materials development and utilization expenses. Further, Grites (2013) articulates the positive outcomes of the course provided through student feedback "familiarity with the institution, an understanding of the curriculum, policies, and

procedures; and made transfer students feel more welcome as a result of being associated with other transfer students during their transition” (Grites, 2013, p. 67).

Relevant Studies. Of the limited, published research that measuring the impact of a transfer seminar course, three prominent studies were performed and analyzed at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, the University of Maryland at Baltimore County, and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. At Richard Stockton College, researchers utilized Wawrzynski and Sedlacek’s Transfer Student Survey to collect data from 328 students seeking to address the questions of (1) “What impact did the transfer seminar have on selected students at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey?,” (2) “Is there a significant change in college goals/outcomes based on participating in the transfer seminar at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey?,” and (3) “Is there a significant change in the use of study strategies based on participating in the transfer seminar at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey?” (Grites & Farina, 2012, p. 10). Utilizing a paired sample *t*-test methodology to determine the impact of the course, Grites and Farina (2012) found positive change as a result of participating in the course on the overall adjustment to the new institution. There were no significant changes in student goals/outcomes based on course participation, however, there were statistically significant changes with respect to study habits (Grites & Farina, 2012).

In smaller scale qualitatively based studies, students reported similar experiences and outcomes with their participation in a transfer seminar course. At the University of Maryland- Baltimore County, 23 students reported greater knowledge of career exploration, academic assistance, and skills in structured writing, and 95% of student participants indicated a better understanding of their abilities to handle academic

responsibilities as a result of their participation in a transfer seminar course (Lee et al., 2012).

In two similar, smaller scale studies at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington (UNCW), similar results were found among participants who enrolled in and completed UNI 201-Transfer Seminar during the 2013-2014 academic year. Among Fall 2013 participants, more than 90% reported an increased level of confidence about their ability to communicate, build relationships with faculty and staff, and to obtain information about majors and careers (Adams & Curtis, 2014). Eighty four percent of students indicated a smoother transition to UNCW as a result of taking the course (Adams & Curtis, 2014). Among the Spring 2014 participants, 100% of students reported increased abilities in the areas of understanding academic requirements, knowledge of campus organizations and involvement with them, developing relationships with other transfer students at UNCW, and communicating with UNCW faculty and staff (Adams & Curtis, 2014).

Additionally, similarly established programs have been identified at St. Mary's College of Maryland and the University of Central Florida, however, data has not been collected or analyzed to measure the impacts of such programs (St. Mary's College of Maryland, n.d.; University of Central Florida, n.d.).

Summary of Literature Review

This chapter has explored the historical and present-day trends of transfer students and addresses the critical need for culture and programs to be implemented to improve student outcomes. Student transfer is a rapidly growing trend across campuses, and many transfer students experience challenges related to transfer shock, minimal engagement,

and unwelcoming environments that inhibit their ability to succeed post-transfer. Though vertical transfer is conceived to be the most predominant route of student transfer, research shows that students are indeed moving in many different directions and for a broad scope of reasons. Because of this, it is imperative to understand the challenges which may arise as a result of student movement.

As students learn to navigate their transition experience, Tinto's Stages of Student Departure outlines the phases (separation, transition, and incorporation) that students must go through to successfully integrate into the new community. Tinto also explores the consequences of failure to move through this cycle including isolation, withdrawal, and departure from the community. Schlossberg's Transition Theory, when integrated with Tinto's phases, provides an understanding of the resources, specifically emphasizing support and strategies- available to help students cope during the period of transition.

Holistically, the university community and its leaders play a critical role in employing the supports necessary to empower transfer students to succeed. Student success is largely dependent on engagement and integration with the environment, and one promising practice supporting these outcomes is freshman seminar courses. Though the needs of a transfer student will differ from native freshman, the impact of such similarly styled courses have only minimally been investigated to examine the potential outcomes as a result of participation in a transfer seminar course.

The following chapter will address the methodology to be utilized in investigating if there is a significant difference in student outcomes (cumulative grade point average and rate of persistence) based on an individual's (non)participation in a transfer seminar course.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Of the millions of students who enroll in colleges and universities across the United States, on average, approximately one third of these students will transfer to another institution at least once, and almost 45% of transfer students will transfer between institutions on more than one occasion (Shapiro et al., 2015). The transfer of students between institutions is a time of both excitement and growth; however, for a large number of students, this is also a time of great challenge. Many transfer students experience transfer shock; the initial drop in academic performance followed by nominal levels of recovery that make succeeding in their educational pursuits more difficult (Hills, 1965). In an effort to improve outcomes for this population of students, institutions across the U.S. are examining innovative programming and strategies to mitigate the effects of transfer shock and foster a more seamless transitional experience between colleges and universities.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a transfer seminar course focused on fostering the intellectual and social transition of transfer students to the institution by increasing involvement in campus life and orienting students to available resources designed to facilitate academic achievement. This chapter articulates the epistemology/methodology, research design and the rationale for the selected approach. Further, the researcher's positionality is discussed in addition to the strategies utilized to protect human subjects. The remainder of the chapter will describe the context of the study including the research setting, sampling procedures, data collection techniques, discussion of the variables, statistical analysis procedures, validity, and reliability.

Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the current research study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of a matched sample of students, defined by age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution who enrolled and those who did not enroll in a transfer seminar course during their first semester of enrollment at a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeastern United States?
2. Is there a significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester or at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?
3. Is there a significant difference in rate of persistence from the first to second semester or the first to second year, post-transfer, for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

Because of the nature of research question one, providing descriptive statistics, a hypothesis was not required for this question. Contrarily, research questions two and three explored the relationship between independent and dependent variables and, therefore, required hypotheses. The following hypotheses were used to guide this study:

H₁1: There will be a statistically significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who complete the transfer seminar course in comparison to a matched sample of students who do not complete the transfer seminar course.

H₁₂: There will be a statistically significant difference in semester one to semester two and year one to year two persistence rates at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who complete the transfer seminar course in comparison to a matched sample of students who do not complete the transfer seminar course.

Methodology/Epistemology/Research Paradigm/Design and Rationale

This study utilized a quantitative, quasi-experimental methodology using propensity score matching to determine if students at a large, four-year, public institution who participated in a transfer seminar course exhibited higher grade point averages and higher rates of persistence than did non-participants. Mertens (2015) states that a randomized study is not feasible in cases where when independent variables should not be manipulated due to ethical considerations, therefore making a truly experimental design not possible. In this study students self-selected into the transfer course, and the treatment intervention, (defined as the one-semester, 15-week, 3-credit hour graded course) was not manipulated by the researcher, therefore making it necessary to use the quasi-experimental design.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) describe quantitative research as “an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables” (p. 4). This research study was aimed at testing the theories of Tinto (1975, 1988, 1993) and Schlossberg (1981, 1984, 2011) to evaluate if there was a relationship between student participation in an interventional treatment (a transfer seminar course) and student outcomes (cumulative grade point average and rate of persistence). The major characteristics of quantitative research are: that it is a “systematic investigation of a social phenomena using statistical or numerical data,” it “involves measurement and assumes

that the phenomena under study can be measured,” and, “it sets out to analyze data for trends and relationships” (Watson, 2014, p. 44). In short, Watson (2014) states that “measures are made, analysis is applied, and conclusions are drawn” (p. 44). Given the measurability and intention to analyze dependent and independent variables in the current study to draw conclusions about the impact of a transfer seminar course on student outcomes, the quantitative research approach was an appropriate fit. More specifically, the researcher utilized a quasi-experimental, quantitative research approach, which White and Sabarwal (2014) suggest is appropriate for the analysis of retrospective interventions.

Quasi-experimental designs are a quantitative methodology most commonly found within the post-positivist research paradigm due largely in part to the significance of the quantitative procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Mertens, 2015). The post-positivist paradigm reflects “the need to identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes, such as those found in experiments” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 6). In the current study, the research aimed to investigate this concept by measuring the relationship, if any, between participation in a transfer seminar course and student outcomes. The primary strength of this method is the ability to study naturally existing groups without introducing potentially ethical concerns that may arise from random assignments (White & Sabarwal, 2014). In contrast, the limitations to this research approach include the inability to compare to baseline data because the analysis takes place after an intervention has been completed, and conclusions drawn surrounding causality cannot be fully established because the results are commonly considered more disputable than truly randomized experiments (White & Sabarwal, 2014).

