

■ Non-traditional transfer student attrition

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Current literature focuses on traditional student attrition and on transfer transition, but little information is available on the non-traditional transfer student experience. The following study explores the process of non-traditional transfer student attrition through an investigation that illustrates the importance of past student experiences, personal issues, institutional fit, academic integration, and institutional communication and procedures. An understanding of how students actually make meaning of their transfer and departure experiences may allow institutions to modify marketing efforts to be more coherent with institutional practice, manage student expectations to enhance post-secondary experiences for today's students in higher education, and eventually introduce functional, non-traditional student retention efforts.

AMONG THE issues facing American higher education, questions concerning admission, transfer, retention and attrition remain central. Several studies have sought to develop, test and modify models dealing with the patterns of “traditional students”—full time, post secondary students between the ages of 18 and 24. Conversely, very few studies have addressed the needs of “non-traditional” students such as transfer students, older adult learners, commuters, part-time students, graduate students, women, students with disabilities, and minority students (Andres and Carpenter, 1997). Early models of retention and attrition of traditional students do provide an understanding that can be broadly applied to non-traditional students. However, they do not adequately explain the changes resulting from demographic shift in either student population, nor do they provide an understanding of the complexity and processes by which students make meaning of their experiences at an institution, which ultimately leads to their leaving.

Theoretical models

Numerous theoretical models employed over the past 25 years to explain post-secondary student retention and attrition have examined student variables, institutional variables, and themes such as integration of students in order to help explain the student-institution "fit." Early bodies of work, primarily descriptive in nature, failed to explain the variation in student attrition (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Psychological models were the earliest attempts to build theories of retention, including Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) psychological model based on student intentions. In their model, attrition is seen as a result of weakened intentions. The variable of intention has become important enough for Tinto to add it to his revised model of retention and attrition (Andres & Carpenter, 1997). Other psychological models have included factors such as student goals (Ethington, 1990), indicating that values and expectations, as well as the level of degree aspirations have a direct influence on persistence.

Additional models attempting to explain the retention/attrition phenomena have emphasized academic and social integration, still focusing on traditional students and their behavior at the university (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1982; Pascarella, 1980). These models set out to examine variables affecting the compatibility of students and institutions. Tinto, perhaps the most recognized researcher

in student retention and attrition, applied exchange theory to Durkheim's theory of suicide. According to Tinto (1975), students apply the exchange theory in determining their academic and social integration, interpreted as goals and levels of commitment to the institution. If the benefits outweigh the costs, students remain in college; if other activities are believed by the student to have higher rewards and less cost, the student will drop out. Numerous variables affect the strength of the student-institution match. Students enter with background characteristics such as parental values, socioeconomic status, race, gender, pre-college education, all of which combine to affect the initial commitment to the institution and the ultimate goal of graduating. Tinto (1975) measures successful academic integration by grade performance. He evaluates social integration by the development and frequency of positive interaction with peers and faculty as well as involvement in extracurricular activity.

Despite increases in the number of non-traditional students, including community college transfers, for the most part we continue to use models that were designed to explain attrition for the traditional student. The complex, dynamic nature of non-traditional students calls for continued examination and refinement of our understanding of changing student demographics in relation to attrition. Moreover, how transfer behavior differs from complete withdrawal from

higher education only adds to the complexity of attrition. The question is not whether colleges can or should try to reduce attrition, but rather, for which students should institutions be targeting changes in policy or practices? Concern needs to focus on students who enter an institution with the skills, abilities, interests and commitment to complete a program, but still leave. Such students are more likely to withdraw voluntarily than fail academically, but then they transfer to another institution rather than leave higher education altogether (Tinto, 1982).

Expectations

Since dropout is highest in the first year of college and usually involves students who discover that their expectations about the institution are unrealistic, there is much to be gained from looking at how colleges market and promote themselves to students. How can institutions more accurately and realistically present themselves to incoming students so that expectations of students and institutions are more aligned?

The following investigation attempts to illuminate the attrition process and expand understanding of non-traditional student attrition, using an in-depth interview of a non-traditional, transfer student who decided to leave the transfer institution. Gaining a clearer understanding of how students actually make meaning of their transfer and departure experiences may improve the application of attrition

models in more meaningful ways, using the results to enhance post-secondary experiences for today's students in higher education.

Literature review

The term "non-traditional" is used to cover a wide range of individual student characteristics, including age, ethnicity, residence, disability status and gender. Transfer students are often categorized as non-traditional and share a number of characteristics upon entering post-secondary educational institutions. They are more likely to be older, be minorities, work part or full time, have weaker academic backgrounds, and be less confident about their ability to complete a program. When referring to transfer students, researchers are generally referring to those who start their education at a community college.

Tinto's model has provided a basis for much of the research on student retention and attrition, producing ambiguous results. Some research has confirmed his argument that institutional fit is a good predictor of persistence or dropout (Nora, 1987; Nora & Rendon, 1990, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Yet, in other studies, social integration has been found to be negatively associated with persistence (Bean, 1980, 1985). Bean (1985) found that a student's peers are more important agents of socialization than the informal faculty contacts presented by Pascarella (1980). Bean argues that students

play a more active role in their socialization than once thought, and college grades are more a product of selection than socialization. Astin (1994) developed a model of retention focusing on student involvement, suggesting that institutional policies can directly affect student learning and development. Astin also suggests that pedagogy used by faculty fails to address the element of student involvement.

