

Are Transfer Students Experiencing Similar Levels of Social Connectedness at Hilbert College?

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### Executive Summary

- Previous research assumes transfer students are a unique population with distinct challenges and low levels of student engagement.
- Using data from administered 2013 Thriving Quotient survey, this study examined the differences between transfer students and traditional students in terms of social connectedness.
- **Findings:**
  - Sense of community, feeling of belonging, and satisfaction with the interaction with staff and faculty showed similar responses between transfer students and traditional students.
  - Transfer students differ from traditional students in reporting the amount of campus events and activities attended.

## Level of Social Connectedness Experience by Transfer and Native Students at Hilbert College

Transfer students at four year institutions are a growing population (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Research illustrates there is an increasing trend of high school seniors attending community college for two years and then transferring to a four year institution (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Ishitani, 2008). The growing rates of transfer students are a unique and important population to study at four year institutions. The characteristics and challenges affecting transfer students greatly differ from traditional students (Ishitani, 2008; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). A significant amount of previous research has been conducted on the transfer population to explore different constructs such as transfer shock, retention rates, and characteristics and challenges unique to transfer students.

Transfer students are a distinct population at four year institutions with specific characteristics that are typically only applicable to this population. It is distinctive of transfer students to take up to six years to complete their bachelor's degree in contrast to traditional students who typically earn bachelor degrees in four years (Doyle, 2006). Another important characteristic of transfer students is the supported finding that they are typically older and work full-time jobs (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). These characteristics of transfer students often lead to a different student experience with unique challenges. (Doyle, 2006; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013; Fann, 2013).

Similar to the phenomena of the sophomore slump there is a researched phenomenon known as transfer shock (Ishitani, 2008; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). The heavily researched notion of transfer shock is one of the unique challenges that independently affect transfer students. This phenomenon has been heavily researched to explore the reliability of the notion of transfer shock at various institutions (Ishitani, 2008; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Fann, 2013;

Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). Cited in previous research transfer shock is defined as, a drop in transfer students grades during the first semester after transferring to a four year institution (Ishitani, 2008). Another unique challenge that affects transfer students is transitional trauma which describes the level of alienation a student experiences when they are unfamiliar with the norms, values and expectations that predominate in a school community (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). These two researched phenomenon's explain the significant amount of various challenges that are impeding on a transfer students success and integration in to an institution. Transfer students are often faced with the concern about not being able to handle the academic rigor of a four year institution, the lack of knowledge to navigate the new environment and the isolation from the social aspect of college (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013).

A major challenge affecting transfer students is the lack of student engagement and integration (Doyle, 2006; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Social engagement is supported in research as an integral part of student success (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). Student engagement is associated with the characteristics the student brings with them to college such as academic preparation but also what the student does at college such as their social behaviors (Doyle, 2006; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias). Transfer students often feel isolated from other students and unwilling to attend events and activities and become involved with the institution because of the lack of integration (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). A successful measure of academic, social and psychological aspects of a student's college experience is the Thriving Quotient Survey.

The Thriving Quotient Survey is an instrument developed by Dr. Laurie Schreiner a successful Professor of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University. The instrument is designed to measure the factors of academic, social, and psychological that are the best

indicators of academic success, institutional fit, satisfaction with college, and ultimately graduation. The Thriving Quotient includes twenty five items which were clustered in to five scales of measure; engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, social connectedness, and diverse citizenship. The current Thriving Quotient was determined highly reliable demonstrated by the internal consistency estimated as Cronbach's  $\alpha=.91$ . (Thriving Quotient, 2012).