Researcher's Role/Positionality

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) assert that ethical concerns arise across all types of research, and it is of critical importance for researchers to adhere to both procedural ethics and “ethics in practice” (p. 263). Further, they suggest that reflexivity and positionality is a process of reflection on both the generation and application of knowledge (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). To understand potential impact of positionality, it is first important to understand the identity, insights, and perspective of the researcher conducting the study, and then to manage these perspectives to facilitate the performance of a neutrally conducted and analyzed study.

In the current study, the researcher was an academic advisor whose duties included advising and classroom instruction to incoming transfer students at the institution where the researcher was employed. It is important to note, however, that the researcher did not provide instruction in the particular course analyzed in this study. Furthermore, the researcher coordinated and supported transfer initiatives including new transfer student orientation, individualized and group prospective student presentations, and transfer credit review. The researcher understands and appreciates the unique identity of each student including prior institutional experience, reasons for transferring, and academic goals. On the basis of personal and professional experiences, the researcher identified as a transfer advocate and consistently sought strategies to minimize the challenges and improve the student experience. With respect to the current study, the researcher's role was merely that of observer whereby the participants voluntarily opted to participate or not to participate in a transfer seminar course and the researcher utilized

secondary data to observe and analyze outcomes, trends, and potential relationships between variables.

Prior to joining the current institution, the researcher spent one year at a private institution facilitating orientation programs for new transfer students. As a higher education professional, the researcher is committed to enabling all students to succeed. The researcher maintains a professional interest in understanding the challenges and needs of the transfer student population and in evaluating the outcomes of this intervention as a means to inform practice and learn how to implement similar programming to impact academic and social integration leading to higher levels of student success.

In addition to professional experience, the researcher was an undergraduate transfer student and experienced many of the same challenges that studies have demonstrated as common to this population. The researcher's experience as a transfer student, coupled with the close work with this population and the desire to empower transfer students to achieve academic success, were contributing factors to this research study.

Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to conducting this research study, the researcher sought and obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the institution from which data was obtained for the purposes of analysis. All data provided by the institution was de-identified; as a result, the researcher did not have access to student names, identification numbers, or other potentially identifying information. The information provided to the researcher included transcript data inclusive of cumulative grade point average, instructor

of record and grade earned in the transfer seminar course as well as college record information, including age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred into the receiving institution. All data utilized was maintained and secured in a password protected file only available to the researcher to further maintain confidentiality.

Context of the Study

Setting

This study was conducted at a four-year, large public institution in the Southeast United States. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions in Higher Education (2017) indicates that the school is a public, four-year, more selective, higher transfer in, doctoral university with a balance of arts/sciences and pre-professional undergraduate programs. The institution is known to have a selective admission policy accepting 62% of applicants. The university boasts seven degree granting colleges in addition to a graduate college and offers more than 171 majors in 77 bachelor's degree programs, 65 master's degree programs, and 24 doctoral degree programs.

According to 2019 data, the institution enrolled more than 29,600 students including 24,070 undergraduates and 5,545 graduate students. Institutional records reflect that 37% of students identify as a minority (16% African American, 9% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 4% Multi-Racial, and 2% International), 60% of the student body identifies as Caucasian, and 3% of the student body did not have a known race indicated. The gender ratio at the institution is relatively balanced with 51% men and 49% women. Additionally, students represent 47 states and 105 countries throughout the world. Academically, transfer students at the institution maintain year one to year two

persistence at a rate of 80.2%. Four and six-year graduation rates, respectively, are 58% and 64%. The persistence rate of non-transfer students from year one to year two is currently 83.3% while their four- and six-year graduation rates are 29% and 54% respectively. While transfer students do differ in many facets from a native freshman, there remains a concern surrounding their timely progression towards graduation when persistence rates remain lower than first time students. Though the difference in persistence rates between these two groups of students is small, this is indicative of a need to enhance processes and resources to further increase transfer student success.

When examining the transfer student population at the institution, 44% of the undergraduate student body identified as transfer students. Of these students, 62.2% transfer from in-state community colleges, and 11.3% transfer from in-state, baccalaureate granting institutions. Another 5.7% transfer from foreign institutions, 4.8% from in-state, private baccalaureate institutions, and 3.1% of transfers come from out-of-state baccalaureate institutions.

All newly admitted transfer students were given the option to enroll in the transfer seminar course in which a range of three to six sections were offered each semester in a face-to-face format. No virtual or online sections of the course were offered. The seminar style course is a three-credit hour course designed to introduce students to the campus, increase student involvement in the campus community, and refine the necessary skills to achieve academic and personal success at the new institution.

Sample Techniques and Criteria

The population for this study included all new transfer students to the institution between the Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 semesters. The sample participants for this study

included 412 post-transfer students who enrolled in the transfer seminar courses between the Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 semesters. A comparison group of 412 students who first transferred to the institution between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 was obtained utilizing propensity score matching. Table 3 displays the number of transfer seminar course sections offered and the total course enrollment by Fall cohort.

Table 3
Total Course Sections and Total Enrollment by Fall Cohort

Cohort	Total Number of Sections	Enrollment Across Sections
Fall 2013	3	51
Fall 2014	4	64
Fall 2015	4	68
Fall 2016	4	48
Fall 2017	4	65
Fall 2018	6	118

The sample for this study was considered a convenience sample because participants were not randomly selected from the population of all transfer students. Due to the fact that participants were not randomly assigned to a treatment or non-treatment condition, quasi-experimental research utilizing propensity score matching was used to determine differences in the groups (Mertens, 2015). The sample groups were created by utilizing data provided by the university's institutional research office. The data was subdivided into two groups, an experimental group and one control group. The experimental group consisted of students who enrolled between Fall 2013 to Fall 2018 semesters and participated in the transfer seminar course. The control group was made up of students whose first enrollment took place at the institution between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 but opted to not enroll in the transfer seminar course. All data provided for both the

experimental and control groups was de-identified as a means to maintain confidentiality and privacy protections to human research subjects.

Propensity Score Matching

Rosenbaum and Rubin (1983) define propensity scores as “the conditional probability of assignment to a particular treatment given a vector of observed covariates” (p. 41), and they suggest that utilization of this approach in research aides in reducing bias resulting from covariates. For the purpose of this research, participants were matched on the covariates of demographic characteristics including race, and gender, in addition to transfer type, and number of credit hours transferred into the receiving institution. To obtain propensity scores for participants, a logistic regression was conducted that sought to match individuals on the basis of covariates with the aim being to eliminate the differences between participants in each group. As a result, those individuals studied should only have differed on the basis of the independent variable, in this study, that is, enrollment or non-enrollment in the transfer seminar course.

There are several possible algorithms which can be used when matching pairs or clusters; however, for the purposes of this study, the researcher utilized nearest neighbor matching with replacement. Caliendo and Kopeinig (2008) state that when allowing for replacement, the matches exhibit an improved quality that also reflects a greater decrease in potential selection bias. Once matches were established, a post-matching, paired samples *t*-test was performed to confirm that there was no longer a statistically significant difference between the newly formed experimental and control groups.

Data Collection Techniques

The data for the current study was obtained from the organization's Institutional Research office. To obtain these data, the researcher completed an IRB request to maintain participant protection and then submitted a written request to the Office of Institutional Research to obtain the requisite data for this study. The data was contributed by two offices across campus: Admissions (all demographic information) and the Registrar (undergraduate GPA, grade earned in the transfer seminar course, instructor of record, and persistence rates). The information applicable to this study consisted of six cohorts from Fall 2013 and Fall 2018. All students included in the sample were new transfer students in their first semester at the institution.

The archival data provided to the researcher, for the purposes of secondary analysis, was drawn from Banner, an integrated system that allows institutions to obtain and maintain information related to students, alumni, financial and employee records (Ellucian Banner, 2019). The data obtained from Banner, during the Spring 2020 semester after receiving IRB approval, included transfer seminar enrollment or non-enrollment, instructor of record and grade earned in the course for experimental group members, cumulative grade point averages, and matriculation data to evaluate persistence rates.

Observed Variables

This study evaluated the relationship between academic outcomes including cumulative GPA at the end of the first semester post-transfer and again at the end of the first year post-transfer and rate of persistence from semester one to semester two and year one to year two post-transfer. Participation was in an intervention (a transfer seminar

course), aimed at fostering the intellectual and social transition of transfer students to the institution by increasing involvement in campus life and orienting students to available resources designed to facilitate academic achievement.