With non-traditional students more prevalent than ever in higher education, research has begun to attempt identifying attrition models for them. Similar to traditional student models, the models of attrition trying to predict non-traditional student retention are concerned with student institution fit, that is, students' academic and social integration into the institution (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Stahl & Pavel, 1992). Numerous studies have cast doubt on the relevance of Tinto's model to different populations of students in higher education. The level of importance of social and academic integration varies among different types of students. The majority of older students, who live off campus, do not value social integration as an important factor in the persistence decision (Andres, Hawkey & Andruske, 1996; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Stahl & Pavel, 1992).

The Bean and Metzner (1985) model of non-traditional student attrition proposes four sets of variables affecting dropout: academic performance, intent, defining variables (e.g., age, ethnicity, gen-

der), and environmental variables not controlled by the institution (e.g., finances, outside encouragement). They found non-traditional student attrition affected more by the environment than social interaction variables which tended to influence traditional student attrition. Later research found that grade point average and institutional commitment directly affected dropout through the perceived usefulness of higher education in gaining employment, satisfaction and transfer opportunities (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Additionally, Pascarella (1989) found that academic integration, measured by grade point average, intellectual development and faculty interaction, is most influential for persistence by non-traditional students.

Transfer students often start at the community college because of lower tuition costs, more relaxed or open admissions policies, demographic convenience or the intent to transfer to a four-year college or university (Andres & Carpenter, 1997). Community colleges have historically played a significant role in the educational process as transfer agents. Since their inception, community colleges have offered a general education curriculum designed to equip students with the skills necessary for successful transfer to bachelor degree granting institutions. Much of the literature on community colleges focuses on the trend of declining student transfer rates and the need to reverse the trend. Thirty percent of all students entering the

community college have the intention to transfer, down from 43 percent in the mid 1970's (Nora, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Recent statistics show that only about 15 to 20 percent of the students entering community colleges are transferring to colleges for four-year degrees (Nora, 1999). There is no question that students enrolling in community college are somewhat less likely than four-year college students to attain a bachelor's degree within four or five years (Cohen, 1989).

Much of the research on post-transfer student experiences has been a quantitative attempt to measure the phenomenon called "transfer shock"—defined as a measure of academic trade loss (Diaz, 1992). Diaz's (1992) meta-analysis of 62 studies dealing with transfer shock indicates that 79 percent of community college transfer students experienced a drop in grades, revealing problems in adjusting to another institutional culture. These adjustments include larger classes, heavier workloads, and fewer personal professor-student interactions (Vaala & Holdaway, 1989). Other factors influencing the attrition of transfer students include ethnicity, residence location, and admission policies intended for traditional students (Cohen & Brawer, 1981), as well as gender and financial problems (Dougherty, 1987).

Although transfer students comprise a significant percentage of the student population on post-secondary campuses, they are often invisible or neglected once they arrive on campus. While the needs of

transfer students have been clearly outlined, literature suggests that the likelihood of addressing these needs with urgency is slight. Universities often lack the incentive to address the needs because transfer students are not the preferred students. In addition, quantitative research has shown that previous GPA is a strong indicator in post-transfer students' academic success. The initial drop in their GPA is small and most students recover from the decline within a year of transfer (Diaz, 1992). Consequently, there is no urgency to assist these students who are perceived to eventually work out their academic transition on their own.

Methodology

In seeking to understand the transfer and departure decisions from the student's point of view, this investigation assumes that the qualitative research design is appropriate to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The study has been conducted within the ethnographic research tradition. The intent of ethnographic research is to record and report human behavior within a particular social context, in this case the university setting (Creswell, 1998). The approach was also chosen to understand student behavior in an everyday context, as opposed to an experimental design. The researcher has attempted to understand the experience of attending an institution and leaving it, and the meaning the informant

makes of it in a case study of one student. To the extent that the institution is similar to other institutions of higher education in its interactions with non-traditional transfer students, the experience of an informant can produce information relevant to understanding the experience of others in a similar situation (Creswell, 1998). The primary methods for information collection include interviewing and document collection. Interviewing provides a context for people's behavior, thereby offering the researcher some understanding of the meaning of that behavior.

Informant selection

To answer both how and why students choose to attend and then leave an institution, a particular type of student and institution was selected. The institution, a mid-sized Midwestern university, was selected primarily because its new leadership had outwardly proclaimed immediate attention to significantly increasing the number of enrolled transfer students in the next five years. The student was selected for the investigation with specific intent. Initially, an e-invitation was sent to a group of non-traditional transfer students who were seeking admission into a graduate health professions program. The graduate health professions admission office provided a list of applicants and granted permission to send an e-mail communication to the students. The e-mail asked basic demographic questions not only to confirm their non-tradi-

tional status, but also to gather specific information about how many times students had already transferred, their career goals and aspirations, distance from home and family, and their willingness to participate in a series of interviews during the semester. Invitees were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn about their recent experiences and discuss ways the institution had already met or could better meet their needs during their time of transition.