The purpose of this research is to examine the transfer experience at Hilbert College. As cited in previous research, transfer students experience at college is unique and different from traditional students (Doyle, 2006; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013; Fann, 2013). A major challenge affecting the transfer students experience is social connectedness; a term used to describe the engagement within a college and involvement in healthy relationships and social support networks. Student engagement and social connectedness has been correlated with high levels of student success (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). The purpose of this paper is to focus on transfer student's reported level of social connectedness compared to traditional students to evaluate the transfer experience at Hilbert College. This research focuses on social connectedness and student engagement as measures of the transfer experience. It is important that transfer students are experiencing the same level of social connectedness because of the strong evidence that student engagement and social connectedness are a critical part of student success.

Transfer students are entitled to the opportunity to succeed at Hilbert College as traditional students. A major factor affecting student success is social connectedness which is shown in previous research to be lower for transfer students (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013; Fann, 2013). It is critical to evaluate the transfer experience at Hilbert College in terms of social

connectedness to ensure transfer students have the same opportunity to succeed as traditional students. It is hypothesized that transfer students at Hilbert College report the same level of social connectedness as traditional students in the Thriving Quotient Survey. The small and intimate community that Hilbert College strives for is a factor that increases the level of social connectedness experienced by transfer students. Another factor promoting strong social connectedness among transfer students is the significant amount of various campus events and activities which Hilbert sponsors.

For the purpose of this paper transfer students refer to any participant of the Thriving Quotient Survey who identified themselves as students who started at a different university than Hilbert College. Traditional students in this paper are used to describe participants who began their college careers at Hilbert College as indicated on the Thriving Quotient Survey. Social connectedness in this paper refers to the student's involvement in healthy relationships and social support network, along with the student's involvement on campus and engagement in academics (Thriving Quotient, 2012).

## Methods

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were undergraduate students at Hilbert College who completed the Thriving Quotient Survey when it was administered in Spring 2013 semester. The data used in this study was previously collected information from the 2013 Spring Thriving Quotient Survey. For the purpose of this study the analysis focused on upperclassmen (junior and seniors). The transfer population was represented the strongest by upperclassman participants in the data from the Thriving Quotient Survey.

The data demonstrates no significant difference among the demographics of the two groups compared in this paper (transfer and non-transfer) with the exception of enrollment status of the students. The data demonstrates traditional students (non-transfer students) are more commonly full time students compared to transfer students. In contrast, the transfer students reported a higher amount of part time status students (Appendix A). Along with the enrollment status reported by the participant the additional demographics examined for significant differences among the groups include; gender, age, race/ethnicity, and if the student is the first generation to attend college. These demographics yielded no significant difference when comparing traditional and transfer students. The lack of significant differences between transfer and traditional respondents demonstrate that any significant differences found in the analysis cannot be attributed to the demographic of the participants.

### *Materials*

This paper reported on the previously document information collected from the 2013 Spring Thriving Quotient Survey. The Thriving Quotient Survey was developed by Dr. Laurie Schreiner, Professor of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University (Thriving Quotient, 2013). The instrument contains 25 items divided in to 5 scales which measure; engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, social connectedness, and diverse citizenship (Thriving Quotient, 2013).

### *Procedure*

This study relied on the previous recorded data collected from the Thriving Quotient Survey administered in Spring 2013. The instrument was examined to discover the items that were the best measure of social connectedness. The following four questions were used in the

analysis measuring the transfer experience at Hilbert College; the perceived level of belonging, the amount of campus activities attended; the sense of community at Hilbert, and the quality of the interaction with Hilbert faculty and staff. The selected questions were analyzed using a 2X2 ANOVA with the main effect factors being class level (junior or senior) and transfer status (transfer or non-transfer). The analysis of variance explored the main effect (class level and transfer status) on each of the selected questions. The main effect was also explored to discover if there was a significant interaction between them for each question.

### Results

The items chosen to explore were analyzed using a two way ANOVA. The specific items from the Thriving Quotation analyzed to measure the transfer experience at Hilbert College include; the satisfaction with the quality of the interaction the participant had with faculty, the sense of community on this campus; the amount of campus activities and events the participant attends, and how strong the participants feeling of belong is on this campus.