The Transfer Seminar Course

The transfer seminar course began being offered on a consistent, semester basis beginning in Fall 2013. The intervention was to be completed in the first semester of matriculation at the new institution, a time period that Tinto (1993) suggested as critical in the academic and social integration of students to an environment leading to further institutional commitment and academic success.

The course description, housed in the university's undergraduate catalog, indicates that the purpose of the course was "to assist with the intellectual and social transition to the institution for transfer students by increasing the involvement of students in the intellectual life of the campus; providing an orientation to the resources available to students; and promoting problem solving and writing skills." The course utilized a common syllabus across sections and outlined the following anticipated student learning objectives:

1. To foster a safe, positive, and supportive environment that helps transfer students develop a sense of belonging to the campus community.
2. To familiarize students with the institution's campus resources.
3. To help students develop study skills and strategies essential for academic success.
4. To create a context in which students clarify their personal values and career goals.
5. To develop critical thinking, written, and oral communication skills.

6. To foster an understanding of and sensitivity to differences in race, culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and physical ability, as reflected in our University community and the world at large.

The topics addressed and the assigned readings were identical across each section; however, as a result of academic freedom, the activities utilized, and pedagogical approaches applied by each instructor may have created variability in outcomes by section or cohort. All sections of the transfer seminar were delivered in traditional, face-to-face instructional format across standard 16-week semesters. The course was facilitated by professional academic advising staff members across diverse units and met either one or two times per week for 75 minutes per class session. The Appendix presents a full syllabus for the course.

Variables

The current research study examined independent and dependent variables while controlling for extraneous variables. The extraneous variables in this study included age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred into the receiving institution, and were selected based on previous research conducted by Tinto (1993) which suggested that these factors potentially influence a student's outcomes. Table 4 depicts the extraneous variables, levels of measurement, and possible values utilized in the current study. By controlling for these variables, the researcher anticipated more accurately addressing research questions two and three to determine if there was a relationship between one independent and two dependent variables.

Table 4
Extraneous Variables

Extraneous Variables	Level of Measurement	Possible Values
Age	Ratio	16+
Race ¹	Categorical	African American, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, Other
Gender ²	Categorical	Men, Women
Transfer Type	Categorical	Transfer From Community College, Transfer From Baccalaureate Institution
Pre-Transfer GPA	Interval	0.000 – 4.000
Number of Credits Transferred Into the Receiving Institution	Interval	0 – 182

Though the current study was not truly experimental in design, researchers still suggest that when utilizing a quasi-experimental approach, there is a certain level of control still attainable in selecting the group to which the experimental group will be compared (Shadish et al., 2002). To establish similarly comparative groups, and to control for the extraneous variables, the current study utilized propensity score matching, as described above, to create a balanced dataset for analysis after the intervention was administered.

¹ The possible values for the variable of race are listed based on the available options for a student to select when submitting their application to the institution being studied.

² The possible values for the variable of gender are listed based on the available options for a student to select when submitting their application to the institution being studied.

The independent variable in this study was participation in the transfer seminar course. Table 5 displays the independent variable, levels of measurement, and possible values utilized in the current study.

Table 5
Independent Variable

Independent Variable	Level of Measurement	Possible Values
Participation in Transfer Seminar Course	Categorical	Yes, No

The dependent variables in this study were cumulative GPA at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year post-transfer and persistence rate from semester one to semester two and year one to year two, post-transfer. The dependent variables were studied separately to determine any potential relationships with the transfer seminar course. Table 6 displays the dependent variables, levels of measurement, and possible values utilized in the current study.

Table 6
Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables	Level of Measurement	Possible Values
Cumulative GPA	Interval	0.000 – 4.000
Persistence	Categorical	Yes, No

Statistical Analysis Procedures

Data collected in the current study was entered into SPSS software to conduct statistical analyses addressing each of the identified research questions. Data was subdivided into two groups, those students who completed the transfer seminar and those who did not complete the transfer seminar. By employing propensity score matching to

create balanced groups, Tinto's (1993) model of student departure was then employed in this quasi-experimental study to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in student outcomes based on participation in the course intervention as a means to foster academic and social integration leading to institutional commitment and student success. All data evaluated in the current study was analyzed at the 0.05 significance level.

To address research question one, descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were utilized to display the profile of student variables including age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred into the receiving institution.

To address research question two, independent samples *t*-tests were utilized to compare the transfer course groups on their GPAs at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year. Specifically, this test was conducted to evaluate the mean cumulative GPA for those who completed the transfer seminar and those who did not complete the transfer seminar to determine if there was statistical evidence demonstrating significantly different outcomes. The independent samples *t*-test was appropriate for use in this research question because the researcher sought to compare the means of two independent groups to evaluate the relationship, if any, between the independent and dependent variables.

To address research question three, chi-square analysis was used to compare the transfer groups with their rates of retention after the first semester and first year when measured as a binary (yes/no) variable. Specifically, the researcher sought to determine if the rate of persistence was dependent or independent of the participant's completion or

non-completion of the transfer seminar. The chi-square analysis was appropriate for use with this research question because it allowed for the comparison among two nominal variables to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between rate of persistence (0-100%) and transfer seminar affiliation (treatment or control group).

Internal and External Threats to Validity

When conducting quantitative research, it is important that the researcher considers the concepts of validity and reliability. Internal validity is explained as ensuring that differences, if any, in the dependent variable are as a result of the independent variable, and not potentially other influencing factors (Mertens, 2015). Similarly, reliability is defined as data collection consistency and “the extent to which instruments are free from error” (Mertens, 2015, p. 396). Strategic cautions were taken throughout the duration of the research in order to ensure the validity and reliability of this study.

The primary threat to the internal and external validity of the current study was presented in the form of selection bias. Because of the nonexperimental nature of this study in which participants were not randomly assigned to experimental or control groups, the potential existed that the differences in the dependent variables may stem from trait differences rather than directly as a result of the independent variable. While selection bias is commonly controlled for through the utilization of random assignment, because secondary data analysis does not allow for this approach, the researcher utilized propensity score matching to ensure the internal validity of the study to confirm, to the greatest extent possible, that differences in the dependent variable values were as a direct result of the independent variable, rather than alternative factors (Mertens, 2015; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

In addition to the primary threat, the potential for extraneous and confounding variables existed as an internal threat to impact student outcomes, therefore, causation cannot be established, and any potential correlations should be interpreted cautiously. Further, though the syllabi and readings are the same for each of the transfer seminar sections, because the instructor has academic freedom, the activities utilized, and pedagogical styles presented the potential for an instrumentation threat to internal validity.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following assumptions applied to this study:

1. Transfer students have completed at least 24 semester credit hours at a regionally accredited institution prior to transferring to the receiving institution.
2. All demographic information reported by the student (age, race, gender) during the admissions process is accurate.
3. Because secondary data analysis was utilized and data was obtained from an organizational office, it is assumed that the data was not altered, except to de-identify participant information prior to being provided to the researcher.
4. Students in the experimental group participated in the transfer seminar course under fully voluntary circumstances.

The following limitations had the potential to impact the study:

1. The utilization of a quasi-experimental, rather than truly experimental design, prevents the randomization of participants to experimental and control groups. As a result of this, there is a limitation in the inability to draw causal conclusions between the dependent and independent variables.

2. The utilization of a convenience sampling method prevents the results of the study from being generalized because doing so may threaten external validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
3. A broad range of factors have the potential to impact a student's cumulative grade point average and ability to persist. Though propensity score matching will be utilized to obtain similar groups, not every factor that influences a student's performance can be controlled for.
4. Numerous sections of the course being examined were facilitated by more than one instructor; though the course content is the same across all sections, teaching style and classroom structure may affect student outcomes.
5. Cumulative GPAs were utilized in this study. As such, cumulative GPA calculations include those students who were not retained and may impact the actual value of this variable.
6. This study included one student, in the matched samples, who graduated after the first semester post-transfer and an additional nine students who graduated after the first year post-transfer. These students were not counted in the retention rate from fall to spring and fall to fall and may impact the actual value of this variable in the study.

The following delimitations had the potential to impact this study:

1. The current study is delimited to one, four-year, large public institution in the Southeastern United States that is known to have a large, diverse by gender, undergraduate population (nearly balanced men to women). The institution maintains a more selective and higher transfer-in rate and a balance of arts/sciences and pre-professional undergraduate programs.