The student in the case study was ultimately chosen because she exemplified the definition of a non-traditional transfer student; she is outside the 18–24 age range, a female, and in her first semester at the transfer institution. She was also selected because of specific features of her transition. She was leaving a family and job in another state to attend school, was commuting to the campus, and had already transferred to more than one other institution in the previous five years. The prior transfer pattern was of interest in learning if it would affect her current transition in a four-year institution. In addition, she indicated she had already begun considering departure, and the researcher sought to capture her experience and meaning making throughout the process.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the instrument for data collection. The hour-long interviews were tape recorded. The primary questions for the first interview

were “Tell me how you came to be a student at the university” and “Describe your experience at this institution as a student.” After the initial interview, the researcher arranged the responses to tell a story; then, the participant was able to look at her story and fill in details that may have been missed or misinterpreted by the researcher. The second interview asked, “What does it mean to be a student at this institution?”, “What does it mean to leave this institution?”, and “What advice would you give this institution about non-traditional transfer students?” The method of interviewing was adapted from Seidman’s (1998) three-interview technique, shortened due to time constraints. The data constructs a profile, using the participant’s own words to describe her experiences before attending the transfer institution, her experience as a student, and her experiences of leaving the institution (see Appendix A). The text has been edited for the usual *ums* and *uhs*, and the names of the persons and the institutions have been changed for the purpose of anonymity.

Document collection

Documentation collected in the study includes institutional strategic planning documents, transfer student admissions materials, institutional course catalog, and pamphlets and leaflets from the academic advising offices. The documents provide background and context for the informant’s reported experiences.

Analysis

After the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, the researcher used ethnographic content analysis to examine the interview transcripts and documents collected from the institution itself. The procedure allows identification of both predetermined concepts and emergent themes. The original set of codes is based on concepts outlined in several retention and attrition theoretical frameworks (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Ethington, 1990; Tinto, 1975; 1982). Themes have been identified based on the approach of Miles and Huberman (1994): placing evidence within a categorical matrix, calculating the frequency of various events, and using chronological order to organize the information. Themes that emerged from the interviews have been compared with documentation, resulting in alterations of original themes and development of new categories within themes.

Findings

Clara’s story, presented in Appendix A, helps illuminate attrition in process, reminding us of the complexity of non-traditional transfer students’ lives. It also confirms findings by others that past and current experiences, personal issues, institutional fit, and academic integration are important influences in student attrition, including non-traditional transfer students. In addition, the case study illustrates the importance of institutional communication as a key component affecting attrition.

Past experience and current expectations

Clara's story shows that transfer students bring with them perceptions and assumptions from the other institutions they have attended which, in turn, influence their expectations of what will occur at the new institution. The quotes below, drawn from Clara's interview transcript, help illustrate Ethington's (1990) assertion that expectations are important in the attrition process.

About higher educational institutions in general:

I have certain things that I don't want happening to me, and one of them I don't like is games. I don't like game playing at schools. I have experienced this, and that's why I'm not thrilled about being misinformed because I had another school do the same thing to me not too long ago.

About interactions with a variety of faculty and staff:

I feel that I was kind of misinformed in aspects, and it's a combination of effects; it is not just one person or another. A lot of it is—and I know comparing schools isn't the best thing to do—but there's general standards that I personally think should be in place with schools—big and little schools. So, yeah, my expectations might have been a little high on the school.

About the course registration process:

Basically, I always had gone to admissions and filled out the forms. I could call in to the one community college. You could call the admissions department; you could register on phone with somebody there.

Personal issues

In addition to past experiences at institutions of higher education, non-traditional transfer students also bring life experience with them, and responsibilities that pull them in numerous directions while attending school. Clara referred to such instances throughout her interviews, noting that *"I was going to enter in the fall, but I had family situations back home; I couldn't enter in the fall."* Her experiences also affirm the importance of outside support as a key variable when weighing the benefits and costs of attending an institution (Tinto, 1975). When she speaks of "home" she states, *"I moved up here; my husband was staying down home 'cause of work purposes, and I am up here. So, he was tolerating it, but he wasn't thrilled."* She later refers to the geographic separation as a compounding factor in her decision to leave.

For me, it was a big decision to move up here. I mean, I left. I came up here on my own. My parents are down there. My husband's down there. It's not like I'm newly married either. We've been married for eight years, so, it's not the easiest thing to do. And I was hoping this would be the last stop. That is very frustrating.

Institutional fit

Tinto's "institutional fit" model (1975; 1982) anticipates what happened in the end but does not adequately explain Clara's experiences with the institution up to that point. Although she ultimately decided to leave, the interviews were conducted during the actual time period when she was deciding to stay or leave. Several times she commented on what could be done to help her stay. In one instance, she notes that a financial aid counselor helped her find an on-campus resource that might be able to help her. *I said to him, "I am very frustrated at this point; who can I talk to about this?" And he said, "Well, you can try to talk to this person." The Ombudsman.*

In the end, Clara decided that the school indeed was not a match, but it was not for her lack of investigating information about the school and trying to find support to stay. She points out numerous times that she felt she was misinformed even though she went to great lengths to find answers to questions she felt were important for her first choosing and then staying at the institution.

Academic integration

Her efforts to find information and resources on campus resulted in interactions with a variety of faculty and staff. She came to experience most of the interactions as negative, which distanced her even further from her commitment to the institution. Pascarella's (1989)

findings that academic integration, measured by grade point average, intellectual development and faculty interaction, is most influential for persistence among non-traditional students. Though Clara's grade point average was not a factor because she did not stay long enough to earn one, she was, however, concerned about grades, which supports Pascarella's notion of academic integration in a sense. The focus of her decision to leave the institution began with the chemistry class she was taking. She commented, *"I was having a hard time in the class, so I was going to have to drop the chemistry, because I have to get a certain grade in chemistry because it is a prerequisite for graduate school."* Fear of negative performance and lack of academic support drove her decision to leave in the end.