A 2 x 2 ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of class level (junior and senior) and transfer status (transfer and non-transfer) on the level of belonging. Appendix B depicts the means and standard deviations for feelings of belonging as a function of the two factors. The ANOVA indicated no significant interaction between class level and transfer status,  $F(1, 203) = .911, p = .341$ . The main effect for class level also did not yield a significant interaction,  $F(1, 203) = .683, p = .410$ . The main effect for transfer status was not significant  $F(1, 203) = .940, p = .333$ . The lack of statistical significance for the interaction between class level and transfer status demonstrates transfer students report the same level of belonging as non-transfer students regardless of upper class level.



A 2X2 ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of class level (junior and senior) and transfer status (transfer and non-transfer) on the amount of activities or campus events the participant attends. The means and standard deviations for total points as a function of the two factors are represented in Appendix B. The ANOVA yielded no significant interaction between class level and transfer status  $F(1, 203) = .009, p = .926$ . The main effect for class level did not indicate a significant interaction,  $F(1, 203) = .270, p = .604$ . The main effect for transfer status did however yield a significant interaction,  $F(1, 203) = 5.91, p = .016$ . The analysis demonstrates transfer students reported significantly different levels of participation in campus activities. The transfer students in the study reported lower levels of attendance at campus events. The transfer respondents reported ( $M=2.56, SD=1.60$ ) and traditional students reported ( $M=3.15, SD=1.89$ ). The item asking the respondents how many campus events they attend utilized a six point Likert-Scale, where one represented never and six represented frequently.

A 2x2 ANOVA was performed to analyze the effects of class level (junior and senior) and transfer status (transfer and non-transfer) on the perception of the sense of community on campus. The ANOVA demonstrated no significant interaction between class level and transfer status  $F(1, 206) = .088, p = .767$ . The main effect for class level did not yield a significant interaction  $F(1, 206) = .048, p = .827$ . The main effect for transfer status also did not yield a significant interaction  $F(1, 206) = .000, p = .996$ . The means and standard deviations for total points as a function of the two factors are represented in Appendix B. The scale to measure the sense of community on campus was a liker scale in which one was the lowest and six was the strongest sense of community. The lack of significant interactions for the two main factors indicate transfer students report the same level of the sense of community on Hilbert College as students who started at Hilbert.

A 2X2 analysis of variance was conducted to analyze the effects of class level (junior and senior) and transfer status (transfer and non-transfer) on the satisfaction with the quality of interactions the participant had with faculty. The ANOVA demonstrated no significant interaction between class level and transfer status,  $F(1, 205)=.042, p=.837$ . The main effect for class level did yield a significant difference,  $F(1, 205)=5.93, p=.016$ . In contrast the main effect for transfer status did not demonstrate a significant difference,  $F(1, 205)=1.80, p=.181$ . The analysis of variance did demonstrate transfer students had the same quality of interactions with professors as traditional students. The ANOVA indicates there is a difference between junior and seniors respondents and the satisfaction with the quality of interaction with faculty regardless of transfer status. The means and standard deviations for total points as a function of the two factors are represented in Appendix B.

## Discussion

Select questions from the Thriving Quotient Survey were analyzed to explore the transfer experience at Hilbert College. The purpose of the analysis was to examine the transfer experience at Hilbert College to determine if transfer students have a different experience compared to traditional students. It was hypothesized that transfer students at Hilbert College experience the same level of social connectedness as traditional students. The items on the Thriving Quotient Survey which were the best measure of social connectedness were analyzed with a 2X2 ANOVA to explore the main effect of transfer status (transfer and non-transfer) and class level (junior and senior). The analysis yielded results that demonstrate transfer students report similar responses to traditional students in terms of; sense of community on this campus, their feelings of belonging, and the satisfaction with the quality of the interactions they had with

faculty this semester. The 2X2 ANOVA for these three items demonstrate no significant difference between the responses of transfer students and traditional students which supports the hypothesis that Hilbert College transfer students experience the same level of social connectedness as traditional students. The findings excluding the participation in campus events and activities support the hypothesis demonstrating that transfer students at Hilbert College have similar experiences as the students who started at Hilbert. This supports the claim that Hilbert College is a transfer friendly institution.