2. The data analyzed in this study were provided for a given time period between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 semesters, and therefore, the findings will also be delimited to this time period.
3. This study only examines data from one course at one institution, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Summary

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the impact of participation in a transfer seminar course focused on fostering the intellectual and social transition of transfer students to the institution by increasing involvement in campus life and orientating students to available resources designed to facilitate academic achievement. The quasi-experimental design was utilized to evaluate the relationship between the independent variable (participation) and the dependent variables (GPA and persistence rates). The selection of the quasi-experimental design allowed the researcher to compare treatment versus non-treatment cohorts without limiting the benefit of participation to select students.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this research was to measure the impact that a transfer seminar course had on transfer students grade point average and persistence rates. This chapter provides an overview of the research findings from the statistical analyses completed in the study. For the purpose of this study, propensity score matching was conducted utilizing R version 4.0.2 and all other data analyses in this study were conducted utilizing SPSS version 26. Statistical significance was determined at an alpha value of 0.05.

Participant Summary

Between 2013 and 2018, 17,214 students transferred into the institution under study during Fall semesters. To better understand the demographics of the transfer students in the population, descriptive statistics and frequency analyses were conducted. For comparison purposes, students in the transfer population were similar to those in the sample of participants who completed the transfer seminar course with the exception of age and pre-transfer GPA. A detailed description of the population demographics and characteristics is presented in Tables 7 through 11 and a breakdown of students based on demographic traits and pre-transfer characteristics of participants in the sample is displayed in Table 13.

Table 7 reflects the minimum and maximum ages of all transfer students in the population, in addition to the average age of the transfer student. Between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018, students who transferred to the institution ranged from 18 to 75 years of age, while the average transfer student was 27.46 years old.

Table 7
Age of Participants

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	17,214	18	75	27.46	6.693

Table 8 exhibits the total number of transfer students by race/ethnicity, in addition to the percentage of students by race/ethnicity in comparison to the overall transfer student population for the period between Fall 2013 and Fall 2018. The largest ethnicities reflected in the populations were White ($N = 9,326$), Black ($N = 3,426$), and Hispanic of Any Race ($N = 1,836$). All other ethnic groups reflected smaller percentages, less than 10% of the total population, including Asian ($N = 960$), Any 2 or More Non-Hispanic ($N = 766$), International ($N = 406$), American Indian ($N = 79$), and Pacific Islander ($N = 20$). Among the students in the total population, 395 individuals (2.3%) had an unknown race or ethnicity.

Table 8
Race/Ethnicity of Participants

Variables	N	Percent
American Indian	79	0.5
Any 2 or More Non-Hispanic	766	4.4
Asian	960	5.6
Black	3,426	19.9
Hispanic (Of Any Race)	1,836	10.7
International	406	2.4
Pacific Islander	20	0.1
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	395	2.3
White	9,326	54.2
Total	17,214	100.0

Table 9 reflects the volume and percentage of transfer students by gender for incoming Fall classes between 2013 and 2018. Women represented 49.7% ($N = 8,548$) of the total transfer student populations while men represented 50.3% ($N = 8,666$) of transfer students.

Table 9
Gender of Participants

Variables	N	Percent
Women	8,548	49.7
Men	8,666	50.3
Total	17,214	100.0

Table 10 exhibits the volume and percentage of transfer students based on the type of institution from which they transferred. The largest portion of students transferred from a community college, ($N = 11,661$) while 5,250 students transferred from another baccalaureate institution. The population also included 303 students that did not have a known type of institution from which they transferred.

Table 10
Transfer Type of Participants

Variables	N	Percent
Community College	11,661	67.7
Baccalaureate Institution	5,250	30.5
Unknown	303	1.8
Total	17,214	100.0

Table 11 demonstrates the minimum, maximum and mean GPAs for the total transfer student population for Fall semesters between 2013 and 2018. The minimum pre-

transfer GPA was 0.000 and the maximum pre-transfer GPA was 4.000. The average GPA for all incoming transfer students in this population was 2.744.

Table 11
GPA of Participants

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
GPA	17,214	.000	4.000	2.744	1.842

The total population ($N = 17,214$) included all transfer students who first enrolled at the receiving institution during the years of 2013 and 2018 in Fall semesters only. Of the 17,214 students, 434 students (2.5%) completed the transfer seminar course during their first semester of enrollment at the receiving institution, and 16,780 students (97.5%) did not complete the transfer seminar course. This information is reflected in Table 12.

Table 12
Transfer Seminar Participants and Non-Participants

Variables	N	Percent
Transfer Seminar Participants	434	2.5
Transfer Seminar Non-Participants	16,780	97.5
Total	17,214	100.0

The average GPA for the total population of students at the end of the first semester was 2.834 while the average GPA for the population at the end of the first year was 2.814. This information is reflected in Table 13.

Table 13
Grade Point Average of Transfer Student Population

Variables	GPA End of 1 st Semester	GPA End of 1 st Year
Grade Point Average	2.834 (0.93)	2.814 (0.87)

When the population (17,214 students) was broken down by gender and then again by racial and ethnic demographics, at the end of the first semester, the outcome variable of GPA was observed. Men in the total population of transfer students exhibited a mean GPA of 2.75 (SD = 0.92) at the end of the first semester while women exhibited a mean GPA of 2.92 (SD = 0.92). When broken down by demographic characteristics, international students exhibited the highest mean GPAs at 3.01 (SD = 0.80) followed by White students carrying a mean GPA of 2.97 (SD = 0.89). The remaining ethnic groups mean GPAs included Race/Ethnicity Unknown (M = 2.95, SD = 0.92), Asian (M = 2.87, SD = 0.86), American Indian (M = 2.78, SD = 1.01), Hispanic (M = 2.77, SD = 0.89), Biracial (M = 2.65, SD = 0.99), Black (M = 2.50, SD = 0.95), and Pacific Islander (M = 2.42, SD = 1.09).

When the population was broken down by gender and then again by race, at the end of the first year, the outcome variable of GPA was observed. At the end of the first year post-transfer, men exhibited a mean GPA of 2.73 (SD = 0.86) in comparison to the mean women's GPA of 2.90 (SD = 0.87). When observing mean GPAs by race at the end of the first year post transfer, international studies carried the highest mean GPA of 2.98 (SD = 0.75) followed by White students (M = 2.94, SD = 0.85), Race/Ethnicity Unknown (M = 2.91, SD = 0.87), American Indian (M = 2.89, SD = 0.93), Asian (M = 2.86, SD = 0.80), Hispanic (M = 2.75, SD = 0.83), Biracial (M = 2.64, SD = 0.93), Black (M = 2.50,

SD = 0.87), and Pacific Islander (M = 2.42, SD = 1.01). Table 14 presents the comparison of grade point average changes, on the basis of these characteristics at each time of measurement.

Table 14
Population Cumulative GPAs At End of First Semester and First Year

Variables	Cum_GPA End of 1 st Semester	Cum_GPA End of 1 st Year
Men	2.75 (0.92)	2.73 (0.86)
Women	2.92 (0.92)	2.90 (0.87)
American Indian	2.78 (1.01)	2.89 (0.93)
Asian	2.87 (0.86)	2.86 (0.80)
Biracial	2.65 (0.99)	2.64 (0.93)
Black	2.50 (0.95)	2.50 (0.87)
Hispanic	2.77 (0.89)	2.75 (0.83)
International	3.01 (0.80)	2.98 (0.75)
Pacific Islander	2.42 (1.09)	2.42 (1.01)
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	2.95 (0.92)	2.91 (0.87)
White	2.97 (0.89)	2.94 (0.85)

The average rate of persistence using proportions for the total population of students at the end of the first semester was 0.90 (SD = 0.30) while the average rate of persistence for the population at the end of the first year (second semester) was 0.76 (SD = 0.43). This information is reflected in Table 15.

Table 15
Rate of Persistence (ROP) of Transfer Student Population

Variables	ROP End of 1 st Semester	ROP End of 1 st Year
Rates of Persistence	0.90 (0.30)	0.76 (0.43)

Further, when the population was broken down by gender and then again by race, at the end of the first semester the outcomes variable of persistence was observed. Men exhibited a mean persistence of 0.91 (SD = 0.29) at the end of the first semester while women exhibited a mean persistence of 0.90 (SD = 0.30) at the end of the first semester. When this variable was reviewed with respect to race/ethnicities, the following means were found Asian (M = 0.94, SD = 0.24), International (M = 0.93, SD = 0.26), White (M = 0.90, SD = 0.30), American Indian (M = 0.90, SD = 0.30), Black (M = 0.90, SD = 0.30), Hispanic (M = 0.90, SD = 0.29), Biracial (M = 0.88, SD = 0.33), Race/Ethnicity Unknown (M = 0.87, SD = 0.33), and Pacific Islander (M = 0.80, SD = 0.41).