In the psych class I said to the instructor, "I'm a new student; I am a transfer here." I asked him, "Is this an appropriate class for a new transfer student to be in?" because of the way he presented everything. So he said, "Don't talk to me: talk to her (points)," which happened to be another student in the class, so, like, oh, fun.

That chemistry professor—he wasn't surprised when I had to withdraw from his class, but I think he was a little sad that I had to withdraw—but he understood why. He actually asked me how I was doing. Certain personnel have been very good, other personnel haven't been that great.

Institutional communication

The importance of communication between faculty, staff and students with regard to internal institutional processes shows clearly in the case study. There were several instances when interactions, either positive or negative, highlighted the open, informal nature of communicating with students that occurs at the institution where Clara transferred.

With regard to parking on campus:

Investigating that more thoroughly, I find out that basically, as a staff member nicely put it to me, it is a permit to hunt for a parking space, not a guarantee for a parking space.

When seeking assistance from an upper level administrator for tutoring:

A couple other comments in my conversation with him too were a little inappropriate, a little uncalled for. We were talking about the chemistry situation and he told me to talk to the head of the chemistry department. Which I did do—his idea—and he made an offhanded comment, and I know, I think he was kind of kiddingly saying it but it is still inappropriate. He's saying, "Well, the chemistry department would tell us not to enroll students that would need assistance in chemistry."

Conversing with a faculty member about getting assistance with chemistry:

He was like, "Well, we used to have open tutoring, but we didn't get enough students, so we decided to put the money to a better use, so we don't do that anymore."

Her experience with academic advising:

She notes that one administrator she spoke with even commented, "Well, this school may not be for you; it doesn't mean your school is not out there."

Her communication with the graduate advisor:

After talking with the graduate academic department and basically being informed that I don't have to get my undergraduate degree here, I decided to go back home. I decided it wasn't worth the hassle anymore.

Clara's case illustrates the importance of how institutional processes and procedures are communicated to students, the overall accuracy of information communicated, and the timeline in which it is given. Clara experienced interactions with staff members who were unaware if services were offered or were not fully aware of the limitations or boundaries of the services. Thus, the information and advice she was given was at times inappropriate, and often neither accurate nor timely.

Discussion

As institutions of higher education face greater accountability, admis-

sion statistics and retention rates continue to be an important measure of institutional effectiveness. Measures of retention include persistence and completion rates, as well as degree attainment rates. On a short term basis, retention is also measured by calculating the ratio between students attending class in the last week of the semester compared to those enrolled in the first census date (Hagedorn, 2005). Other measures of retention take into account students' educational goals at the beginning of their enrollment. Such examination may capture legitimate reasons why non-traditional students leave programs because of family or job requirements, personal goals that were not met, or deciding that the particular program in which they initially enrolled is no longer a goal (Hagedorn, 2005).

In the current investigation, Clara's actions provide insights for institutions measuring retention of non-traditional students. She initially believed she had to attend the institution to complete her undergraduate degree before being admitted into a particular graduate program. Discovering that was not necessary, in addition to personal family issues pulling her back to her home state served as confirmation she would be able to achieve her educational goal without staying at the institution.

Program design

Designing programs to attract and services to support non-traditional learners is becoming part of insti-

tutional planning by educational administrators and faculty alike. Institutions which actively seek non-traditional learners can reach them by creating programs explicitly designed around their needs. The options may include the format of the educational medium (distance education for some), how credit is earned, loosening stringent transfer requirements or giving credit for life and work experience, as well as allowing students to enroll part-time and work at their own pace. Hagedorn (2005) found evidence that job, family, and lack of information about transfer options were key obstacles for non-traditional students in attaining their educational goals. That information can help inform policies and programs created to assist this population of students.

Customer service

The for-profit educational sector has for years had the competitive edge when it comes to meeting non-traditional students' needs and market demands. It has recognized the value of convenience and has provided support and service leading to booming enrollments, even though costs are considerably higher. How have they done it? They have learned that the strategy which will set them apart is service. According to Hadfield (2003), "Except for the quality of our academic offerings, excellence in customer service is the single most important factor in determining the future success or failure of our programs....(p. 19)." Non-tra-

ditional learners do think in terms of being customers, and they hold higher education accountable to provide results for the exchange of their time, effort, and money. They are demanding customers with high expectations. Clara illustrates such expectations in her interactions with college personnel and her self-knowledge. If learners like Clara do not find what they want at one school, they will transfer to another, just as she did in the end.

Institutional integrity

So how do institutions plan academic programs and customer service that will attract and retain non-traditional learners while marketing them to the appropriate audience, at the same time maintaining ethical integrity? There certainly is room for improvement. Clara felt misled by the institution to which she transferred. She was led to believe she had to—or at least should—attend that institution to complete her educational goal of graduate school. She also believed that there were support services in place to help her, including advising and tutoring services. She was surprised to see non-faculty members teaching and considered that inappropriate for her learning. The way she made meaning of her institutional experience began with the recruitment process, which was the foundation for shaping her future expectations. Numerous internal and external factors have been identified as contributing to student attrition. A holistic approach

to attrition (Shaik, 2003) attributes student dropout to overall impressions and experience of students during their stay at the institution. Processes at different levels in the organization, including recruitment and admissions, orientation, advising, help-desk, and the teaching and learning environment, have a significant influence on student retention. Both the theory of student retention and the focus on services to develop long-term relationships seek a balanced emphasis on enrollment and retention. Institutional ethical integrity begins with the recruitment process.