However, the analysis did not exhibit that all the questions analyzed supported the hypothesis. The item asking the participant how often they attend campus events or activities yielded a significant difference between transfer students and traditional students. When the mean of the responses were analyzed comparing transfer responses to non-transfer responses it was found that transfer students reported they attend campus activities less than traditional students. This finding demonstrates that Hilbert College can make improvements to improve the transfer experience at Hilbert College. A possible suggestion to increase the amount of transfer students attending campus events and activities is advertise the events more. Some events at Hilbert College are not advertised until the week before or a couple days before. This makes it hard for transfer students to attend the event if they cannot schedule work or other outside activities around the event. Also some events are not advertised with poster so not everyone knows when the event is happening.

The findings in this study are not consistent with previous findings which suggest transfer students experience transfer shock and transitional trauma (Ishitani, 2008; Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). Previous research found transfer students experience unique challenges which often result in an experience referred to as transfer shock and transitional trauma (Ishitani, 2008;

Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). One of the major findings which contributes to these two phenomena's is the isolation felt by transfer students which results in reduced involvement and engagement in the college (Doyle, 2006; Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013; Fann, 2013). Transfer students at George Mason University were found to have lower involvement in campus activities and reduced engagement in academics compared to traditional students (Lester, Leonard, & Mathias, 2013). The results of this study do not support the previous claims that transfer students experience reduced levels of involvement and engagement in terms of the social and academic aspects of college. In contrast, this study suggests Hilbert College transfer students report the same experiences traditional students in terms of social connectedness. The data suggests transfer students and traditional students have the same levels of belonging, sense of community and the same level of satisfaction with the interaction with faculty and staff. The only aspect of social connectedness which significantly differs between transfer students and traditional students is the amount of campus activities attended.

This study had some limitations that are important to comment on. First the study was conducted on previously document information. This limits the type of questions that can be asked and the analysis and comparisons that can be made from the data. The researchers could only rely on the responses to the Thriving Quotation instead of surveying the participants with their own item. The Thriving Quotation survey was limited in the information it provided on transfer students. To expand upon the conclusions made in this study, a future study could create their own instrument. The instrument would be designed to specifically measure the transfer experience at Hilbert College. The instrument could be parallel to the Thriving Quotation but instead of having extra questions for sophomore students the questionnaire would have more questions for transfer participants. The added questions could ask the transfer participant when

they transferred to Hilbert College and if the student transferred from a two year or four year institution. It is important to ask the transfer participants when they transferred to the institution to measure the transfer shock and to analyze if the transfer student is still in the adjustment period.

## References

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## Appendix A

## Enrollment Status

**A. TRANSFER**Enrollment status<sup>a</sup>

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Full-time student	88	76.5	77.9	77.9
Valid Part-time student	25	21.7	22.1	100.0
Total	113	98.3	100.0	
Missing No Response	2	1.7		
Total	115	100.0		

a. Did you transfer to this institution from another university? = Transfer

**B. NON-TRANSFER STUDENTS**Enrollment status<sup>a</sup>

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Full-time student	208	92.9	93.3	93.3
Valid Part-time student	15	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	223	99.6	100.0	
Missing No Response	1	.4		
Total	224	100.0		

Appendix B

	Transfer Students			Traditional Students		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Feel I Belong Here	94	5.03	1.2	109	4.86	1.3
There is a Strong Sense of Community	97	4.62	1.42	109	4.61	1.39
How Often do you Attend Campus Events	97	2.56	1.6	110	3.15	1.86
How Satisfied with the Quality of the Interaction with Faculty and Staff	95	5.2	1	110	5	1.1