Moreover, when the population was broken down by gender and then again by race, at the end of the first year, and the outcome variable of persistence was observed, men maintained a mean persistence of 0.77 (SD = 0.42) in comparison to the women's mean persistence of 0.75 (SD = 0.43). When this variable is again reviewed by race/ethnicity, the following means were found: International (M = 0.86, SD = 0.34), Asian (M = 0.83, SD = 0.38), American Indian (M = 0.78, SD = 0.41), Hispanic (M = 0.77, SD = 0.42), White (M = 0.76, SD = 0.43), Race/Ethnicity Unknown (M = 0.73, SD = 0.45), Black (M = 0.72, SD = 0.45), Biracial (M = 0.71, SD = 0.45), and Pacific Islander (M = 0.65, SD = 0.49). Table 16 presents the comparison of persistence rates at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year.

Table 16
Population Rate of Persistence (ROP) At End of First Semester and First Year

Variables	ROP End of 1 st Semester	ROP End of 1 st Year
Men	0.91 (0.29)	0.77(0.42)
Women	0.90 (0.30)	0.75 (0.43)

American Indian	0.90 (0.30)	0.78 (0.41)
Asian	0.94 (0.24)	0.83 (0.38)
Biracial	0.88 (0.33)	0.71 (0.45)
Black	0.90 (0.30)	0.72 (0.45)
Hispanic	0.90 (0.29)	0.77 (0.42)
International	0.93 (0.26)	0.86 (0.34)
Pacific Islander	0.80 (0.41)	0.65 (0.49)
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	0.87 (0.33)	0.73 (0.45)
White	0.90 (0.30)	0.76 (0.43)

The data provided alludes to the fact that significantly fewer students transfer and complete the seminar course than those who did not complete the course. Because of the diversity presented among students and the fact that a quasi-experimental design was utilized which did not allow for random assignment to treatment and control groups, the risk of selection bias was presented. To explore the impact of the treatment, propensity score matching was utilized to create a matched sample of participants and non-course participants to obtain a more accurate portrayal of the impact of course participation on academic outcomes.

Data Review

Prior to conducting the propensity score matching analysis, dummy codes were created for the race and gender variables. The original and dummy coded variables, as well as the corresponding values are presented in Table 17.

Table 17

Recoded Variables

Variable Category	Recoded Variable	Value
Race	Ethnicity	Value: 1 White, 2 Black, 3

Gender	Gender	Hispanic, 4 All Other Ethnicities Value: 1 Women; 0 Men
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Before further analysis was conducted, R version 4.0.2 was utilized to perform propensity score matching (PSM) to generate a comparable group of participants that did and did not participate in the transfer seminar course. A matching algorithm with a tolerance of 0.5 was used for purposes of matching the cases and covariates using gender, race/ethnicity, transfer type, and number of transfer credits as the matching variables. The resulting analysis yielded a matched sample of $N = 824$ students.

Data Analysis Procedures and Results

Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of a matched sample of students, defined by age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution who enrolled and those who did not enroll in a transfer seminar course during their first semester of enrollment at a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeastern United States?

To analyze the variables in this question, for each group of students, who did and did not complete the transfer seminar course, descriptive statistics and frequency analyses were utilized. A series of cross-tabulation tables were generated to assess the prevalence of different race/ethnicity groups, gender groups, and transfer institution types (community college and baccalaureate institutions) that participated in the transfer seminar course. The frequency and percentage statistics for these findings were reported and interpreted. The means and standard deviations for the transfer credit and pre-transfer GPA variables were also calculated for the two transfer course groups. The descriptive

statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages for the matched samples is presented in Table 18.

Table 18
Demographics and Characteristics of a Matched Sample Course Participants and Non-Participants

Variable	Participants who did not take the course	Participants who took the course	Transfer student population
Age	27.49 (6.56)	25.17 (3.03)	27.46 (6.69)
White	212/412 (51.4%)	202/412 (49.0%)	9,326 (54.2%)
Black	128/412 (31.1%)	130/412 (31.5%)	3,426 (19.9%)
Hispanic	38/412 (9.2%)	32/412 (7.8%)	1,836 (10.7%)
All Other Ethnicities	34/412 (8.3%)	48/412 (11.7%)	2,626 (15.2%)
Gender (Women)	133/412 (32.3%)	138/412 (33.5%)	8,548 (49.7%)
Gender (Men)	279/412 (67.7%)	274/412 (66.5%)	8,666 (50.3%)
Comm. College Transfer	266/412 (64.6%)	269/412 (65.3%)	11,661 (67.7%)
Baccalaureate Transfer	146/412 (35.4%)	143/412 (34.7%)	5,250 (30.5%)
Pre-Transfer GPA	2.835 (0.50)	2.809 (0.51)	2.744 (1.842)
Transfer Credits	51.73 (20.03)	43.68 (16.52)	51.52 (19.99)

Variables of Interest

Age. The mean age for transfer students who took the transfer seminar course was 25.17 years while the mean age for transfer students who did not take the transfer seminar course was 27.49 years. In comparison, there was a significant difference between the students in the sample who took the transfer course and those who did not with respect to age, where $p < 0.001$. Students who took the transfer seminar course tended to be younger than the mean age of the transfer population (27.45 years), while those who did

not take the transfer seminar course were only slightly older. This data is reflected in Table 13.

Race/Ethnicity. The frequency and percentages for each race/ethnic group for course participants and non-participants is presented in Table 13. Approximately one half of the students who took the transfer seminar course identified as White students (49.0%) whereas similar numbers are reflected in White non-participants (51.5%). Among course participants, students who identified as Black accounted for 31.6%, while Black students made up 31.1% of non-course participants. Hispanic students accounted for 7.77% of course participants and 9.2% of non-course participants. Finally, students of all other races made up 11.65% of course participants, and 8.25% of non-course participants. The chi square analysis performed among this variable indicated no difference in ethnicities, $p = 0.37$.

Gender. The frequency of each gender among transfer seminar participants and non-participants is shown in Table 13. Approximately one half of the transfer student population was men (50.3%) and one half was women (49.7%) with similar percentages reflected in non-transfer seminar participants (50.5% men and 49.1% women). Transfer seminar course participants reported only slightly higher percentages of women (50.9%) in comparison to men (49.5%). The chi square analysis performed for this variable indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference in gender ($p = 0.71$).

Transfer Type. The frequencies for each transfer type, among transfer seminar course participants and non-participants is show in Table 13. Participants who completed the transfer seminar course exhibited transfer rates from community colleges at a rate of 50.3%, in comparison to 49.5% of course participants transferring from baccalaureate

institutions. Similar percentages were reflected in students who did not complete the transfer seminar course in which 49.7% of students transferred to the institution studied from community colleges and 50.5% transferred from baccalaureate institutions. The chi-square tests of these variables indicated that there was not a difference in transfer type ($p = 0.83$).

Pre-Transfer GPA. The average pre-transfer GPA of course participants and non-participants is displayed in Table 13. The average pre-transfer GPA of course participants was found to be 2.809, while non-participants exhibited an average pre-transfer GPA of 2.835. An independent sample t -test revealed that there was no difference between the groups on the basis of their pre-transfer GPA ($p = 0.45$).

Incoming Transfer Credits. The mean number of credits transferred in for course participants and non-participants is displayed in Table 13. Students who did not take the transfer seminar course tended to transfer in a higher number of credits (51.73) in comparison to students who did take the course (43.68).

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester or at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

To analyze the outcomes from transfer seminar course participants on the basis of GPA at the end of the first semester and again at the end of the first year, independent samples t -tests were employed to compare the transfer course groups on their GPAs at different times. Means and standard deviations were reported and interpreted for the two groups and are presented in Table 19.