Institutional self-assessment

How higher education represents itself to prospective students is important if it truly wants to serve the needs of non-traditional transfer students. Faculty and administrators develop policies regarding transfer students that determine transferability of credits, tutoring, advising, housing, financial aid, and parking without regularly testing how the information is disseminated to current and potential students. Nor do they regularly assess whether an office or service is doing what the institution claims it is doing or whether the faculty and staff at the institution are aware of changes in policy or services offered. It is important for institutions to regularly assess their performance by listening to both traditional and non-traditional students. Resolving the complaints of students has a significant impact on reten-

tion (Hadfield, 2003). Students often do not understand educational systems and policies that guide the operations of the institution. Many of the most valuable ideas for new programs and services come from existing students. By attending to their needs and answering student questions, institutions of higher education receive an opportunity to test and improve the system as a whole (Hadfield, 2003).

Conclusion

Although a case study tells the story of only one student, what Clara experienced happens to many students, traditional and non-traditional, transfer and native alike, across the country. Her story brings to light what is not often examined by institutions or researchers in their attempts to prevent student attrition—the responsibility of the institution to accurately represent itself in its marketing and admissions materials, to be honest about the services it provides, and to initiate reciprocal communication with students through appropriate venues.

The Professional Practices and Ethical Standards policy for the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers lists the following tenet for admissions personnel at colleges and universities nationwide: “Communicate an accurate interpretation of our institutions’ admissions cri-

teria, educational costs, financial aid availability, and major offerings to assist prospective students and their parents in making an informed decision” (AACRAO, 2002). In the Core Values of the National Academic Advising Association is the following statement: “Advisors are responsible to the students and individuals they serve. The cooperative efforts of all who advise help to deliver quality programs and services to students. These include, but are not limited to, giving accurate and timely information...” (NACADA, 2002). In Clara’s experience, much of the information and advice she was given was neither accurate nor timely. In her own words, *“They need to have somebody that gives you more of a general concept...If some things would have been handled earlier on, that would have changed my mind, but it’s too late.”*

Critically examining attrition and retention as they relate to the student experience, for traditional, non-traditional, and transfer populations, will continue to be important. In doing so, institutions of higher education can reassess the accuracy of the content they present students, the timeliness of information disseminated, and the venues for appropriate communication. Here lies a significant opportunity to enhance the post-secondary experience for all students in higher education.

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Appendix A

Clara's Story

I've been dealing with people for a long time. I'm a paramedic; I have been in EMS for 13 years, since I was 18 years old. I've worked in the hospital system, and the hospital system I am at now I have been at for five years. I have a wide range of experience from med search force to ICUs. I have been a student on and off because of life and circumstances. I have an associate's degree from a school, a community college. There's terms when you can go to school, there's terms when you can't go to school.

After looking through a bunch of different programs, and checking out a couple schools that didn't turn out to be what they were presented to be, I found out about the academic program here, looked into it. I had come up to the campus a couple times to talk to the department and I had a list of questions for the department. So I was very specific, there was something like thirty-seven very particular questions I had for the department. And, when I got the answers, that was one of the biggest reasons why I chose to come here. I figured, well if the Master's Degree program that I was looking into was as clear or thorough as the questions I had, then I assumed that the undergraduate would be pretty good. That was a mistake on that. It looked like a very good program. And it sounded like a good opportunity. That's why I came up here, basically, for the graduate program. In the process I was told, informed, misinformed, I don't know how you want to phrase it, that I should get my undergraduate degree from here. But later, I found out that I don't have to get my undergraduate degree here to get a master's degree. (Small laugh).

For my orientation, I came up that morning; we had been driving all night. I came in, and the lady in charge of our group was brand new to the department, and they gave her the pre-professional group, which isn't quite fair, I think, because a lot of us already have degrees, or transfer credits coming in, and she didn't know what to do with most of us. I mean, I know they gotta learn, and I know she had another student in there with her that had worked with students before, but that's still not right. Especially when you have to figure out a schedule for us. Unfortunately, she did not have the correct paperwork on me. She had an old transcript evaluation that didn't have all the correct information on it. She had no clue what to do with me. I had an anatomy and physiology class that we were questioning, if it was going to transfer in and how it was going to transfer in. It came into the school as a biology credit, because it was called 'Biology: structure and function'. When I talked to the biology department head, 'cause I had to go to the biology head to get a clarification if I would have to take a general biology, which is a prereq for the zoology class I needed, he told me I didn't have to do it. He said I was beyond the general biology thing. He looked at the anatomy and physiology class and said, well, "This shouldn't've come in as a biology credit; it should've come in under our health science area. I'll look into it."