Table 19
Cumulative Grade Point Average After First Semester and First Year Post-Transfer

Outcome	Did not take course (N= 412)	Did take course (N = 412)	p-value
NT term GPA ³	2.62 (0.99)	2.78 (0.82)	0.014
SP term GPA ⁴	2.62 (0.92)	2.63 (0.78)	0.917

Given these outcomes, it is clear that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups on the basis of their GPA at the end of the first semester, $t(822) = -2.46, p = 0.014$ but not at the end of the first year post-transfer where $t(822) = -0.11$ and $p = 0.92$. The results also show that the mean GPAs for students who took the transfer seminar course were higher than those students who did not complete the transfer seminar course at the end of the first semester; however, there was not a significant difference in GPAs between course participants and non-participants at the end of the first year. In addition, Cohen's d was calculated to measure the effect size. The value for Cohen's d for grade point average at the end of the first term (NT_TERM_CGPA) was found to be 0.176 while Cohen's d for the grade point average at the end of the first year (SP_TERM_CGPA) was found to be 0.012. These results suggest that there is a small effect in the difference of GPAs on the basis of course participation versus non-participation.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in rate of persistence from the first to second semester or the first to second year, post-transfer, for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

³ NT term GPA is defined as the cumulative GPA at the end of the first semester post transfer

⁴ SP term GPA is defined as the cumulative GPA at the end of the first year post transfer

Chi-square analysis was used to compare the transfer course groups on the categorical outcomes associated with their respective rates of retention after the first semester and again after the first year when measured as a binary (yes/no) variable. Frequency and percentage statistics were analyzed for the chi-square analyses and are presented in Table 20.

Table 20

Retention Rate after First Semester and First Year Post-Transfer

Outcome	Did not take course	Did take course	<i>p</i> -value
Retention Fall to Spring	385 (93.4%)	394 (95.6%)	0.17
Retention Fall to Fall	311 (75.5%)	328 (79.6%)	0.16

The results presented here suggest there was not a statistically significant difference between the groups for Fall to Spring retention ($\chi^2(1) = 1.90, p = 0.17$). These rates are reflected in a 95.6% retention rate from Fall to Spring for course participants and at a rate of 93.4% for non-participants. When this outcome was again evaluated after the first year post-transfer, from Fall to Fall, there was also not a statistically significant difference between the groups on the basis of their retention rates ($\chi^2(1) = 2.01, p = 0.16$).

Summary

This chapter presented the results of this study which sought to measure the relationship between participation in a transfer seminar course and the outcome variables of cumulative GPA and rate of persistence at the end of the first semester and first year post-transfer. The study included six years of data, utilizing students who started in Fall semesters only between 2013 and 2018. A total of $N = 412$ controls that did not take the transfer seminar course were matched to the $N = 412$ cases that did take the transfer seminar course. Descriptive and frequency statistics were utilized to analyze the group

demographics and they were found to be similar prior to moving forward with evaluation of the research questions.

To address the first research question, descriptive and frequency statistics were utilized to display the characteristics, defined as age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in of students who enrolled and those who did not enroll in a transfer seminar course during their first semester of enrollment at a large, public, baccalaureate institution in the Southeastern United States. The findings suggest that the typical student who participated in the transfer seminar course was a Caucasian man transferring from a community college, whereas non-participants more commonly were Caucasian men who transferred from baccalaureate institutions. The most prevalent difference between course participants and non-participants was reflected in age as those students who completed the transfer seminar course tended to be younger than those students who chose not to complete the transfer seminar course.

To address research question two, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine the average GPAs for transfer seminar course participants and non-participants at the end of the first semester and first year post-transfer. The *t*-test results indicated a statistically significant difference in GPAs for course participants versus non-participants at the end of the first semester but a non-significant difference between participants and non-participants at the end of the first year. Students who completed the transfer seminar course exhibited higher GPAs than students who elected not to complete the transfer seminar course at the end of the first semester, but comparable GPAs at the end of the first year.

Finally, to address research question three, chi-square analysis was employed to compare the persistence rate, when identified as a binary (yes/no) variable with course participation and non-participation. The analyses, conducted for rates at the end of the first semester and first year post-transfer, did not produce a statistically significant difference among students who took the transfer seminar course and those who did not take the transfer seminar course at the end of the first semester. Additionally, there was not a statistically significant difference between groups at the end of the first year.

The following chapter will provide a review of these findings in relationship to the current literature and prior research studies. Moreover, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for both practice and future research studies will be discussed.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the impact of participation in a transfer seminar course on student outcomes with respect to grade point average and persistence at a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeastern United States between the Fall 2013 and Fall 2018 semesters. All data for the study was provided by the organization's Institutional Research office and was aimed at addressing the three research questions in this study:

1. What are the characteristics of a matched sample of students, defined by age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution who enrolled, and those who did not enroll in a transfer seminar course during their first semester of enrollment at a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeastern United States?
2. Is there a significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester or at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?
3. Is there a significant difference in rate of persistence from the first to second semester or the first to second year, post-transfer, for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

This chapter provides an overview of the study, a discussion of the findings and conclusions in relationship to prior literature and research studies. Finally, the chapter concludes with implications for future research and recommendations for practice.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to measure the impact that a transfer seminar course had on transfer students that participated in the course during their first semester of enrollment at the receiving institution and their outcomes, based on grade point average and persistence at the end of the first semester, and again at the end of the first year post-transfer. This quantitative, quasi-experimental study compared a matched sample of transfer seminar course participants and non-participants to evaluate the impact of the treatment on transfer student outcomes. The quasi-experimental approach was used due to the inability to retroactively assign students to the treatment and control groups. The researcher utilized propensity score matching to ensure that the comparison group was equivalent prior to addressing the research questions.

The participants in this study were a total of 824 students, including 412 students who participated in the transfer seminar course, and a matched sample of 412 students who did not participate in the course during their first semester of enrollment at the receiving institution. Subjects were matched on the variables of race/ethnicity, gender, transfer type, and number of credits transferred into the institution studied.

Quantitative data provided by the organization's Institutional Research Office was analyzed to respond to research questions one through three. Descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used to analyze data utilizing SPSS version 26.

Research Findings

The research findings section of this chapter is organized in two parts. First, in research question one, a comparison is made between the demographic traits and other characteristics of two groups: transfer seminar course participants and a matched sample

of non-course participants. Second, in research questions two and three, a discussion is presented regarding how the independent variable, course participation or non-participation, impacted the dependent variable outcomes, GPA and persistence for the matched sample of subjects.

Research question 1. What are the characteristics of a matched sample of students, defined by age, race, gender, transfer type, pre-transfer GPA, and number of credits transferred in to the receiving institution who enrolled and those who did not enroll in a transfer seminar course during their first semester of enrollment at a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeastern United States?

To analyze the demographics and other characteristics, descriptive statistics and frequency analyses were used. The majority of the transfer seminar course participants were comprised of White men who transferred from community colleges. In comparing the matched sample of non-participants, the results exhibited that this group was primarily comprised of White men who transferred from community colleges. The greatest differences between those student groups were reflected in mean age, mean pre-transfer GPA, and mean number of credits transferred in. When measuring each of these variables, non-transfer seminar participants exhibited higher means in all three categories such that their average age was 27.49, their average pre-transfer GPA was 2.835, and they transferred in an average of 51.73 credits. In comparison, those students who did complete the transfer seminar course had a mean age of 25.17, a mean pre-transfer GPA of 2.809, and on average, brought in approximately 43.68 credits.

When comparisons are made on the basis of each of the categorical variables in this question, race/ethnicity, gender, and transfer type, only slight differences are

observed in the percentages for gender and transfer type; however, more significant differences are noted for the race/ethnicity variable. In comparison, for the matched sample, 49.1% ($N = 133$) of women elected to complete the transfer seminar course and 50.9% ($N = 139$) of women did not complete the course. With respect to men in the matched sample, 50.5% ($N = 279$) did not complete the transfer seminar course while 49.5% ($N = 274$) did complete the course. When the transfer type is compared, 50.3% ($N = 269$) of students who transferred from community colleges participated in the transfer seminar course while 49.7% ($N = 266$) of students from this type of institution did not complete the transfer seminar course. Students who transferred from baccalaureate institutions participated in the transfer seminar course at a rate of 49.5% ($N = 143$) in comparison to 50.5% ($N = 146$) electing to not participate in the transfer seminar course. The greatest differences between the matched samples is observed in the racial makeup of the subjects. White students participated in the transfer seminar at a rate of 48.8% ($N = 202$), while non-participants made up 51.2% ($N = 212$) of the group. Similarly, Hispanic students exhibited a 45.7% ($N = 32$) participation rate in comparison to a 54.3% ($N = 38$) non-participation rate. These are the only two ethnic groups in which students who opted to complete the transfer seminar course did so at a rate lower than non-participants. Among Black students, 50.4% ($N = 130$) completed the transfer seminar course while 49.6% ($N = 128$) did not complete the course. Finally, in all other ethnicities, 58.5% ($N = 48$) of the students participated in the transfer seminar course as compared to 41.5% ($N = 34$) of students who did not.

Research question 2. Is there a significant difference in cumulative grade point average at the end of the first semester or at the end of the first-year post-transfer for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

Student grade point averages were analyzed using independent samples *t*-tests to determine the average for transfer seminar course participants at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first year. Results showed that transfer seminar course participants exhibited higher GPAs (2.78, SD = 0.82, $p = 0.014$) in comparison to non-participants (2.62, SD = 0.99, $p = 0.014$) at the end of the first semester. However, at the end of the first year post-transfer, there was a non-significant difference between the groups such that transfer seminar course participants exhibited an average GPA of 2.63 (SD = 0.78, $p = 0.917$) in comparison to non-participants exhibiting an average GPA of 2.62 (SD = 0.92, $p = 0.917$).

Research question 3. Is there a significant difference in rate of persistence from the first to second semester or the first to second year, post-transfer, for students who participate versus students who do not participate in a transfer seminar course?

Student persistence rates were analyzed using chi-square analysis to compare the binary variable (yes/no) with course participation or non-participation. The results of the analysis conducted at the end of the first semester found that there was not a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.17$) in the rate of persistence for course participants (95.6%) in comparison to non-course participants (93.4%). Similarly, at the end of the first year, there was also not a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.16$) between transfer seminar course participant retention rates (79.6%) in comparison to non-transfer seminar subjects (75.5%).

Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

Transfer students continue to represent a large percentage of the population on college and university campuses throughout the United States, and research shows that their needs are commonly different from that of a traditional first time student (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). The process of transferring can be both confusing and exciting. Addressing challenges of this transition early, is critical to fostering student success. Results of this study support this concept by demonstrating the modest, positive impact that course participation had at the end of the first semester., Matched samples of student outcomes were similar, reflecting a diminished impact of the course beyond that period of time.

It is widely known that a relationship exists between student engagement and academic success such that individuals who actively put forth “the time and effort to activities linked to desired outcomes of college” (Kuh, 2003, p. 683) are more likely to have higher persistence and success rates (Adams & Curtis, 2014; Grites & Farina, 2012; Kuh, 2003; Lee et al., 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1988, 1993). Though few studies currently exist on student engagement through transfer seminar courses, of those that do, all are qualitative in nature. This study provided new insight by exploring the quantitative impacts of such an intervention on student outcomes. The primary findings of this research, however, do align with the findings of previously conducted studies on this topic such that students who exert the initiative to engage in a non-mandatory transfer seminar course have a modest, short term positive impact on those who complete the course, but additional research is needed on long term effects of

participation, if any (Adams & Curtis, 2014; Grites & Farina, 2012; Kubacki, 2017; Lee et al., 2012).

Transition and integration are critical milestones in a student's academic journey. Tinto (1988, 1993) suggested that it is during these phases when individuals establish relationships and adopt the norms of their new group. Two primary objectives of the course studied were to familiarize students with the institution's campus resources and to help students develop the study skills and strategies essential to academic success. The primary findings of the study imply that students may be developing new study techniques as evidence by their higher GPA at the end of the first semester in comparison to their peers who did not complete the course. The difference in academic performance between matched samples is, however, diminished by the end of the first year suggesting that the course may not be as impactful beyond the first semester and additional supports may be needed beyond that time frame.

To further drive the significance of integration, acclimation, commitment, and success, researchers recognize the importance of providing unique opportunities that stimulate, engage, and challenge students to reach their full potential. Stewart and Martinello (2012) found that institutions which proactively addressed the needs of transfer students early, position individuals for a supportive transition and an increased likelihood of persistence and success. This builds upon the notion of Jain et al., (2011) in which it is suggested that a transfer receptive culture empowers students to succeed when they are stimulated and challenged at the appropriate times and levels. Moreover, this aligns with Schlossberg's (2011) 4S Theory articulating the significant role that institutions play in encouraging transition while fostering a sense of belonging for new

members. One objective of the course is “to foster a safe, positive, supportive environment that helps transfer students develop a sense of belonging to the campus community.” By offering the course as a unique opportunity to transfer students in their first semester, the university is fulfilling its role in assisting students to transition and allowing them to position themselves for success, however, it remains unclear if, by participating, students feel more a part of the community as their persistence levels at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first year were comparable to their peers who did not take the course.

In summarizing the current findings, it is evident that students who participate in the transfer seminar course exhibit short term gains with respect to their academic performance, and that there is no difference in persistence rates for participants in comparison to non-participants. As a result of these findings, it is critical for further research to be conducted and practices to be explored to identify and capitalize on methods in which students may excel academically over longer periods of time at the new institution.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Based on the conducted study, primary findings of the research highlight strategies that inform professional practice and assist students in transitioning to the receiving institution while encouraging seamless integration and peak academic success. There are three recommendations for future practice: assessment of the course curriculum for alignment with student needs and expected outcomes, enhanced tracking of transfer student persistence to degree completion, and finally, continued cultivation of support programs towards the growth of a robust transfer receptive culture.

All coursework offered by an institution should be of a high quality nature and tailored to meet the needs of the students that the course is intended to reach. As a transfer seminar course, the curriculum is intended for students who are non-native to the institution but are matriculating at different points in their academic career from diverse colleges and universities. The results of the study only indicated statistical significance in one analysis – cumulative GPA at the end of the first semester between course participants and non-participants. As a result of this finding, the researcher recommends that practitioners consider evaluation of the curriculum to determine if course content and assignments align with the objectives of the course and are truly tailored to transfer student needs. Again, because the outcomes of the study demonstrated only a short term positive gain for participants, it is critical to not only evaluate what aspects of the course allowed the student to transition and succeed in the first semester, but what additional supports, resources, and services may be needed beyond the first semester to enable continued success and eventual graduation from the institution. It is recommended to conduct this analysis, in concert with, or after, qualitative research is completed to identify areas that may be missing as determined by prior participants. Further, it is recommended to assess the pedagogical strategies of the course to determine if there are new, innovative, and active approaches to teaching and learning that may better meet student needs and produce greater impacts on GPA and persistence outcomes for participants.

It is widely known that a significant number of students who enter college each year aspire to transfer and complete a bachelor's degree; however, only a small number of students actually do so successfully (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). The current study only

explored two academic outcomes after one semester, which despite subtle differences, only found statistical significance in the difference of GPA at the end of the first semester. Through enhanced tracking of transfer student performance with a heightened focus on the areas of semester to semester persistence, admission to a degree program, attempted and completed credit hours, and completion of core courses, the university can begin to identify critical milestones and implement strategic practices to further promote student success beyond the first semester post transfer. Once critical points in the student's field of study and academic program are identified, staff and administrators can begin to establish goals and objectives that allow for the creation of policies and initiatives to earlier identify students experiencing potential challenges in their journey to degree completion. Targeted outreach would then allow the university to implement strategic communications and practices that support students towards achievement of their original goal or provide alternatives while offering the relationship and supports that theorists suggest as critical to transition, integration, and success.

The volume of transfer students will continue to grow and though the results of this study did not provide enough conclusive evidence to make the course mandatory for all incoming transfer students, it is apparent by examining the traits and outputs that there are subtle differences that may be improved through further growth and development of a transfer receptive culture. The responsibility for transfer student success is a collaborative effort and much work is yet to be done to further elevate their achievements (Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Jackson & Laanan, 2015; Jain et al., 2016). Jain et al. (2016) suggest the following strategies to produce a transfer receptive culture (1) “offer financial aid and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional/reentry transfer

students where they are stimulated to achieve at high levels” (p. 58), (2) “acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family” (p. 58) and (3) “create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs and initiatives that can lead to further scholarship on transfer students” (p. 58). The researcher recommends that to achieve this culture, it is critical to continue building relationships with feeder schools, identify and capitalize on opportunities unique to transfer students through funding and academic integration that make transfer financially attainable and success achievable, and commit to continued knowledge and research on prominent transfer student traits and trends to remain at the forefront of cutting edge practices that are driving students to transfer and succeed. In short, it is essential to continue developing and refining programmatic offerings that drive the early acclimation and connections between the student and their new environment, which theorists have maintained as a critical component to student success.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study add to the literature on transfer seminar and student outcomes by providing quantitative insight into the impact on and performance of individuals who chose to complete the non-mandatory course during their first semester of enrollment at their new institution. There are a number of opportunities for further research to expand and refine an understanding of transfer seminar courses, their applications, and impacts. Three recommendations for future research are: (1) inclusion of a qualitative research component to investigate student perspectives of their experience in the course, (2) a more in-depth examination of outcomes by transfer type, and (3) the

inclusion of two additional variables – socioeconomic status and first generation status to deepen analysis on the measured variables.