I was going to enter in the fall, but I had family situations back home, so I couldn't enter in the fall. In the spring semester, I came up right before the term started. And, basically, there was really no transition kind of thing set up or anything for spring – for people transferring-in in the spring. I did talk to the housing department here, and it was a little pricey, (laughs), so I got fortunate and I ended up staying with

relatives, at their house 'cause they're not home, so I am kind of house sitting for them. I drive about 30-45 minutes from where I stay to school. I moved up here, my husband was staying down home 'cause of work purposes, and I am up here. So, he was tolerating it, but he wasn't thrilled. I did get some financial aid, from the school, and after taking my tuition and fees out, they gave me a reimbursement check, and that's for me to live on. It seems like a lot when you first get it, but it's really not that much and you actually think about it. Then I came in and found the campus police to get my parking permit. I didn't have any problems too much with that situation 'cause I had done that on-line – only after I got an address up here, 'cause you can't do it otherwise. They gave me an idea of parking areas that I could park in.

The first week here, I sat in the classes that I initially set up, because I really didn't have too much guidance in reference to what classes to take, so I was just trying to figure out the best I could. One of the classes I was registered for, which happened to be a zoology class, I did attend it the first day, and the instructor goes up in front of us and says, "This is going to be the hardest class you have," which is not a problem, I don't have a problem with that, but then when he says that, "You are going to have these students teaching your lab," I do have a problem with that. That makes me feel a little uncomfortable. I understand they may be doing their senior project, but the way he talked it didn't seem like they were doing their senior project– they were like a regular undergraduate students doing their time in the labs. In my experience, I've already taken anatomy and physiology, biology, cell biology, for the simplest lab you have you need some sort of instructor in there. It's not fair to the students because they're not equipped

yet to handle a situation. On that, I am like, "This isn't gonna work."

At that point in time I had a behavioral neuroscience class and went over to the class, because I was looking at neuroscience for a major initially. I was going through the book and trying to figure out, "Okay, these are the classes I need for the prereqs for the graduate program; this program seems to cover most of those versus any of the other programs." Which is not the best way to do it, but when you trying to figure it out and you don't really have anybody there to help you, you kinda do the best you can. And I found out real quickly that I didn't want to do neuroscience. In the psych class I said to the instructor, "I'm a new student; I am a transfer here." I asked him, "Is this an appropriate class for a new transfer student to be in?" because of the way he presented everything. So he said, "Don't talk to me, talk to her (points)." Which happened to be another student in the class, so, like, oh, fun. I just decided that I am going to go find the head of the psychology department and ask him, what psychology classes he suggests to take. So, I tracked him down over there, and he did meet with me. So, I kind of got a ballpark idea of what to do and try to break it down. But he was helpful with it; he suggested what classes to take. I had to rearrange my schedule, during the first week because some of the classes that I had signed up for I had no clue about.

I went though on-line computer registration to do it. I went on-line, tried to find a class, which took a little bit of doing. I was looking for a class that I was interested in. I did go to the Student Advising Center and try to get help, and you don't get any kind of personal contact, you can't. They say, "Well the computer's there or you can do it on the phone." This is

the university office that is supposed to be helping the students, advising, whatever you call it. So I went there initially to re-register, and the lady was like "Here's the phone." I didn't know how to register over the phone. She said, "Oh, well it is here in the book. Just follow these directions" (laughs). Which I didn't have any luck getting through on that. Well, apparently, it was because it wasn't clarified that if you already tried to sign in on-line before, you had to use the pin number for the phone. I figured it out after a little while, and that's how I did the first one. I picked my back-up plan class (laughing) and took that instead, which was a scuba diving class – that was my back-up plan. I registered for the history class on-line; I did the scuba class over the phone. I never did this sort of registration before. So, that was a new one, but that was a minor thing to get over. Basically, I always had gone to admissions and filled out the forms. I could call in to the one community college. You could call the admissions department, you could register on phone with somebody there. You did not do this, go on-line and do it, or "yeah, go put this pin number in." No. You actually had a human being on the other end of the phone.

I also had an organic chemistry class and the instructor—on the first day of class—he was going over stuff I had no clue about, and so I talked to him right after class. I said, "Okay, I haven't been in chemistry in awhile, and I am not familiar with some of these things. Is this going to be a problem down the line?" He says, "No," he says, "Typical for most students, you'll get used to it once you're in there." So, that's what he told me in reference to some of the equipment he was going over, I had never used it before. And so the first week of class was fun (rolls eyes).

The second week of classes was the same. When all this came into play, it was with my chemistry class. I am in the class, and I'm an older student, and trying to make my way through this class and I am already lost in the beginning and I'd talked to the instructor, and he was trying to work on something, but he wasn't sure if he was going to be able to get anybody, and I went to try to get tutorial assistance. I went over to the Student Center, again, and I was told to go over to a different office in another building to check into the tutors. I went over there, and I was basically told by the personnel, "We don't do tutorial for anything above 200-level math and English, freshman/sophomore level." Okay. Basically, they told me I would have to go to the instructor, which I had already talked to the instructor. And they said, if the instructor can't get anybody, you're pretty much on your own. And that to me is a little bit of a problem when you have upper division classes like that, that are not easy. There should be some sort of tutorial assistance available, and not having to depend on if the instructor can find somebody or not. He was trying, but he had no guarantee he was going to be able to find anybody. And he did find somebody, but unfortunately, when I tried to call the person, I couldn't get a hold of the person. The chemistry head, when I talked to him, he was, just kind of on the fence, a borderline kind of thing. He was doing the political thing. He was like, "Well, we used to have open tutoring, but we didn't get enough students so we decided to put the money to a better use, so we don't do that anymore. Just keep with your instructor and see if he can find somebody but you may understand it more than you think you do." By this time, I mean, we're talking first and second week, I am already having a bunch of problems, and I'm thinking, I'm not sure if this is the best decision to be here.