Future research should expand on this study by including a qualitative research component in which student perceptions about their experience in the course are considered. Of the quantitative outcomes measured, the only statistically significant difference between participants and non-participants was found in the GPA at the end of the first semester post-transfer, reflecting a modest, short term positive impact of course participation. Due to this fact, a review of the course content may be warranted, and the student voice (with respect to course topics, instructor characteristics, and pedagogical approaches), may provide insight into components of the course that were either lacking or most beneficial to participants. Furthermore, consideration should specifically be given to what additional, more long-term supports students need to be successful once the course is complete as the evidence currently suggests a meager, short term positive impact on student achievement. This valuable input should be used not only to identify topics and strategies that allowed for short term success, but it should also provide contextualization to the quantitative results, and allow for the creation of meaningful and engaging content that has the ability to further enhance student success over a greater time frame at the institution, not just throughout the first semester of transition into the new academic community.

Researchers should explore a more in depth study of the academic outcomes by transfer type. It is often thought that vertical transfer is the most frequent method of movement between institutions; however, lateral transfer is equally, if not more common (Goldrick-Rabb & Pfeffer, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2018; Taylor & Jain, 2017). Analyzing

performance by transfer type, in concert with recommendation one (to include a qualitative component), may further identify differences in student needs and allow for the creation of content and facilitation of instruction, by section according to type, to best meet each groups unique support needs.

Finally, the researcher recommends the investigation into the impact of the transfer seminar courses on the basis of two added variables: socioeconomic status and first generation status. The institution studied currently has an undergraduate population in which 37% of students identify as first-generation. Further, the institution is classified as the largest transfer institution in its state system and in recent years also had the largest number of Pell recipients. The inclusion of these variables may create a stronger match in the propensity score algorithm and provide additional insight into the academic outcomes of transfer students who also identify with these traits.

Conclusion

This quantitative, quasi-experimental study examined the differences in cumulative grade point average and rate of persistence for students who participated and a matched sample of non-participants in a transfer seminar course. Four analyses were conducted to compare GPAs at the end of the first semester and first year, and rate of persistence for the same time-frames. This chapter provided a discussion of the findings, their connection to prior research, and recommendations for both practitioners and future studies.

While few studies exist on this topic, much of the previous research on transfer seminars explored the qualitative impact on the student and their transition experience. This study began to address a gap in the literature by providing quantitative insight into

the outcomes for such a type of programmatic intervention. It is the researcher's hope that the results of this study will empower faculty and administrators to further investigate program efficacy and capitalize on targeted initiatives that improve the academic success of transfer students at the institution.

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Appendix A Syllabus

Time: Wednesdays 11:00am-12:15pm

Location: [REDACTED]

Contact: [REDACTED]

Office Hours: [REDACTED]

Course Description: This three credit hour course is designed to assist with the intellectual and social transition from a previous college or university to [REDACTED]. This will be done by encouraging positive attitudes toward learning and increased involvement of students in intellectual life on and off campus. This course will provide an orientation to resources available to students, and promote development of: decision making, problem solving, written and oral skills to become successful at [REDACTED] and beyond. The course will meet the requirement to satisfy the general education oral communication requirement.

Course Objectives:

1. To build and encourage personal, social and academic growth
2. To assist in students' acclimation and transition to [REDACTED]
3. To provide an overview of the university's resources and services
4. To create a context in which students clarify their personal values and career goals
4. To develop effective oral communication skills

Classroom Expectations:

- Attendance on meeting days is mandatory
- Arrive to class on time
- Class will be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect
- Log in regularly to CANVAS to complete required readings, assignments quizzes, etc.

Academic Integrity Policy: Students have the responsibility to know and observe the regulations of the [REDACTED]. The code forbids cheating, fabrication, or falsification of information, multiple submissions of academic work, plagiarism, abuse of academic materials and complicity in academic dishonesty. All violations of the Code of Academic Integrity will be prosecuted to the fullest extent. Penalties for academic dishonesty may range from a grade of F in an assignment or course to expulsion from the University. Students are expected to report cases of academic dishonesty to the course instructor.

University Policy Statement 104 10.s: "The use of cell phones, beepers, or other communication devices is disruptive, and is therefore prohibited during class. Except in emergencies, those using such devices must leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period."

Disability: Students in this course seeking accommodations must first consult with the Office of Disability Services in [REDACTED] and follow the instructions of that office for obtaining accommodations.

Grading: There will be a very fair chance to earn a high grade in this course. Points will be awarded for assignments using the following scale.

A= 225-200 B= 199-175 C= 174-150 D= 149-125 F> 125

Attendance and Participation: Your attendance and participation are essential to your success in this course. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to contact me to find out what you missed. Due to having guest lecturers, some assignments are not able to be made up. *Upon your fourth unexcused absence, your final grade will be reduced by one letter grade per absence. If you have six or more unexcused absences, you will automatically fail the course.*

Written assignments: All written assignments should be double spaced in Microsoft Word format using a standard 12-point font including your name, date and assignment title on the paper. You will submit/post assignments to the web-based platform CANVAS.

Late Assignments: No assignments will be accepted past the due date. Extensions are obtainable only for personal illness or family emergency, and then only if you have proper documentation.

Tardiness: You should plan to arrive to every class session on time. You are considered tardy if you are five minutes late to class or more. Tardiness reduces your participation grade. Once you have three tardies your participation grade will drop by 2 points and will continue to drop by 5% for subsequent tardies.

Assignments:

Transfer Tale (20 points): Create a Powerpoint/Prezi presentation all about yourself and your 'Transfer Tale.' This presentation will be your first oral communication experience and will help the class learn about you while you are establishing a baseline from which to improve on in future class presentations. Specific presentation requirements will be provided separately.

Reflection Papers or Assignment (5 x 10 points each= 50 points): Each paper must be a minimum of two pages, typed, double-spaced, and a 12-point font with one inch margins. Please center the title of your paper at the top with your name and email listed below. Reflections will cover a series of topics/activities/campus services presentations done throughout the semester.

Research Article Paper (35 points): Students will research a topic that relates to University transfer students: adjustment issues, GPA trends, out-of-state transfer students, transfer student trends, etc. Each student will locate at least 3 peer-reviewed, scholarly articles that provide insight into the topic of choice.

Career Exploration Presentation (50 points): Allowing you to use many of the skills learned during the semester, you will make a detailed informational speech about your experience and findings on a career of interest to you. Your presentation *should be a minimum of ten minutes, but no more than eleven minutes.*

Final Exam On-line (25 points): A final exam will be given to assess your learning over the course of the semester. You may be asked questions about various campus resources and speakers that came to class.

Participation (25 points): As a course with an oral communications component, it is imperative that you participate in Both in-class and online discussions and complete class assignments.

Selfie/Campus Activity (10 points): Post a picture into the "media gallery" of our Canvas course of the activity you attended. The picture has to be with a staff member of department running event. Also required in the photo either a sign advertising the event or at the registration table with department banner.

Spring 2017 schedule (10 points): After your appointment with your assigned advisor you are to upload the document given to you that outlines the classes recommended that you register.

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
8/24	Welcome;	Pre-test in class; Review 1 st presentation assignment
8/31	Success	
9/7	Working in Teams	Assignment - Reflection Essay #1
9/14	Get to Know	Transfer Presentations(10-12)
9/21	Campus Activity	Assignment #2 -Reflection Essay
9/28	Get to Know	Transfer Presentations(10-12)
10/5	Financial Literacy	Assignment #3 –Financial Lit
10/12	Career Center Model	Research Paper
10/19	Attend Workshop & At-Risk Assessment	

10/26	Advising for Spring	Post selfie from campus activity in Canvas. Required to be with a sign, staff member, or at registration table of event
11/2	Conduct/Title IX Dean of Students	Assignment #4 -Reflection Essay –Title IX
11/9	Career	
11/16	Counseling Center – Stress, Anxiety & Resiliency	Assignment #5 – Reflection Essay – Counseling Center
11/23	Campus Activity	
11/30	Career	Career Presentations
12/7	Career	Career Presentations
12/14	Career	Career Presentations & Online Final (Post-test) Due