I talked with an advisor at the Student Center. We were trying to think, what would be my easiest way to get my undergraduate done, so I could get to what I wanted to do which was graduate school. With it being also useful, you know to a point. And, they were not the best of help. Basically the one lady I had talked to told me, "Well, maybe you can do a psychology class," but it was already too late, because we're talking already after the second week of classes, you're already kind of past that time where you can change classes without a lot of problems.

I am still trying to get things situated. And I hadn't heard anything back from biology, it is about the second or third week of the school, I went up to the biology department and talked to him again, at that point, in reference to that anatomy and physiology class. And he told me, he didn't really want to deal with it—so he just kind of pawned me off over to the other department. So I went over to the other department, and, basically I was told leave the syllabus with them and they'll look at it when they get a chance to look at it. So I was, at that point, getting even more frustrated because one instructor said he was going to check into it, he didn't bother to check into it, and then he didn't want to deal with it, so he pawns me off to somebody else. And that seemed to be a common occurrence, when I started having questions and problems, people would say "go to this person or this person or this person or this person" and you can only chase so long before you start getting frustrated. And I was getting to that point.

I talked to the Associate Dean of Students and his concept to the idea of the chemistry situation is, "Go stand outside an upper division class and say 'I'm looking for a tutor.'" Which is not an answer. It may be an answer,

but it's not a good answer. A couple other comments in my conversation with him too were a little inappropriate, a little uncalled for. We were talking about the chemistry situation and he told me to talk to the head of the chemistry department. Which I did do, his idea, and he made an offhanded comment, and I know, I think he was kind of kiddingly saying it, but it is still inappropriate. He's saying, "Well, the chemistry department would tell us not to enroll students that would need assistance in chemistry." I'm older and I can understand it to a point, but if he would have said that to a younger student, I don't think that would have been the most appropriate answer to a question.

I am getting very frustrated, I am looking at withdrawing. I talked to the financial aid department actually. I dealt with one guy a lot, in reference to, "okay, if I drop at this point and time, how much do I get back? How much do I have to pay back to the school because of my loans?" and everything like that. He is trying very hard to figure it out for me. The biggest problem was he is not sure what to do with the scholarship, because that's issued from the Admissions department. And he did investigate that and tried to follow-up and it took a little bit of time for him to figure out, try to get an answer back from the Admissions office of what they were going to do with that. He finally got back to me, and told me they had decided that if I withdraw at the time I was at, I wouldn't get charged money, I wouldn't have to pay the scholarship back, but they would count it toward credits used for this scholarship because you're only allowed to have it for so many terms. I had contact with him in reference to if I were to drop at this point how much I would have left. He said it changes daily, so when you decide, you would

have to make sure. I said to him, "I am very frustrated at this point, who can I talk to about this?" And he said, "Well, you can try to talk to this person."

The Ombudsman. And she tried to help. I was having a hard time in the class so I was going to have to drop the chemistry, because I have to get a certain grade in chemistry, because it is a prerequisite for graduate school. I was trying to figure out if there was some way I could pick up another class, either in distance learning or one of the off-campus sites that I could pick up the credit hours I needed in order to keep my scholarship. And we just had no luck. We found a class, but because it doesn't end until June, the financial aid office said it's considered a summer class so I can't use it. So, we ended up with a dead end there. We were trying to work something out, she was trying to help work out something. She told me to go talk to the director of advising so I went but I didn't think was going to be much of a use anyhow.

I went over to the Student Center to ask who was in charge of advising. I was very irritated at this point. The secretary there told me, "Well, why don't you talk with our boss" who happened to be the same lady I had already talked to before. That day when I talked with her, and I think it was the last day where I could withdraw with the 50% return. And her comment to me was, because I was saying I was looking at withdrawing because of the problems I was having, she just said, "Well, this school may not be for you. It doesn't mean your school is not out there." And the tone she used was not an appropriate tone. It's an answer but the way she said it was not the most appropriate way of an answer to say it.

After talking with the graduate academic department and basically, being informed that I don't have to get my

undergraduate degree here, I decided to go back home, I decided it wasn't worth the hassle anymore. All I have to do is do the prereqs, and as long as the classes are equivalent—they don't have to be an actual transfer into the school unless I want to use it for my degree at the school. At this point and time for me financially, it's a better way for me to go back home, and finish my degree down home by my husband and my parents than to stay up here and go through the hassles up here. I decided to withdraw.

For me, it has not been the best experience in the world, really. Looking back, certain individuals were more helpful, and tried to be more helpful. That chemistry professor (pause), he wasn't surprised when I had to withdraw from his class, but I think he was a little sad that I had to withdraw, but he understood why. He actually asked me how I was doing. Certain personnel have been very good; other personnel haven't been that great. One gal over in the department that does transcript evals, was as helpful as she could be, too, in reference to trying to figure out classes and stuff like that. Even with the chemistry one, when I was looking at withdrawing and maybe taking it at home in the summer, she ran a couple schools down by where I lived to find out what classes might be equivalent transfers to the school that I could use. In the tutorial office, I mean, her hands were tied, but still. And the lady in advising, I know who her boss is, the "Assistant Dean of Students." Like I said, it depends on the personnel I have dealt with.

Parking was an interesting concept at this school too. When you pay anywhere from fifty to a hundred dollars for a parking permit, and you are trying to find a parking spot, and basically you can't find a parking spot, except for at a meter and you have to double pay,

I don't think that is quite appropriate for students, having to double pay. Investigating that more thoroughly, I find out that basically, as a staff member nicely put it to me, it is a permit to hunt for a parking space not a guarantee for a parking space. And, I'm sorry, but I still have a little bit of a problem with that. It's basically double paying, and that's not fair to students. If they're gonna make you pay for a parking permit, then you should be able to park. Or if they're going to make you park at meters, then let students know that they're going to have to pay at meters. I've dealt with big schools and little schools where I have had to do parking permits, and, you didn't have to pay at a meter, you could get a parking spot. You didn't have to park halfway at the other end of the campus to get a parking spot, if you were lucky, and walk halfway to the other end to get to your classes. You could find something, fairly close to where you had to go. That, for a commuting student, and I was informed that this was a big commuting college, but if it's a big commuting college, then I think they should figure out some better parking situations. I do realize that they do allow freshman to have cars on the campus, which is a little unusual for a lot of campuses.

If some things would have been handled earlier on, that would have changed my mind but it's too late. In reference to getting some of the answers a little sooner, so I maybe could have gotten into a class sooner, you know, picked up one of the other classes, to make up. Even if it was like three weeks into the class, I could maybe make it up, I would have still been able to do what I want to do. I couldn't pick up anything even if I wanted to. You know, what I have already lost. In order to finish up in the time frame I wanted to, I would have to pick up two

classes this summer in order to even try to be at a point where I could actually continue in the fall and on the time frame when I wanted to get done. And that's that part about it that's very frustrating. The Ombudsman was trying to help me and tried very hard to find something that would work and then we couldn't find anything that I could use. By the time all this stuff got situated, we're talking four to six weeks into the term. And it's too late to get into any classes and this university doesn't have too many classes that start around like the mid term time frame. If some things would have been taken care of earlier on, then I probably could have stayed here.

I would not recommend transferring here to anybody with what I went through. You know, chasing down credits, trying to get classes signed off, for doing this and talking to these umpteen-million different people, it gets to be a problem when you're playing chase. It's a major problem, and it's not fun for a student. When you are trying to deal with classes, trying to figure out what's going on here, and then you have to play chase as well. It would be a better situation if there were academic advisors that were versed in reference to transfer students, in reference to degrees that a transfer student would be doing, like pre-professional degrees, they're versed in the areas of what's required, what you need to do, what they recommend would be your best major to go for, and that. I know you get the catalog, but they are not always clear. Maybe if somebody reads that whole thing all the way through, but, typically most students don't. Even trying to go through all that stuff, trying to wade through all that information, it's too overwhelming for any student to try to figure out all the specific little points. They need to have somebody that

gives you more of a general concept. Like, ok, the parking situation. Yeah, you pay for this parking, but there's a good chance you're going to have to pay at meters. That'd be something nice to know. The people I talked with said there was tutorial assistance here. But another nice thing to know is if you are in upper division classes, there isn't tutorial assistance. If I would have known this before transferring here, I would have looked at it a little more thoroughly and figured out—tutoring is a big issue for me. Personally, I feel for as much money as students pay for classes, and fees, all the additional fees, they should have assistance. That doesn't seem to be totally present here, from what I've seen.

For me, it was a big decision to move up here. I mean, I left. I came up here on my own. My parents are down there. My husband's down there. It's not like I'm newly married either. We've been married for eight years, so, it's not the easiest thing to do. And I was hoping this would be the last stop. That is very frustrating. I feel that I was kind of misinformed in aspects and it's a combination of effects, it is not just one person or another. A lot of it is, and I know comparing schools isn't the best thing to do, but, there's general standard that I personally think should be in place with schools—big and little schools. So, yeah, my expectations might have been a little high on the school. A lot of it is from experience myself. I have certain things that I don't want happening to me, and one of them I don't like is games. I don't like game playing at schools. I have experienced this and that's why I'm not thrilled about being misinformed because I had another school do the same thing to me not too long ago. I don't like that. That gets me very upset because a person uproots their life to come to a school to finish up their

degree, and they thought everything was in place, and you can double check and triple check stuff. And they get there, and they find out it's not everything it appeared to be. I'm talking in general aspect. They now get informed of certain things that they weren't informed of previously and they should have been and it is costly to a student. I mean, for me right now, by withdrawing, I lose a whole term, it puts me behind again, because right now, back home, I might be able, at the community college, to pick up one or two classes that might start, I might get lucky, but I don't guarantee it. I won't be able to do anything until summer. So, that's going to put me behind another whole term. Which doesn't make me real thrilled.

I am actually researching a different program at a two-year college. And the way it looks for me, I pretty much only have two major classes to take and then just the courses for the degree. And I don't think I am going to be able to double up on classes. I may have to; I might be working in my extra classes. I am looking at finishing it up, but I am not sure where I am going. There's a couple of schools I am checking into right now. But I also know that if I get my two-year year degree, at least back home, I can get a job working in a hospital and they'll pay for me to go back and get my bachelor's. They'll help pay for school. A lot of hospitals back home have programs where they'll help reimburse you if you're taking classes as long as you agree to work so many years after graduation for them. Right now for me, I can't say I would come back, even if I get my bachelor's degree down home. I can't honestly say if I would come back or not for the graduate program, from the experience I have already had.

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